

Changing Home Behavior For The Better: Some Quick Tips



“Auggghh!!! How could such behavior be coming out of our child? We struggle so hard to create a good kid who will do the right thing.” It can be frustrating, humiliating, or one of those other primary emotions that sometimes build and display themselves in the secondary emotions that we regret: Irritation & Anger. What else can we do to help our progeny make good behavior choices and display appropriate, pro-social actions?

You might already be using the strategies found below. If so, pat yourself on the back. You've prevented the emergence of a more negative and resistant behavior pattern by making things better than they otherwise might be. If you haven't been proficient in using these approaches, give them a try. You won't be sorry. In fact, you'll have ecstatic moments on your way to more regular, elongated periods of pride.

Helping Kids Make Better Choices In Recurring Situations

- “What’s gotten into you? I can’t take you to the store if you don’t behave when we’re there.”
- “If you want clean underwear, why don’t you wash it yourself?”
- “Why can’t you just get into the car without a fuss?”
- “Can’t I take you on playdates anymore? Why do you do those things?”

Do any of those statements sound similar to the ones you utter? Why don't kids do what they should do? There could be a number of reasons for why kids (at present), display behaviors that we wish would change. Some of them can be addressed rather quickly by changing our ways of addressing situations. Read on... (To discover the ways to discern the reason for certain behaviors, go to the “Intervention Strategies” button on the home page of www.BehaviorAdvisor.com and complete the form to gain access to the teacher section of the site. The page titled “[Figuring out why kids misbehave](#)” describes how to divine the cause. The information is easily translated to the home front).

Understand the Basics of Behaviour/Behavior

(Here is an excerpt of a response I sent to someone who visited my online consulting site (www.BehaviorDrs.com): Hi Geoff. First, understand that all behaviour has a purpose/reason/payoff. If a behavior didn't have a benefit, we would stop using it. Actions either bring something we like to us (“positive

reinforcement"), or make something that we don't like (a person, a requirement, a food we find distasteful) go away ("negative reinforcement").

You want to figure out what is driving the behaviour with an A-B-C (antecedent-behavior-consequence) analysis. When you see the behaviour, think "What happened just before we saw this action?" (that event is the antecedent or "spark" that set off the behaviour). Then look at the consequence. The antecedent is something that you'll try to avoid (or prepare the child for it), and the consequence is what is keeping the behavior going (the "payoff"). You'll want to provide a different consequence.

So... you'll want to try to avoid the problem, but when you can't, you'll have to be consistent with a penalty for having shown the inappropriate behavior. Easier said than done. You can find more guidance on how to address your youngster's behavior at:

www.ParentingDoneRight.info, and more specifically, my video podcast at:

<http://www.behavioradvisor.com/PositiveParentingPracticesDescription.html>

The video podcast is a 2-hour, multi-chapter "what to do when..." resource. Good fortune to you in your efforts to help your child make better behaviour choices. Let me know if I can be of further help. Best, Tom ("Dr. Mac")

Avoid Certain Words

When we attempt to provide direction to our progeny, it is important to avoid saying some words that commonly create conflict and hard feelings, and make disagreement situations worse. To enhance the chances of avoiding and escaping conflict with your child, delete these words from your disciplinary lexicon: "No," "Don't," "Stop, and "Why" – especially when combined with "You." ("Don't you...", "Why do you..."). Words and phrases like these prompt negative responses. You can read more on words to avoid, and their replacements by signing up for the ["Intervention Strategies"](#) section of behavioradvisor.com and then scrolling down the index page to ["Phrasing comments to enhance chances of COMPLIANCE & build SELF DISCIPLINE in kids \(and us\)"](#)

Concentrate on the Present

Focus your discussion on the issue at hand. Avoid bringing up past offences. If you do bring up past situations that apply in the present, be sure that you reminisce back to positive experiences ("Do you remember how we handled this situation with smiles down at the riverfront?"), not negative ones ("This is another time that you didn't.. blah, blah, blah.") Rather than, "Why do you constantly do this crap?" say, "Remember two weekends ago at Chinese school when you struggled with this situation? You figured out what to do. Let's think back. Tell me: What did you do to solve it?"

Give 3-Part Directions

It's not enough to simply say, "Do the right thing." When giving your children a command, include the 3 parts of a good direction:

1. Say the child's name (to gain his/her attention)

2. Be sure to insert "Please" (thus modeling the behavior you wish to witness), and
3. Tell him/her what to do. (versus what NOT to do)

We can enhance the chances of our direction being followed by:

1. Giving a reason for the behavior ("Lee, please come to the table so that our family can start eating." "Fran, please put on your coat and shoes so that we will be on time to school.")
2. Mentioning how showing the requested action would make them appear older (The wish of all younger kids), or more mature (The image desired by preteens and teens).

As mentioned above, be sure that you tell them what **TO DO** ("Please use your inside voice."), rather than what **NOT TO DO** ("Stop yelling!"). There are several reasons for making use of this style of phrasing:

1. Kids hear the action word. Saying "No hitting." actually suggests that act. The same applies to "No running away from me in the store." (Something the youngsters may not have even thought about until you mentioned it.) Instead, we would say "Nice touch only." and "Stay next to me in the store."
2. Saying "No" doesn't tell children what they OUGHT to do. They keep showing the same behavior because they don't know what else to do. We find ourselves saying in futility: "How many times do I have to tell you to stop doing that?!" (The answer: **Forever**... because, like punishment and negative criticism, saying what not to do fails to tell them what they should be doing.)
3. We're also giving our valued parental attention to a negative behavior, thus strengthening it.

Praise: Make it Effective

When kids are showing appropriate behavior (or are making the attempt), it's important to offer praise, a smile, a thank you, or some other form of positive recognition. Progress should be noted, even if youngsters aren't yet at their final goal. They are getting closer to the desired behavior, and that deserves our approval. Two major points when giving praise:

1. **DO NOT** assign labels to kids ("Good boy.", "Smart kid.") as there is strong research evidence that this practice actually works against producing a good boy or smart kid.
2. Instead, describe the specific actions/things that please you ("Thank you for picking up the game pieces and putting them back in the box.", "The table looks great! Thanks for setting it, sweetie.")

Some types of praise are ineffective. Others are even counterproductive (like the labeling praise mentioned above). For more details on how to give effective praise that changes behaviors for the better, fill out the form ([click here](#)) and once at the index of strategies, scroll down to the page on praising.

Use Criticism That Helps, Not Hurts

If we want our youngsters to think: "Gee, that's good advice", we need to offer criticism in a way that motivates, not deflates. We accomplish this goal by sandwiching our constructive criticism between two positives. Start out with recognition for what was done well: "I like the way you started working right away and that you remembered the first three steps of the long division problem." Then offer the advise/guidance/"reality rub", focusing on what needs to be done, versus what was done wrong. End on a positive note: "Great, you've mastered the front part of

this process. Now we just have to attend to the steps at the back part." For more details on how to give effective and supportive criticism that changes behaviors for the better, fill out the form ([click here](#)) and once at the index of strategies, scroll down to the page on offering criticism.

Offer Choices that are Acceptable to You

A student who is motivated by the need for power will argue with the teacher when presented with virtually any task or request. A proactive solution for this situation is to use 'Limited Choices'. The reason why limited choices work so well with this type of student is that they give the student an element of control over the situation rather than making them feel they are being forced into a decision.

Power-motivated students have a need for autonomy, they hate being forced to do anything and need to feel they are in control. For example, if you tell a power-motivated student to complete ten questions from the text book... right now... (and stand over them scowling)... they will almost certainly find something to argue about – either that ten questions are too many, that the subject is boring or that you should go and pick on someone else.

These students find it incredibly difficult to 'back down' - especially in front of their friends – so the more we 'boss them around' the more we become embroiled in a power struggle with them. Giving them a 'limited choice' takes the sting out of the situation and gives them a way of complying without losing face; they are making the decision based on the clear choices we have given them. In this way responsibility is passed to the student. Here are a couple of examples...

"Joe, do you want to carry on sitting with your friend and get on with your work quietly or do you want to come and sit at the front with me and work quietly? The choice is yours. I'll go and help Paul for a minute and then come back to see what you've decided."

"Simon you can play the game by the rules or choose another game from the box. It's up to you."

"Jonny, you can sit on the chair properly, stationary and with all four chair legs on the floor, or you can sit on the floor and do your work there for ten minutes while you remember how chairs are supposed to be used. Your choice."

Practice, Practice, Practice. Use Role Playing to Teach New & Better Behaviors

Changing a persistent behavior requires more than just saying "Stop doing it." (I'm sure that I'm not telling you anything you don't already know). So, how do we teach and ingrain a new behavior pattern? Ahh... the key word here is "Teach". You are your children's first and most important teacher. Your actions and reactions guide your children into their action and reaction patterns. Here's a formal, structured method to use when just talking to your children about it doesn't work: Roleplaying.

Yes, role play what you would like them to do in various situations. Act it out. This strategy gives them skills for success in that situation, and brain and muscle memory for capably displaying the desired actions. After talking about the problems with the present response, talk about the benefits of showing the new response that you have in mind. Keep in mind the

following caveats:

1. Children must be developmentally able to understand and display the behavior. Few 3 year olds can display behaviors of 6 year olds to the same level of proficiency.
2. The benefits of showing the new behavior must outweigh the benefits of continuing with the present one. Why would someone show a new behavior if the payoff is less than what they're getting now?
3. Be sure to give lots of valued reward when the child first attempts the new action. You'll be able to fade out the reward later. First though, get the children enthused about showing the new behavior. Motivate them to try their best. With enthusiasm and effort, new skills arise.
4. Be sure that the new behavior meets the same need as the old one. If the purpose of the present behavior is to gain sensory stimulation or parental attention or power/influence in situations, then the new behavior must also meet that need, and to at least the same extent.

After having discussed the desired behavior, engage in the pretend situation, say: "Let's try what we've talked about." You may have to demonstrate the action first, or show your improved version after their initial attempts (which you have effectively praised and followed with an encouragement statement that communicates that you know they'll work hard to make it even better in the future). Your drama demonstration will exaggerate important parts while you draw attention to them and explain how to perform them.

Engage in the roleplaying at several different times. Repeating your sessions (perhaps in different places and with different variations) gives the "practice that makes perfect". If the child displays an incorrect action, instead of saying "That's wrong", say "Let's try it this way." and again show him/her how to do it. Use "criticism sandwiches" to effectively get your constructive criticism into the young one's brain. If the child has previously practiced that part, and just needs the memory jogged a bit, instead of showing or telling him/her what to do or say, ask: "What should have been done just then?" Give hints and cues if s/he doesn't immediately recollect. Once s/he remembers, practice it immediately. The principle here is to use the least amount of guidance necessary, while providing what is needed.

When it's time to move to the real-world situations, prepare children for them. Talk with them about the behaviors to remember, or even practice it in the situations where they'll use them. Remember, it's better to prevent misbehavior than react to it. The misbehavior that never happens is the one we want. So... before your youngster gets on the bus, goes into a friend's house for a play date, or whatever the troublesome situation, talk about (or act out) the behavior that SHOULD be displayed in that setting/event (Go beyond the caring, but non-helpful "Be good." or "Be polite." Describe the specific actions that should be shown.)

Use Time Out In A Thoughtful Manner

Humans only show behaviors that result in benefits; either bringing something desirable to them ("positive reinforcement"), or making something undesirable go away ("negative reinforcement"). If a behavior doesn't have a payoff, we stop doing it. We should, of course, try to identify the reason/cause/function of the behavior, but sometimes that analysis is difficult to conduct in-the-moment, or we may not be able to figure out what is making that behavior happen in that situation. Even if we can't discern what is driving the repetitious action, there is,

indeed, something there that is rewarding the youngster's behavior. When youngsters fail to respond to our "cease & desist" instructions, it may be time to use "time out".

Time out involves removing the child from the "reinforcing" (rewarding) situation to another secluded place (corner of room, bedroom, dressing room in department store). Once there, be quiet. Don't try to get through with words until your child is calm enough to hear them, and respond respectfully. If the words are rejected, say "I'll wait until you can listen." and be quiet again. It's alright during this time to hold him/her gently, sit with him/her, put a hand on his/her knee, and otherwise make it clear that you still love him/her.

At other times, you may decide that isolation is the key: "Go to your room. I will let you know when you can come out." The usual advice is one minute of time out for each year of age. If the child is rowdy during the timeout, reset the clock or move the time out to another area (something in your first time out area may be rewarding that rowdy behavior). State in a calm, quick manner: "The timer will begin when you are calm." My video podcast (<http://www.behavioradvisor.com/PositiveParentingPracticesDescription.html>) and iPhone/iPad/iTouch (<http://itunes.apple.com/us/app/positive-parenting-practices/id414829276?mt=8>) address the use of time out and the problems that arise when using the common ways of implementing it. (The [app](#) and [podcast](#) are both 2 hours of truly helpful, information-packed, what-to-do-when strategies.)

Set behavioral goals.

If you're attempting to promote better behavior from your youngster, work through the steps to the ultimate goal. Perhaps you want your child to begin homework immediately after you request that act (Tell him/her what to do with the 3 steps of a good direction: "Name, please sit down and begin your schoolwork." Set a realistic goal. Perhaps at first this means that your child gets started with two or fewer reminders, or begins the process within 1 minute. Then you can start to tighten the reins a bit, and expect your young one to start the process within 30 seconds. You can find more information on setting goals inside "[Intervention strategies](#)". Once you've completed the form and been directed to that area of www.BehaviorAdvisor.com, scroll down to "task analysis" or "shaping". My iPhone/iPad/iTouch app on Positive Parenting Practices also tells how to engage in these procedures.

Summation

There's so much more to know about positive and effective parenting, and you've now got access to it at www.BehaviorAdvisor.com. By having signed up to this quick pointer sheet, you'll now receive periodic messages in your mailbox, tips for parenting, and special offers. Rest assured that your address will not be shared with anyone else. It stays in the BehaviorAdvisor.com hermetically sealed vault.

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2. Drop by the parenting page often. Dr. Mac will soon be offering a "**mini-course**" in home-based positive discipline practices! Don't miss this one!

3. Need coaching in order to better help your child? [Visit BehaviorDrs.com](http://BehaviorDrs.com)

4. Toys for kids with ADHD and Autism



5. [Nutrition, Diet and ADHD & Autism](#)

6. Dr. Mac's [Self-Help Book](#) for Kids with Behavior Challenges

7. Dr. Mac's [video podcast](#) on raising great kids who make good behavior choices.

8. Click on the app ad to review or purchase it at the iTunes store (For iPhone, iTouch, iPad)

By: