

Help for Children with Behavior Disorders or Disabilities

This article was written to assist and provide support to parents and teachers involved with behavior issues that are causing some concerns both at home and or at school. There is much that can be done to help, however; the focus here is on the preventative approach, which is key to maintain positive behaviors.

A consistent approach when dealing with children with behavioral concerns most often leads to more productive and positive behaviors. It is highly recommended that you plan strategies that you can implement regularly. Whether the child is acting out, involved in conflicts, bullying, or being verbally or physically aggressive; it is important to ensure that you have positive interactions and that you refrain from calling the child 'bad', it is the behavior being exhibited that you are unhappy with and the child needs to know it is not him/her it is the behavior. Acceptable and appropriate behavior is developmental - it happens over time and is greatly influenced by parental support and guidance, peers, previous experiences and the intervention techniques employed by teachers, caregivers and parents. As 'Dr. Phil' often says: "You teach people how to treat you".

Occasionally, despite your ongoing efforts, consistent applications of interventions and techniques, some children will continue to display ongoing behavioral difficulties. You cannot be all things to your child at all times. You may need to seek the advice and assistance of professionals.

The Basics:

- Promote self-esteem and confidence every chance you can. Catch your child doing something great and praise him/her.
- Provide opportunities for the child to become responsible. When they take responsibility well, let him/her know.
- Always be objective and understanding - do not lose your patience even though you are tempted to.
- Use your best judgment at all times, remain objective and seek to understand.
- ***Patience, patience, patience!*** Even though you may be very frustrated.

Next Steps:

- Communicate your expectations with a minimal number of rules and routines to be followed. Think big, start small.
- Involve the child when you are establishing rules and routines. Ask for his/her assistance. Make sure they repeat them - this will help them remember.
- Emphasize the child's strengths and minimize the weaknesses.
- Set your child up to be successful when the opportunity presents itself.
- Provide opportunities for the child to reiterate expectations. For example: "What always needs to be done before bed?"
- Encourage the child to participate and monitor its own behavior. For example: "What is terrific about what you're doing right now?"
- AVOID power struggles - nobody wins!
- Take time to discuss appropriate and inappropriate behaviors.
- Routines - children with behavior difficulties benefit from clearly established routines, I cannot say enough about this.
- Role play some situations based on unacceptable behaviors and discuss them.

- Set up practice situations and role-play those. For example: Tommy just came and stepped on your toe, you even though he did it intentionally. How will you handle this situation?
- Teach the skills necessary for appropriate behaviors.

In Summary:

If you're this far - you're concerned and you want some strategies. Now you're ready for the implementation stage. You are now ready for the **5-step plan**:

1. Pinpoint the behavior that you want to change. Be specific.
2. Gather your information. When does the unacceptable behavior occur? How often does it occur? Under which circumstances does it occur? What event precedes the behavior? What is the child's view of the behavior? Does the inappropriate behavior always happen when the child is alone? Supervised? With others? At a specific time?
3. Now it's time for you to interpret what the information may mean from the previous step. Give it your best shot when trying to analyze the information you've gathered.
4. Plan for Change! Now it's time to set your goals - with the child. What are the short term goals? What are the long-term goals? Who's involved, what will happen. The plan for change should be collaborative between you and the child. Be specific, for instance: Johnny will not yell and scream when it is time to do homework - or time to go to bed. In your plan for change, some rewards and or a reward system should be in place. For instance, when 5 instances of appropriate behavior happens, Johnny will have(opportunity to indulge in his favorite activity, a new sticker book etc.).
5. Evaluate how your plan is working. If it is not working, make the necessary changes collaboratively.

Once again, if after several consistent tries you find your plan isn't working and there is no noticeable change in the unacceptable behaviors, the child may need to be referred to a specialist.

Good luck!