

Behavioral “Best Practices” from a Parent’s Perspective

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1. Establishing “control”
 - a. Distinguish between giving a direction and giving a choice
 - i. “Do you want to come sit down?”--CHOICE
 - ii. “Sit down.”—DIRECTION
 - b. When there is not a choice in the matter, present it as a direction
 - c. If there is a choice in the matter, present it as a choice between 2 things, not as an open-ended question
 - d. Always follow through after giving a direction
 - i. Prompt a response (help them do it)
 - ii. Give feedback (praise!) after compliance
2. Ignore/redirect minor inappropriate behavior
 - a. Ignore the behavior completely if it does not hurt anyone and if the child re-engages afterwards
 - b. Redirect to the task at hand without acknowledging the inappropriate behavior
 - c. Only reprimand if the behavior was hurting someone or destroying something. Certainly do not reprimand if the child is laughing at you (sure way to know they are enjoying your frustration)
 - d. Rephrase the statement to be positive (e.g., instead of, “Stop it! No!” say, “Hands down.”)
 - e. If giving a verbal direction after an inappropriate behavior, use a calm, neutral tone of voice with minimal eye contact and facial expression (again, if the child is enjoying the attention, the higher ground is to walk away for a minute)
 - f. Lavish praise and love every time your child does something “right”
3. Transitions/Demands
 - a. Use structure to support smooth, quick transitions
 - i. Warnings (“In one minute I’m going to ask you to put that away”)
 - ii. Contingencies (“Do you want that juice? Oh good, when you are done cleaning up you can have it!”)
 - iii. DO WHAT YOU SAY YOU ARE GOING TO DO (or your child will never do anything you ask)
 - b. Reinforcement systems (yes, these even work at home—stars for doing homework which lead to a trip to the Dollar Store can work wonders). PRAISE PRAISE PRAISE.
4. Managing noncompliance
 - a. The standard way to work with a child who is being “noncompliant” is to send the message, “I will not give you attention until you do what I say,” by doing the following:
 - i. Stay in close enough proximity to the child for him/her to know you are addressing him/her
 - ii. Avoid excessive attention (including eye contact and facial expressions)
 - iii. Calmly repeat ONE direction that is brief and clear in a calm, neutral tone of voice
 - iv. Count to 15 in your head and repeat the SAME direction in the same manner until some form of compliance
 - b. Other things to try (in line with not giving attention and not allowing escape from the direction):
 - i. Remind the child what wonderful things will happen after this is done
 - ii. Show the reward system
 - iii. Offer a choice between the demand and another less-preferred activity (“Pick up the toys or help empty the dishwasher”)
 - c. Behavioral momentum: build compliance by engaging the student in preferred/previously mastered tasks/demands at a rapid pace and give the ultimate direction after several successful trials
5. Reinforcement (to make good behavior happen more)

- a. PRAISE PRAISE PRAISE (have I mentioned PRAISE?)
 - b. Use the 4 to 1 rule: 4 positives for every corrective interaction
 - c. Use a positive tone of voice when giving reinforcement
 - i. Verbal descriptive praise: state the behavior that is being reinforced, i.e., “Great job washing your hands!”
 - d. Use child interests to drive reinforcer-choice
6. Parent behavior
- a. OUR behavior affects child behavior
 - b. Use self-control (take breaths, count to 10, take a break). Take care of yourself!
 - c. Avoid power struggles with the child (inappropriate attention-seeking behavior that should NOT be reinforced with any attention from us)
 - i. You may maintain control of the situation by DISengaging
 - ii. If there’s a legitimate issue being expressed by the child, actually consider whether they can have what they want
 - d. Mind your tone of voice—our children imitate and pick up on every message we send, verbal and nonverbal.
 - e. Be patient: always give the child an opportunity, however brief, to respond independently
 - f. STAY POSITIVE. BE LOVING. ENJOY THE CHILD REGARDLESS OF THE BEHAVIOR.