

Discipline Techniques to Help Children and Youth Manage Their Behaviors

1. Be a Role Model

One of the most effective methods of learning is imitation. Role modeling is an effective method of teaching social behaviors. Think of some things you have learned to do by watching others. Can you think of some social situations, such as your first formal dining experience, where you may have taken cues on how to behave based on what others were doing?

2. Provide the Child with Time Out

Time out is an effective behavioral way to let children know that what they are doing they cannot continue to do. Some people will ask, "How can you help a young child, learn to do things when their language is limited and it is difficult to reason with them?" Time out can be effectively used to stop a young child's behavior. It lets the child know what is right and what not to do. Time out also provides the child with an opportunity to get back in control. Think of ways you as an adult have learned to take time out when you are angry or are having an emotional reaction.

3. Provide Positive Reinforcers and Privileges

One of the best ways to get a behavior to continue is to reward it. Immediate positive feedback usually causes the person to continue or repeat the behavior that is being reinforced. Both the cycle of attachment and the positive interaction cycle depend on positive interventions and positive response. The process is simple. Would you continue to smile or make eye contact with someone who did not smile back or look at you? We all tend to continue behavior when it is reinforced.

4. Take Away Privileges

Children need to be able to make the connections between actions, responsibilities and rights. Often privileges are earned based on responsible behavior. We let children use the telephone and expect that they will be considerate of the privilege and others' needs. If the rule is that no call be longer than 20 minutes, and the child continues to extend calls beyond that time limit, taking away the privilege of using the phone for 24 hours may be an effective way to change the behavior. Children learn the connections between behavior and consequences when their lost privileges are tied to the behavior they need to change. When the loss of privilege does not relate to the behavior, the child is more likely to feel punished and resentful.

5. Provide Natural and Logical Consequences

Consequences that are natural, ones likely to occur if no intervention is taken, become life's lessons. Unfortunately, some natural consequences are really learning by the school of hard knocks, such as when toys left outside are stolen. When we want to prevent life's blows to children or need to protect their health

and safety, we often provide logical consequences rather than natural consequences. What are some natural consequences from which you have learned?

6. Ignore the Behavior

Some behaviors need attention or reinforcement to continue. Sometimes children will act up or out just to get a parent's attention. If a child is using a behavior to gain control or get your attention, an effective response can be to withhold attention.

7. Ensure that Restitution Occurs

Sometimes the best way to learn what to do right is by practicing the right way. If children are held accountable for their behavior, they are more likely to be responsible.

8. Hold Family Meetings

Often the best way to resolve an issue is to get all the parties together and discuss what is happening and what are logical solutions. By holding family meetings, parents show their children that they are an important part of the family and that their feelings count. Also, family meetings help children learn to talk about their concerns.

9. Develop Behavioral Charts

Behavioral charts can help assist parents to determine when behaviors occur and what causes them. By tracking behaviors, parents can determine when to use positive reinforcement to increase the learning or performance of the desired behaviors.

10. Grandma's Rule or This for That

Grandma's Rule or This for That teaches both the expected order of behaviors and a logical way to earn privileges. For example, children must finish their homework before they can watch television.

11. Help the Child Understand Feelings

Many children will not relate the way they are feeling to the way they are acting. When parents can help the child connect emotions and behaviors, an important first step toward changing behaviors has been made. Several communication methods such as paraphrasing, reflecting, active listening and "I" messages can be very useful.

Paraphrasing is restating what was said with minor variations in the words and in a similar tone. For example, child says, "I wish my mom could help me with my homework." You paraphrase and respond, "You wish your mom were around to help you."

Reflecting is restating the content (beliefs, opinions, event and facts) with focus on the emotion and feelings behind the words. For example, child looks sad and says in a soft voice, "I wish my mom could help me with my homework." You

reflect by saying, "It sounds like you miss your mom, especially when you have a big job to do."

Active listening is listening with understanding and then clarifying the statement and responding to the feelings. For example, child says "You're not my mom, I don't have to do what you say!" You respond, " You are right, I am not your mother and you really wish you were able to be with her.

"I" message is responding in the first person: "I feel worried and upset when I don't know where you are."

12. Replace Negative Time with Positive Time

It is very difficult to stop behavior. Substituting something positive and healthy for something negative and destructive is a key to being able to change a behavior.

13. Provide Alternatives for Destructive Acting-Out Behaviors

Emotions carry a great deal of energy. Children will need some place to put that energy. Parents can help them to find positive ways to express their feelings.

14. Make a Plan for Change with a Child

Learning how to make a plan for change only comes with practice. Plans usually start with a goal. If you can help a child understand the need for change and then develop a goal, you will be moving in the right direction. Think of a time you had a goal and what helped you to achieve it. Did you have small, reasonable steps? Were there lots of options to get you where you were going? What kind of reinforcers or rewards did you get along the way?

15. Make a Plan for Change with the Child and a Professional

Adoptive parents and foster parents have many resources available to them. You can call on the child welfare worker, a clinical social worker, psychologist, counselor and many other professionals. Be ready to reach out for the help that you and the child need.