

# ***Essential Principles for Successful Child Behavior Management***

## **Behaviors Parents Should Eliminate**

Purchasing overly elaborate rewards and designing complex reward charts for earning privileges. You don't have to use a prize or special treat to reinforce your child—nothing is more reinforcing than *your attention*. Regular doses of your positive attention, used differentially based on the child's behavior, will go a long way towards facilitating behavior change.

Questions, commands, and criticisms.

- When interacting with your child during "time-in," just describe and praise without making any demands of the child.
- When your child is misbehaving, use as few words as possible. Eliminate lectures or "why would you do something like that?!" and simply deliver the consequence.

Warnings. Instead, a consequence should occur after every occurrence of misbehavior.

Passionate discipline. Children love attention, whether it is positive or negative. Reprimands may stop a behavior temporarily, but they are not effective in reducing their frequency over the long-term (this is referred to as "the criticism trap").

Micromanaging time-out. Your child may be squirming in her chair or crying—this is not the time to remind her of the rules of time-out. You should not provide any eye contact or address her in any way except to release her from time-out after she has demonstrated the necessary behavior there (hands, feet and mouth are quiet and her bottom is in the time out spot that the parent specified).

Talking about the misbehavior the child engaged in. Cognitive immaturity means that children learn from experience, not from reasoning. Making the child apologize for the misbehavior is also less effective than practicing an alternative appropriate behavior.

## **Behaviors Parents Should Do More Of**

"Time-in." Describe and praise what your child is doing when he is being "okay" and *especially* when he is being good.

Acknowledge your child with a pat on the back, tussle of the hair, or squeeze of the hand. Aim for 50-100 of these touches per day.

Point out when you notice your child being "okay" and/or "good."

Label behaviors she engages in that are "good"—that is, *cooperative, thoughtful, generous, helpful, kind*, etc. Giving attention to these behaviors will increase their frequency in the future.

When stating the consequence,

- Keep it short and simple.
- Keep your voice calm and neutral ("boring").

Follow through with a **consequence** if the child has not started to comply within 10 seconds of your direction.

Point out and praise your child for complying the first time. *Prompt the child before giving a command that you'll be watching to see whether she listens the first time.* If she doesn't, give a consequence or time-out.

Consider whether the child's misbehavior resulted from a skill deficit, provide coaching, and encourage the child to practice an appropriate alternative behavior. For example, if the child interrupts, teach him an appropriate way of requesting your attention (e.g. by putting his hand on your wrist and waiting until you attend to him) and have him practice several times. Use time out for interrupting that occurs after the alternative has been taught and practiced.