

TECHNIQUES FOR MANAGING BEHAVIOR IN CHILDREN

July, 2021

We are more likely to succeed as parents if we have specific skills in managing behavior. Setting limits and using incentive programs and consequences are important tools for shaping a child's behavior. Experiment with some of the below strategies. If you have questions or concerns, consider discussing these with your clinic's Behavioral Health Consultant (BHC).

Setting Limits

1. Be realistic in your expectations and use age-appropriate commands.
2. Give one command at a time.
3. Use commands that clearly specify the desired behavior.
4. Make commands short and to the point.
5. Use "do" commands and "when-then" commands.
6. Make commands positive and polite.
7. Give children options when possible.
8. Give children ample opportunity to comply.
9. Praise compliance or provide consequences for noncompliance.
10. Give warnings and helpful reminders.
11. Don't use stop or don't commands.
12. Don't give unnecessary commands.
13. Don't threaten children.
14. Support your partner's commands.
15. Strike a balance between parent and child control.

Use of Incentive Programs

1. Define the desired behavior clearly.
2. Choose effective rewards (i.e., rewards the child will find sufficiently reinforcing).
3. Set consistent limits concerning which behaviors will receive rewards.
4. Make the program simple and fun.
5. Make the steps small.
6. Monitor the charts carefully.
7. Follow through with the rewards immediately.
8. Avoid mixing rewards with punishment.
9. Gradually replace rewards with social approval.
10. Revise the program as the behaviors and rewards change.

Primary Care Behavioral Health

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Use of Consequences

1. Make consequence age-appropriate.
2. Be sure you can live with the consequences you have set up.
3. Give the child a choice; specify consequences ahead of time.
4. Involve the child whenever possible.
5. Use consequences that are short and to the point.
6. Make consequences immediate.
7. Make consequences safe and non-punitive.

Guidelines for Ignoring

1. Limit the number of behaviors to ignore.
2. Choose specific behaviors to ignore and make sure you can ignore them.
3. Physically move away from the child, but stay in the room if possible.
4. Avoid eye contact and interaction while ignoring.
5. Return attention to the child as soon as misbehavior stops.
6. Be prepared for possible initial increase in misbehavior.

Using Time Outs

1. Try to focus on one behavior at a time when time-out is used.
2. Use time-out consistently for each instance of that misbehavior.
3. Be as polite and calm as possible in sending child to time-out.
4. Make sure to explain why they are being sent to time out and for how long.
5. Give time-outs for one minute per year of child up to 10 minutes.
6. Be prepared for possible initial increase in misbehavior.
7. Be prepared to use other consequences, such as loss of privileges, if the child refuse to go to time out.