

BEHAVIOR MANAGEMENT FOR FAMILIES

Most children young children with special needs are observed to have “bad behaviors”. Whatever the behavior may be it is not “bad” for the individual. Since most behaviors are learned, the child has some history of reinforcement for both appropriate and inappropriate behaviors (IB). Usually, IB, such as tantrums, are generalized from home to school without deliberate instruction. Tantrums may have functioned for the child, in the past, to avoid or escape demands being put on them from their parents. Avoidance and escape behaviors, throwing toys, hitting, and biting behaviors may have been reinforced just like any appropriate behavior may have been. It is our responsibility as parents and professionals to treat and decrease these inappropriate response classes (e.g. avoidance, escape, assaultive behaviors, self-injurious behaviors, and food refusal) using positive behavioral interventions. Punishment techniques are to be avoided due to the negative side effects and disadvantages, such as counter-control.

Research has shown that the best way to reduce inappropriate and aberrant behaviors is to replace them with appropriate behaviors through the use of positive reinforcement techniques (Cooper, Heron, & Heward, 2007). Remember that your roles as parents, special educators, or therapists are to shape new repertoires in young children which is a particularly challenging endeavor. Children with diagnoses and behavioral disorders require additional opportunity to respond and time to allow the process of positive reinforcement to take effect. Some strategies and tactics are follows:

- ✓ *Be proactive instead of reactive* whenever possible in dealing with IB. Identify fresh and motivating reinforcers for a given child and change them often.
- ✓ Use *frequent and immediate positive reinforcers* in addition to social praise for all correct target behaviors.
- ✓ *Give high rates* of approvals! Your child will succeed, and so will you!
- ✓ You can *set a timer* to alarm every 2 or 3 minutes to be reminded to deliver positive reinforcement.
- ✓ *Provide immediate simple corrections* (i.e. “pick it up”, “touch nicely”) using physical guidance immediately.
- ✓ When providing simple corrections, *do so in a neutral tone with no affect* (this takes practice).
- ✓ *Arrange the environment* to reduce the likelihood of IB (i.e. seating position or proximity to the door)
- ✓ *Work through* tantrums so that they do not function to escape demands.
- ✓ “The show must go on”!
- ✓ *Avoid reprimands* in favor of simple one or two word directions such as “come here”, or “sit down”.
- ✓ *Never reinforce negotiating behaviors.*
- ✓ *Teach mands and functional communication skills to replace IB.*
- ✓ *Opportunity to respond* should be given as often as possible (>100 learn units per hour)
- ✓ *Communicate with team members* (parents) to identify setting events and antecedents which may be responsible for IB outside of school or therapy sessions
- ✓ If IB perpetuate and significantly interfere with a child’s participation in classroom routines or with peers, complete a *Functional Behavior Assessment* and record environmental conditions.
- ✓ *Be patient and be consistent* (there may be a long history to unravel).
- ✓ Consult with a *Board Certified Behavior Analyst* to develop an appropriate behavior intervention plan.

Jeremy H. Greenberg, Ph.D., BCBA

Cooper, J. O., Heron, T.E., & Heward, W.L., (2007). *Applied Behavior Analysis 2nd Edition*. Pearson Education Inc.: Upper Saddle River, NJ.

