

## **STRUCTURING FOR SUCCESS**

### **Behavioral Strategies To Help Your Child Start The Year Off Right**

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Everyone wants a household that runs smoothly. It's real life that gets in the way. When a parent takes on the responsibility for all the details in life including getting children organized and moving, a child doesn't have to organize for himself or get himself out of the door.

Below are tips that focus on establishing a structure that enables a child to get through the daily activities without relying on adult support. You know - the nagging, cajoling, pleading...

**ESTABLISH EXPECTATIONS IN ADVANCE.** Discuss expectations with your parenting partner. Determine a sequence, a short list of behavioral expectations and make that part of the routine. Schedules, routines - preferably stated in writing - help children make sense of a world of time and expectations that are often arbitrary and inconsistent.

To establish routines or change behaviors, answer:

- WHAT DO I WANT HIM TO DO INSTEAD OF WHAT HE'S DOING?
- HOW CAN I PUT IT IN A VISUAL FORMAT SO HE DOESN'T HAVE TO RELY ON ME TELLING HIM WHAT TO DO?
- WHAT WILL MAKE IT WORTH HIS WHILE?

**DEVELOP ROUTINES.** Routines make the world predictable. When expectations remain constant day in and day out, children gradually develop proficiency in meeting these expectations.

Practice makes perfect.

## **PROCESS FOR ESTABLISHING ROUTINES**

- Include the child in discussions whenever possible.
- Identify situations that occur on a frequent basis.

*What do I want him to do instead of what he's doing?*

- Determine 1 to 5 things (depending on child's age) that need to be accomplished as part of that routine. Decide what tasks must be included.
- Separate the desirable from the truly essential. Ignore the unessential—you can expand the routine once your child has fully mastered the essential tasks.
- Prioritize the important tasks.
- Discuss and decide on number of reminders needed.
- Determine time frame for completing steps.

*How can I put expectations and progress in a visual format?*

- Develop documentation (chart, checklist).

*What would make it worth his while?*

- Decide on reinforcer for successful completion of routine within specified time.
- Review steps of routine, tools (checklists, timers) and rewards with child.

**PRIORITIZE** - Focus on one or two behaviors at a time. Define the desired behavior(s), discuss it with your spouse, your child, teachers, babysitters. Be consistent. Stay with these few behaviors. Consistent feedback and a limited focus increase the likelihood the child will remember what your priorities are. What do I want him to do instead of what he's doing?

**USE A VISUAL TO SUPPORT STRUCTURE.** When specific intervals have been established, use a timer to "document" the length of the interval. It is the schedule that says dinner at 6:00. It's objective. It decreases the interaction between parent and child signaling the end of the activity. It is a way to disengage. It is the timer that ended play, not the parent. Instead of a parent standing over them, nagging/reminding, the timer gives the signal and the child is now responsible for responding. As a result, children are generally less reactive. Reinforce compliance with the timer/schedule/list.

- **Calendars** - Use calendars to document family activities and privileges. If it's not on the calendar, it doesn't happen.
- **Timers** - Use a kitchen timer to determine when "time's up" for your child's activity. The timer enforces the rule—not Mom or Dad.
  - **Provide an incentive** for your child to respond to the timer. He can earn it by ending an activity when the timer goes off or by completing a task before it rings.

### **CHECKLISTS + SCHEDULES = PREDICTABILITY = FEWER MELTDOWNS**

- HOW CAN I PUT IT IN A VISUAL FORMAT SO HE DOESN'T HAVE TO RELY ON ME TELLING HIM WHAT TO DO?

**DEFINE THE RULES.** All children need and want limits. Determine what guidelines are most important and phrase rules in positive terms. Ask your child's opinion as to what rules are important

- Keep rules short and to the point. A very few rules that apply in all situations. Adults have a way of identifying the rules as soon as the child breaks them. Call attention to the rules when the child is adhering to them. *Too many rules frustrate the parent and defeat the child.*
- Clarify consequences. List rewards as well as negative consequences associated with rules/behavior, before the behavior occurs.
- Make sure consequences, both positive and negative are powerful enough to

motivate the child. WHAT WILL MAKE IT WORTH HIS WHILE?

- Use positives before punishment.
- **REINFORCE**. Define what you want the child to do (Prioritize) and determine what would make it worth his while to do it.
- Reinforce often.
- Reinforcers must be changed/rotated often.

**WHEN THE BEHAVIOR IS APPROPRIATE, PRAISE IT.** Focus on the many small, positive behaviors that your child exhibits. When you enter a room, ask yourself, "What is going right?" Make specific positive comments. When you notice things that a child does right, it breaks the cycle of negative redirection (nagging) and makes her feel better about herself and about you. Your attention is something your child needs, use it at the right time. Provide extra praise for behaviors you want to increase.

- **Catch the child being good.**
- **If you want to see the behavior happen again, pay attention to it.**

**USE NEGATIVE CONSEQUENCES PAIRED WITH REINFORCERS.** It's part of making outcomes predictable to the child. For a punishment procedure to be effective it needs to:

- Entail a warning.
- Have a set beginning and end.
- Be delivered at maximum intensity.
- Be delivered in a matter of fact tone.

Ask yourself what was the behavior you were reinforcing the last time you punished. Was the last discussion about behavior a positive one (reinforcement/praise) or a negative one?

Punishment won't change your child's behavior. Punishment interrupts a behavior, for the moment, but it doesn't teach an alternative.

-Evaluate based on results. If the behavior improves, the procedure is effective.  
If not...

**Goals for Behavioral Change** Realistic gauge of progress, that negative behavior occurs:  
less frequently  
lasts for shorter duration  
at lower intensity

**Look for trends.** Learn to recognize when the child does behavior better than he did last time.

## **That's progress!!**

**Never and always do not apply to behavior.** Behavior does not occur in absolutes. Do not expect intervention to result in elimination of any negative behavior or in consistent demonstration of appropriate behavior. Expect ups and downs.

**Don't take your child's behavior personally.**

**Don't attribute negative motives to your child's actions.**

## **BEHAVIOR CHANGE IN YOUR CHILD STARTS WITH YOU.**

### **Books for Parents**

1. *Good Behavior: over 1,200 sensible solutions to your child's problems from birth to age twelve* by DM Garber, S W Garber and RF Spizman (Mass Market - 1993)
2. *No More Misbehavin'. 38 Difficult Behaviors and How to Stop Them.*(2003) Borba, Michele Jossey-Bass, San Francisco.
3. *Taking Charge of ADHD: The Complete, Authoritative Guide for Parents, revised.* (2000) Barkley RA. Guilford Publications (800) 365-7006.
4. *Teaching Teens with ADD and ADHD: A Quick Reference Guide for Teachers and Parents* (2001) Dendy, Chris A. Zeigler. Bethesda, MD, Woodbine House,
5. *The Explosive Child: A new approach for understanding and parenting easily frustrated, chronically inflexible children.* (1998) Greene R. HarperCollins, New York. (212) 207-7000.
6. *From Chaos to Calm: Effective Parenting of Challenging Children with ADHD and other behavioral problems.* (2001) Heinger, JE, Weiss SK. Perigee Books, division of Penguin Putnam Inc., NY, NY. (800) 788-6262
7. *Raising your spirited child: A guide for parents whose child is more intense, sensitive, perceptive, energetic.*(1991) Kurcinka MS. HarperCollins Publishers, NY. (1-800-742-7831).
8. *The Angry Child: Regaining Control When Your Child is Out of Control.* (2001) Murphy, Timothy and Oberlin, Loriann Hoff. New York: Three Rivers Press.
9. *1-2-3 Magic: Effective Discipline for Children 2-12.* 2nd Revision edition (1996) by Thomas W. Phelan Ph.D.; Child Management; 1-800-442-4453.
10. *Angry Children, Worried Parents (2004)* Goldstein, S., Brooks, R., Weiss, S. Plantation, FL. Specialty Press
11. *Raising a Thinking Child.* Shure, Myrna B. New York: Pocket Books, 1994.
12. *What to Do Until the Grownup Arrives: The Art and Science of Raising Teenagers.* Novello, Joseph. Seattle: Hogrefe & Huber, 1993.
13. *Raising Resilient Children: Fostering Strength, Hope and Optimism in Your Child.* Brooks, Robert and Goldstein, Sam. New York: Contemporary Books, 2001.