

Managing Children's Behavior

Practical Strategies and Ways to Cope

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Your Presenter

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Overview of Today's Webinar

- Children and Youth Behavior: The “What”
 - Overactive/ underactive behavior
 - Children with special needs
- Children and Youth Behavior: The “Why”
 - Development, context, and learning
- Behavior Management 101: The “How”
- Difficult Moments: When You are Frustrated

Children and Youth Behavior

The “What”

Why did they *DO* that?!

- Behavior management is the most common issue for people who work with children.
- Many layers of management including:
 - How kids regulate their own emotions
 - How kids work/ play with peers
 - How kids work/ play with their teachers or caregivers
 - Rules of engagement (e.g., game rules, equipment safety, routines)
- How can we make sense of behavior?
 - Reasons v. Excuses?
 - Can't do v. Won't do?
 - Within the child v. Outside of the child



Common Challenges: Acting Out

- Defiance
- Aggression (verbal or physical)
 - Reactive
 - Instrumental
- Tantrums
- Social aggression
 - Excluding others from play
 - Rumor spreading



Common Challenges: Acting In



- Non-Compliance (e.g., dawdling)
- Social Withdrawal/ Shyness
- Disengagement
 - Lack of participation
 - Lack of motivation
- Somatic complaints
- Crying

Children with Special Needs

- Common disabilities in children include:
 - ADHD, Autism Spectrum Disorders, Intellectual Disability, Learning Disability, Post-Traumatic Stress
- Do not make assumptions
 - Just because a child “appears” typically developing does not mean that they are
 - Sometimes behavior can appear “bratty” when really it is a function of an underlying condition which we may not know about
- Always ask parents for more information if you have concerns

Reasons vs. Excuses

- **Reasons for behavior:** possible explanations for why children are not meeting our expectations
 - Examples: hunger, fatigue, mental health problems, family difficulties, lack of structure in the environment
- **Excuses for behavior:** circumstances that explain why poor behavior is permissible
 - Feelings and bad days are always acceptable – making decisions and acting ways that are disrespectful, unsafe, or hurtful are NOT
- Sometimes adults confuse reasons for excuses

Can't or Won't?

Can't Do What We Expect

- Lack of clear expectations
- Lack of the required skills

Won't Do What We Expect

- Have the skills but make other choices

Children and Youth Behavior

The “Why”

Within the Child



- Reasons for misbehavior may be because of something within the child.
- May include:
 - Hunger, fatigue
 - Stress, life changes
 - Underlying cognitive or social/ emotional problems
 - Poor behavior regulation skills
- All too often we assume that behavior is about the CHILD.

Within the Child: Developmental Considerations

- Children's frontal lobes (controls decision making, behavior regulation, attention) are only starting to really develop between ages 4-7 years.
- Remember that:
 - Young children (pre-school, early elementary grades) children have a difficult time with perspective taking and separating fantasy from reality.
 - Older children (middle-to-late elementary school) are beginning to be able to reflect on the perspectives of others but still need support.
 - Adolescents (remember that the brain is not fully developed until age 25 years) are heavily influenced by peers and wanting to impress peers. Risk-taking and rule breaking behavior are more common when peers are around (e.g., driving laws).
- YOU as the adult need to fill in the gaps where their cognitive and social-emotional development is still lagging.

Outside of the Child: Learned Behavior

- Children are often “taught” how to misbehave because:
 - Poor parenting skills
 - Poor boundaries/ rules in the environment
 - Adult caregivers allow misbehavior to “slide”
 - Adult caregivers are overly restrictive on behaviors that they probably SHOULD let “slide”



There's Almost Always a Reason

- Four main functions of behavior (Alberto & Troutman, 2009)
 1. Attention – positive or negative
 2. Gain object/ activity
 3. Escape – avoid a task or situation
 4. Sensory Stimulation – person finds the feeling pleasing

It's All Learning

To decrease an
unwanted
behavior we need
to



teach a desired
behavior that
serves the SAME
function

Outside of the Child: Context Matters



- Although poor behavior is not necessarily a caregiver's "fault" it is still, in part, their responsibility.
- Children tend to struggle with behavior in environments that:
 - Have a lack clear routines and expectations
 - Have caregivers are overly permissive or harsh in their discipline
 - Are poorly monitored

Behavior Management 101

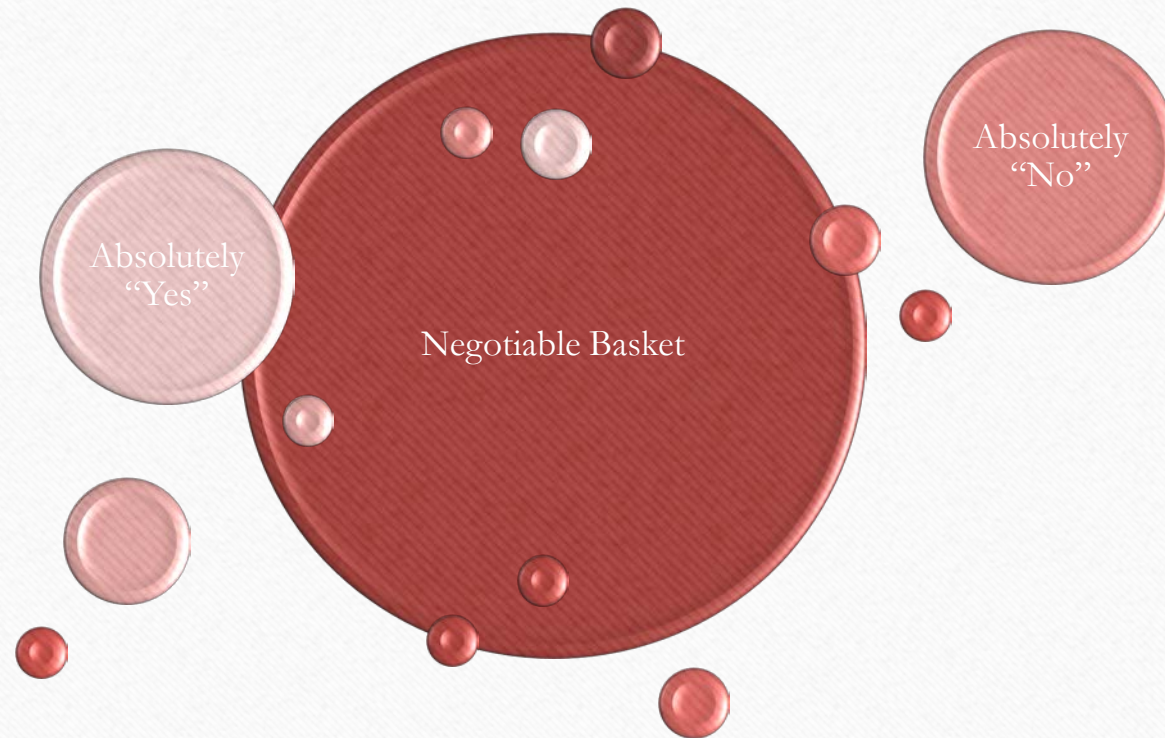
The “How” to Help Kids Meet Our Expectations

Supporting the Behavior You WANT



- When you are in the business of STOPPING undesirable behavior, you are taking time away from TEACHING behavior that you want to see.
- Research shows that we do much better with managing behavior when we:
 - Teach and reinforce the positive.
 - Ignore most of the negative.
 - Correcting the negative that is severely disruptive or dangerous.

The Three Baskets



Getting the Behavior You Want: Clear Expectations

- Setting expectations: three positively stated rules
 - Examples:
 - Listen to the leader
 - Stay in your seat
 - Be kind to others
- 3-5 **positively stated** rules (e.g., Be Ready, Be Respectful, Be Safe)
 - Clearly posted, explicitly taught
 - When undesirable behavior occurs use a reminder such as “You’re throwing crayons. Is that following our rule of being safe?”



Getting the Behavior You Want: Giving Commands

- **Precision commands** – used when necessary to increase compliance
 - Polite, direct (“Please wash your hands” rather than “Do you want to wash your hands now?”)
 - Use the child’s name (“Sarah, I need for you to wash your hands now.”)
 - Positively stated (tells a child what TO do, not what NOT to do)
 - Given one at a time
 - Specific (“Please put your feet on the ground” not “Be Careful”)

Getting the Behavior You Want: Praise and Logical Consequences

- Positive praise
 - Specific praise helps kids to know exactly what you like about their behavior so that they can repeat it!
 - “Alan, I love how you are using the toys so gently”
- Logical consequences
 - “You didn’t clean up the materials like I asked, so now the rest of your activity time is shorter”



Getting the Behavior You Want: Involving Parents, Using Rewards

- Talking to parents
 - Always a good idea to keep in good communication with parents
 - Parents often know what works with their children at home and school
 - Parents can help you reinforce behavior that you want to see
- Use of rewards
 - When used effectively, rewards can be a great tool
 - Rewards can be privileges, preferred activities, tangibles, tokens to earning something bigger, praise
 - Rewards/praise should be given immediately after the good behavior (and only when the child actually does the good behavior)

Common Pitfalls in Behavior Management

- Back-handed praise
 - Compares child's behavior to past behavior or to other kids' behavior
 - "You're doing so much better than usual!"
 - "I'm glad to see you're acting much more normal"
 - Vague praise (ok, but not as effective as specific praise)
 - "Good job!" "Nice work!" "You did it!"
- Too many, negatively stated, rules
- Inappropriate rewards
- Time out (used poorly)
- Using negative language with parents



A photograph of a piece of yellow lined paper with the word "RULES" written at the top and underlined. Below it is a list of four items:

1. YOU CAN....
2. YOU CAN'T...
3. YOU CAN....
4. YOU CAN'T

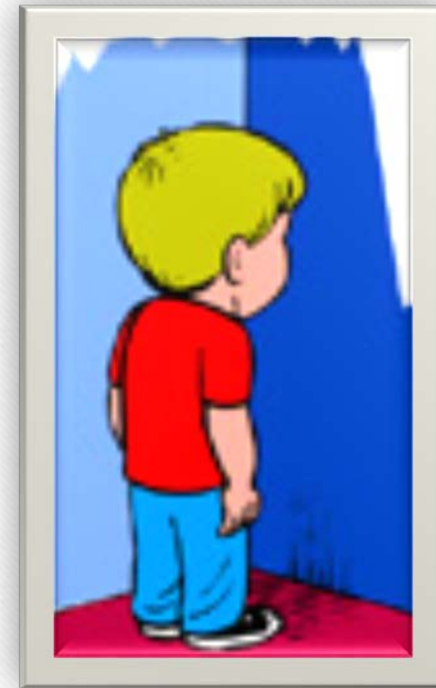
What About Stopping the Bad Behavior?

- Use exclusion or time-out sparingly.
- Ask yourself:
 - Is the behavior dangerous?
 - Is the behavior severely disrupting the other children's participation?
 - Is the behavior persistent and pervasive?



Time-Out Doesn't Work!!

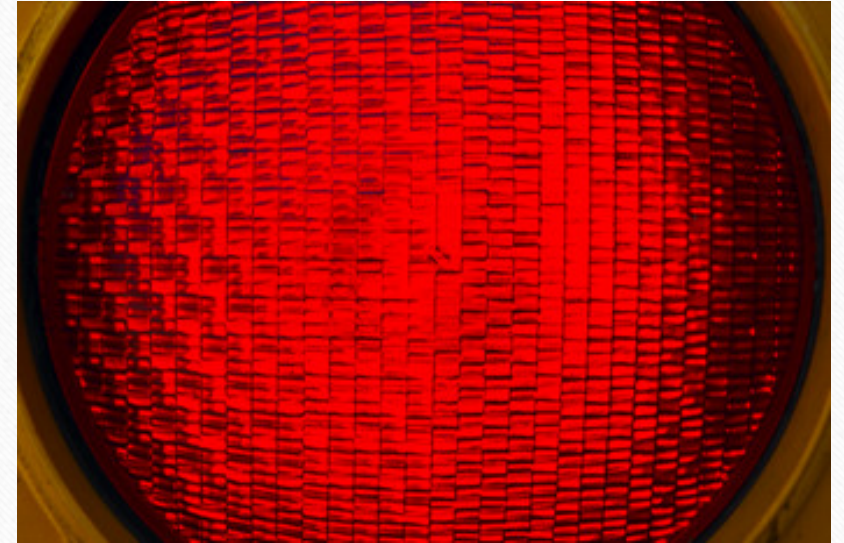
- Poorly used time-out does not work.
- Usually when it does not work it is because:
 - The adult gave in too soon.
 - The time-out was inappropriate.
- Time Out means “time out from reinforcement”.



Time-Out Guidelines

How to make it work!

1. 1 minute/ year of age of the child NOT TO GO LONGER than 10 minutes
2. Child in time-out should not be doing unwanted behaviors (crying, hitting, throwing objects, etc.) → “time” does not start or stop until proper behavior is shown
3. Time-out rules should be set up BEFORE using time-out
4. Never use for a behavior that functions on negative reinforcement (escape or avoidance behaviors)
5. Consistency. Consistency. Consistency.
 - If you won’t follow-through, don’t even bother.



Difficult Moments

When the Adults are Frustrated....

The Hardest Job in the World



- Working with children is frustrating.
- Caregivers are often:
 - Overworked
 - Under-paid
 - Under-trained
 - Under-supported
- In environments where kids are struggling with behavior this can lead to burnout and staff turn-over.

How Burnout Effects Behavior



- When adults are stressed it leads to:
 - Overly permissive caregiving (letting kids “get away with it”).
 - Overly harsh caregiving (punishing children for minor misbehavior).
 - Poor modeling of self-regulation (showing children how NOT to manage their own feelings and behavior).
- Staff training and self-care, therefore, serve two purposes.
 - Support/ increased staff continuity
 - Better behavior management and overall milieu

Managing Frustrating Moments

- Knowing when to ask for advice.
- Knowing when to ask for help.
- Knowing when to take a deep breath.
- Knowing when to walk away.
- After-hours self-care.



Modeling Self-Management



- Label the feeling.
 - “I am feeling really frustrated with your behavior right now.”
- Explain your strategy.
 - “I think I’m going to take a 5-minute break to calm down so we can talk when we feel better.”
- Take space and figure out a new plan.
- Talk about what happened.
 - “Even adults get angry sometimes. It’s just that then we have to take time to calm down and then solve the problem.”
- Let go of grudges and move on.

Questions?

Thank you for joining me today! ☺

