

Behavior Modification (*Reinforcing Good Behavior*)

Intro: In helping a young child to improve behavior, parents often are at a loss at how to approach the issue except for punishing the child. Here are some ideas on how to use a positive approach.

Basic Principal: To provide a way for the child to "earn" a privilege or reward by demonstrating improved behavior.

Necessary ingredients:

1. Child is at least 3 or 4 years old & wants to try this.
2. Child must know what to do (specifically) to earn privilege or reward.
3. Plan must be simple enough so that everyone can stick to it.
4. Plan must be carried out in an upbeat, positive manner.
5. "Tokens", such as stickers, poker chips, etc. (are given for good behavior).

Step 1: Decide on the exact behavior that you want to change. If that behavior is one you want to see happen less, then choose a behavior that is the opposite,

Examples:

- "Undesirable" behavior = hitting. "Desirable" behavior to reward = "using words all day instead of hitting" (or "for the next one hour", if all day is impossible).
- "Undesirable" behavior = not staying in bed at night. "Desirable" behavior = "staying in bed like a big boy".
- "Undesirable" behavior = refusing to sit on toilet. "Desirable" = "sitting on toilet for 5 minutes & trying to poop".

Step 2: Explain to child: "we're going to try a game". Explain the "desired" behavior (that will be rewarded) to the child in simple words that are understood, and be specific. Do not say "you'll get a sticker if you're a good boy". That's too vague (after all, it's awfully hard to be "good" all day...it's easier to just "not hit".) Make sure the child knows exactly what he must do to earn a token, and what the token is worth.

Step 3: Choose a reward, but keep these suggestions in mind:

- It's best to choose a privilege that money can't buy, like a privilege or a food. And it's best to choose a reward that fits the desired behavior. For example, for each sticker on calendar, child can stay up 10 minutes past bed-time (for child who fights bed-time & gets out of bed).
- Using a reward of toys often wears off. Rewards like "trips to McDonald's" often wears parents out.
- Remember to keep consequence positive. Withdrawal of privileges is not part of this plan.

Step 4: Set up a convenient place for the tokens: stickers on a calendar, poker chips taped to a wall chart, marbles in a jar. At a set time each day, a token (if earned) is placed, while parent smiles and praises child. Then at a set time, the token is "cashed-in" by allowing the privilege or reward. And (this is important) if the child has earned NO tokens, the parent will still be positive and say "Gee whiz, I see there is no sticker there tonight...I bet you'll earn some tomorrow" (hug, hug).