

Sample Scripts for Behavior Management Training

Step 1: Providing psychoeducation to parent

"We have already talked about how children often react to traumatic events with anxiety and distress. Other common reactions are disruptive behavior, aggression, anger, or having trouble following rules. Fortunately, several effective strategies are available for parents to use to deal with these types of behavior."

Step 2: Teaching parents how to use praise

"Praise is a valuable tool parents can use to increase their child's desirable behavior. Most children respond well to praise or positive attention, which is why it is important to know how and when to use praise effectively."

"The first thing to remember is the difference between labeled and unlabeled praise. "You're a great kid!" and "Good!" are sometimes helpful, but they are unlabeled and it can be unclear to the child what you liked about their behavior. This is why it is better to use labeled praises instead of unlabeled praises. A labeled praise is specific and it tells the child what you are praising. An example of a labeled praise is: "I like how you took out the garbage the first time I asked." This example is clear in terms of what the parent was praising—the parent liked that the child took out the garbage, and especially appreciated that the child did not need to be told more than once to do so. It is also important to praise desirable behavior as soon as possible after it happens. The more immediate the reward, the more the child will be affected by it."

"One of the most important rules is to be consistent. Children's behavior is most difficult to manage when they have unpredictable rewards and consequences for their behavior. This does not mean that you must praise a behavior each and every time it happens. But, when possible, it helps to keep consistency at a high level."

"This may seem unusual at first, but one of the hardest things for parents is to avoid criticizing their child while praising them. Let's use the example of the child taking out the garbage. If that same child usually does not take out the garbage the first time the parent asks, the parent might have been tempted to say instead: "I like how you took out the garbage the first time I asked. Why can't you do that every time?" The problem with this praise is that it will not reward the child's good behavior as effectively as in the example above."

"Last, but not least, it is important to avoid sounding robotic when praising your child. An enthusiastic praise can go a long way toward rewarding your child's desirable behavior."

Step 3: Teaching parents how to use active ignoring

"Children often will do something undesirable in order to get attention from parents, even if it is negative attention. It is easy and common for parents to attend and respond more often to undesirable behavior than to their child's desirable behavior. By doing this, they may be rewarding their child's undesirable behavior without realizing it. For this reason, it is important to use praise for desirable behavior and active ignoring for undesirable behavior. By active ignoring, I mean that you avoid reacting to the child's behavior in any way, positive or negative. You are not fully ignoring the behavior if you make eye contact with the child or react to the child's behavior in a way that shows emotion through language or facial expressions. When you remove all forms of attention, positive or negative, the child will learn that they will have to engage in other behaviors in order to get your attention. Very importantly, NEVER ignore dangerous or unsafe behavior. You should only use active ignoring to decrease undesirable, non-dangerous behavior."

Step 4: Teaching parents how to use timeout

"Another strategy that is effective in decreasing undesirable behavior is 'timeout.' You've probably heard about timeout before, and you may have even tried it with your children. But, timeout is a bit more complicated than most people think, and unless you were taught how to use it by someone with lots of skills and experience, we may need a refresher on the effective use of timeout. The primary goal of timeout is to remove a child temporarily from a reinforcing environment or situation in order to decrease an undesirable behavior. Timeout should not be done in a crowded room. It should be done in a quiet, un-stimulating room, and should last only a few minutes. Some experts recommend that it should last, at most, for one minute for

every year of the child's age (e.g., a 6-year-old child would get a 6-minute timeout). Other experts consider a 3-minute timeout to be long enough for most children aged 7 years or younger."

Step 5: Teaching parents other contingency management strategies

"A behavior chart is another useful tool to manage children's behavior. You can arrange it so that you specifically pick behaviors that you would like to see more often. Always try to frame goals in a positive way. For example, instead of setting a goal to "stop being mean to your brother when he wants to play with you," the goal can be framed more positively, such as "sharing toys with your brother." A goal can be set for this, say, 3 times per week or more, and stickers can be used each day to document whether or not the child shared his toys with his brother on that day. At the end of the week, the stickers are added up, and if the goal is met, the reward is earned. Parents can be creative with the types of behavior that they pick for behavior charts, but it is most helpful to:

- a. be consistent
- b. frame goals positively
- c. set short-term goals (use one day or one week rather than one month)
- d. follow through with rewards

If the reward at the end of the week is ice cream, be prepared and avoid postponing the reward. The behavior chart is most likely to be effective if parents follow through consistently and predictably."

Step 6: Role play with parents

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