



TIPS FOR DEALING WITH CHALLENGING BEHAVIORS

At Cliffside/Gatehouse your child participated in a program based on principles of behavior analysis and emotional regulation. The daily program of groups, activities and school targeted specific problem behaviors and utilized positive behavioral strategies to help your child learn or re-learn more positive and appropriate responses to their emotions.

BEHAVIOR: Behavior always has a purpose. Behaviors repeat because they are working in getting your child what he/she wants.

Some common examples:

- A child throws things, hits people, curses, threatens others, etc. in school. They may be trying to avoid doing the work because it's too hard. "Acting up" in class has caused them to be removed from the room and not have to do the work. Therefore, "acting up" has gotten them what they want – getting out of doing the hard work.
- A child tantrums (throws things, hits, kicks, etc.) when they don't get what they want. In the past, when the tantrum got bad enough – they got what they wanted, to stop the out of control behaviors. They will keep tantruming because it worked in getting him/her what they wanted. This is why being consistent is important!

Your child has been taught skills to replace those types of problem behaviors, rather than just being taught what "not to do." He/she has been taught safe and appropriate coping skills to deal with frustration, anger, sadness, disappointment, anxiety, etc.

CATCH THEM BEING GOOD:

- Praise positive behavior and ignore negative behavior. Focus on the good, not the bad!
- Children love attention! If you want a behavior to happen more often, pay attention to it! The best way to strengthen a behavior with attention is to praise the exact behavior you were happy to see.
- Say, "Great job using your coping skills instead of hitting!" rather than just "Great job!"
- Ask them to teach you their coping skills. It is great practice and you'll be able to identify their new skills better.

POSITIVE REINFORCEMENT:

- When a behavior is followed by something that a child likes (a reward), that behavior is likely to occur again.
- Allow your child to earn "rewards" with positive, appropriate and safe behavior. Let them choose (within reason) what they would like to EARN. Rewards can include video game time, play time with a family member, later bedtime, movie, etc.

ZONES OF REGULATION:

- The four "zones" (blue, yellow, green & red) describe how in control of your body you are and how you are feeling. They align with common feelings that your child may feel and helps them learn to identify as well as control their feelings.
- Check in with your child often and ask them "What zone are you in?"
- Your child has been encouraged to identify their feelings using the Zones of Regulation, talk about their feelings and try to manage them safely and appropriately.
- Many children find it hard to talk about their feelings calmly. If you can model talking about feelings calmly, this will help them a lot!

8 WAYS TO POSITIVELY COPE WITH DIFFICULT BEHAVIOR*

- 1. Establish House Rules:** Make easy rules for your child to follow. Start with a few "things we DO and DON'T do." Discuss the rules with your child and even demonstrate what you mean. Examples: Be safe. Be respectful. Be cooperative.
- 2. Prevention Is Better Than Cure:** If you feel that your child's behavior is beginning to get out of control, "nip it in the bud" by distracting your child's attention to something different.
- 3. Understand Your Child's Behavior:** Keep a diary of what led up to the behavior and what immediately followed it. If you do this, you might be able to see if there is a pattern. Understanding the triggers and what's happening immediately after the behavior, will help you pinpoint why the behaviors keep happening and more safe and appropriate ways for your child to get what they want.
- 4. Discipline With Short Time Outs:** Try to view punishment in a different way. For example, if a rule is broken, give your child a time-out (a short, quiet time alone, without play). Also, ignore minor behavior difficulties, as your attention will often accidentally encourage the exact behavior you want to stop.
- 5. Take Five:** When tensions and anger rise in you OR your child, take five. Take five minutes to cool down and to ask yourself, "Why am I getting so angry?" Try to identify the real problem, and then work to find a solution.
- 6. Never Strike In Anger:** Research has shown that hitting your child does not help, and can do more damage. Try to avoid striking/hitting your child in anger. Hitting is not effective in reducing "bad" behavior because it does not teach

children "good" behavior.

7. No Yelling Allowed: Words hurt. Try to avoid yelling at your child when you are angry. Do not insult your child. If they break a rule, tell them what they did wrong and why it makes you upset. You can be angry at what they did, NOT at who they are.

8. Get Away: When you feel frustrated, angry or overwhelmed with your child, try to let your feelings out safely and appropriately. You need to be a role model for your child by using safe and appropriate coping skills. Call a friend. Get out. Take a shower/bath. Take a walk. Exercise. Get help and support from others.

Praise* Praise any signs of positive behavior and do it often! Don't wait for perfect behavior. Praise will increase the chances of "good" behavior in the future. Tell your child very clearly, exactly why you are praising them.

Examples: *"You did such a great job listening to me the first time!"*

"I am so proud of you for using your coping skills when you were upset!"

"What a great friend you are being!"

Give praise immediately after good behavior and only for good behavior.

Be positive, enthusiastic and give good eye contact when you praise your child.

REWARDS*

- Tell your child clearly what the "good" behavior is that you want to see and even show them what the behavior looks like.
- Notice and praise any good behaviors, even small ones.
- Give small rewards each day, normally immediately following good behaviors. You can give bigger rewards at the end of the week for good behaviors throughout the week.
- Have your child to help you choose the rewards - they will be more likely to work for it, if it's something they chose themselves.
- Give rewards only after the "good" behavior has happened and tell them why they are getting it.
- Have a variety of different rewards available for your child.
- Let your child know that you know that he or she can do it (behave safe and appropriate) and earn the rewards.

Some examples of rewards:

Verbal: *"Thank you for cleaning up your room."* *"You did an excellent job sharing your toys."*

Physical: a pat on back following "good" behavior, high fives, a hug

Activities: doing activities selected by your child following "good" behavior

Non-social rewards (always combine with praise): toys or treats following "good" behavior

Star chart: behavior plan that rewards positive, safe and appropriate behaviors

CORRECTIVE TEACHING*

- Avoid emotional reactions (yelling, mean words, physical violence)
- Remain calm and neutral
- Avoid taking sides
- Model appropriate conflict resolution skills
- Steps for Corrective Teaching:
 - Stop the behavior.
 - Explain why the behavior is a problem.
 - Provide a reasonable consequence.
 - Model the desired ("good") behavior that you want to see.
 - Have the child practice the desired ("good") behavior.
 - Reinforce (reward) the child for using the desired ("good") behavior.

ALTERNATE WAYS TO SAY "NO"*

That's not an option right now.

Say it in a funny way, i.e. "Never in a million trillion years!" "No way Jose!"

That's not appropriate.

I am not ready for you to do that yet.

Use distraction.

Ask, "What do you think you would need to do before I would be willing to say yes?"

Ask, "What do you think? Is this a good choice for you?" (If you choose this, make sure you are willing to abide by your child's answer)

Ask, "What are your other options?" or "Let's see what else we can do."

No, but I would be willing to...

I appreciate your asking, however...

Tell them what to do instead, i.e., "Water needs to stay in the tub."

This is not negotiable.

You may be able to do that later but first you need to _____. Explain why

*SOURCE: Positive Approaches for Challenging Behaviors - Parenting Tips & Strategies Created by Susan Mack, M.A. and Steven Vitto, M.A. MAISD Behavioral Consultants