

PARENT CONNECTIONS

A Newsletter for First Steps Families ♦ Summer 2012

Five Facts Every Family Should Know About Behavior

(Provided by PBS Parents/PBS Teachers. For more information go to: www.pbs.org/parents/inclusivecommunities/challenging_behavior2.html)

1. All behavior is a form of communication.

Everybody communicates through behavior. An infant may cry when she is hungry or wet, just like an adult may yawn when he is bored at work. Adults and children are communicating something through their behavior during every moment in every day, even if they are not aware of it. A child's challenging or inappropriate behavior is a sign that he is upset and that something is not right.

2. There is always a reason for challenging behavior.

Children sometimes have trouble communicating because they may not know the words to describe how they are feeling or what to do in a difficult situation. At these times, children may act out their feelings or needs. Thus children engage in challenging behavior for a reason. The purpose may be getting someone's attention, stopping an activity they don't like, or gaining sensory pleasure – but there is always a reason behind the behavior.

3. There can be many reasons behind one specific behavior.

Children with challenging behavior are sending adults the message that something is not right or that their needs are not being met. There could be many reasons for a single behavior, such as being hungry, scared, hurt, tired, bored, wet, sad or angry. Some children have a hard time knowing how to tell adults they are angry, so they act out in ways that get them into trouble. Other children may engage in behavior that seems destructive, because they enjoy the physical sensation, for example, punching things or pulling threads from clothing. Sometimes children feel unsafe or out of control, so they take inappropriate action over the things they do control, like being able to kick or hurt someone. A child who has tried several times to communicate to adults about what he needs, but whose needs remain unmet, will often use challenging behavior as a way of sending a very loud message.

4. Adults can learn to understand and interpret children's challenging behavior.

Since children often use their behavior to tell others what they need, adults can help the child by figuring out the meaning behind the child's behavior. All children, but especially those who display challenging behavior, need the consistency of a reliable and loving adult who will provide support and guidance, especially during difficult times. Just as it is important to find meaning in children's behavior, it is equally important for adults to be aware of the meaning in their own behavior. Children learn a lot through the messages that adults send everyday.*

5. Children's challenging behavior can be reduced with support, not punishment.

Once adults understand what children are communicating through their behavior, they can respond better. When children feel respected and have their needs met, there is no longer a reason to use challenging behavior to communicate. Yelling at or punishing a child for a behavior may stop the behavior for the moment, but it does not give the child support or provide alternate ways to act in difficult situations. When adults use punishment, they are sending the message that anger is a good way to solve problems. When adults help children find positive ways to communicate their needs to others, children learn important social and problem-solving skills that will help them throughout their life.**

*For more information on sending positive messages through behavior, read the PBS Parents article on *Everyday Ways to Teach Children About Respect*.

**For more ideas on teaching children to deal with difficult emotions, read Mister Rogers' article on *Mad Feelings*.



A Missouri Family's Story

By Carrie of Miller, Mo.

When my husband and I adopted our first child, he sure didn't come with a set of instructions as to how to care for a special needs child. Here we are: new parents with a 2½ year old son who has been diagnosed with shaken baby syndrome, traumatic brain injury, mild CP and a few other issues. Our baby boy needed several services, and we weren't real sure where to turn for help. I searched the Internet for resources and found out about First Steps.

First Steps stayed a part of our lives over the next few years as our family grew. Our next son we brought home was diagnosed with Fetal Alcohol Syndrome (FAS), congenital heart defects and failure to thrive, and our youngest, a girl, also has FAS. The IFSP teams helped all of our children and our family in unique ways. For our oldest son, it was helping us understand how important communication is for him and his success and supporting us to learn American Sign Language. For our next son, it was helping him overcome profound sensory issues and the introduction of a rice and beans box to slowly desensitize him to aversive textures. And for our daughter, it was the importance of the whole family becoming part of her "tummy time." We would all get on the floor and play and have fun to keep her engaged, and we forgot how much she hated it!

There is no doubt in my mind that my children wouldn't have done so well if it wasn't for the services that they received from First Steps. In fact, with all the help that my daughter received through First Steps she was able to attend kindergarten without an IEP. That was a goal I set for her while in First Steps, and she was able to meet it.

Just for Fun...Choice Tickets

Time: 5 to 10 minutes

Materials: paper and scissors

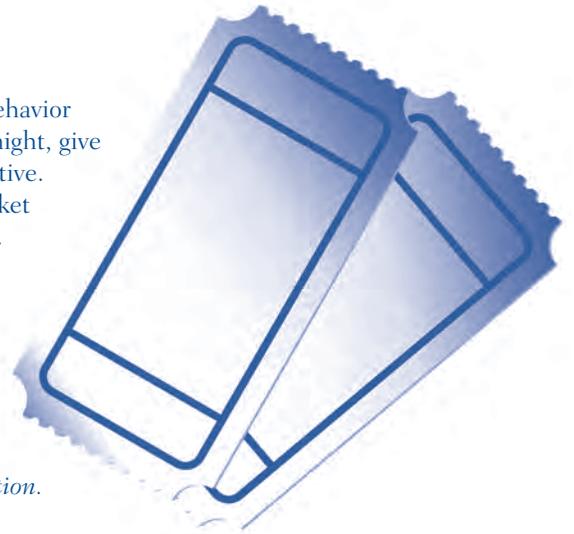
Directions

Cut the paper into ticket-sized squares. Whatever the behavior difficulty your child is having, such as staying in bed at night, give her a ticket or two that can be used to choose an alternative. For example, at bedtime, your child might spend one ticket to come back for another hug and another to get a drink.

Extensions

- Determine a reward if your child saves the tickets and accumulates a certain number.
- Let your child reward you with tickets that you can redeem for hugs and kisses.

Read more on Family Education at <http://fun.familyeducation.com/games/early-learning/35672.html#ixzz1rZYy1ApV>.



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