BRIEF INTERVENTIONS: DISCIPLINE

BI-PED PROJECT (BRIEF INTERVENTIONS: PEDIATRICS)
Emotional Health Committee Maryland Chapter American Academy of Pediatrics

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Elements of Effective Discipline: Proactive Skills

Basics

- ***Clear rules and expectations*** **(framed positively): "We would like you to clean your room daily which means toys put away, clothes in drawers, dirty clothes in hamper and bed made". "During bath time you need to take off your clothes and get in the bath tub before the timer goes off". Posting a list or pictures of expected behaviors may be additionally helpful**
- ***Consistency*****: clear consistent rules as well as appropriate consequences for infractions create a secure and stable environment**
- ***Establish routine*****s: morning, mealtime, homework and bedtime routines also help to create a secure and stable environment**
- **Giving directives: Using an *authoritative* approach may be more effective particularly with young children e.g. "please put your toys away now" vs. "honey, would you mind putting your toys away?"**
  In order for a parent to be effective, they need to convey a sense to the child that they really mean what they are saying and expect the behavior in question to change. They also need to remain firm and impart the message to the child that "this behavior is NOT going to happen anymore!!!"
- **Praise: it is best to *praise effort* rather than accomplishments or the child's attributes e.g." I am proud at how hard you worked on that project" vs "your project was the most amazing project in your class" or "you really studied hard" vs "you are so smart". Parents can also use second hand praise by telling someone else how proud they are of their child's efforts**

within earshot of the child. Praise, however, should be parceled out judiciously- it becomes less effective when overly utilized

- **Positive feedback: "*Catch the child being good*"**
    - **Switching coins in pocket: parents praise a child for engaging in a desired behavior each time it occurs over a block of time. The parent then switches a coin from one pocket to another pocket each time they recognize and give positive feedback to the child. Coins cue the parent to look for and acknowledge positive behaviors e.g. "Thank you for playing quietly when I was on the phone"**
    - **Parents can dispense stickers, or place green marks or rubber stamps on the child's hands during a block of time whenever the child exhibits a desired behavior such as sharing toys**

- **Assigning *chores and responsibilities*: children and teens should not grow up feeling *entitled* and should be assigned regular *age appropriate* tasks as part of the household (cleaning their rooms, washing dishes, taking out the garbage, walking the dog, etc.). Parents may also wish to set up an allowance that is conditional on satisfactory performance of assigned chores**
- **Give liberal doses of *affection*: physical touch (a hug), giving an unexpected gift or simply unconditionally doing something nice are effective ways for parents to show affection to their children**
- **A sense of humor can be very effective in changing behaviors (e.g. a note to the child from the garbage can "Please take me out, I really need some fresh air")**
- ***Positive time*: parents can reserve *special time* with their children doing something that everyone enjoys- *special time* should be *labeled* as such. This can be particularly effective for an older child who feels a bit displaced by a new sibling. It is best not to take away special time as a consequence for misbehavior**

- ***Mutual respect*: parents should expect to be treated respectfully and should not tolerate verbal abuse by their children or teens. In return, parents should refrain from verbally abusing their children or teens**

<u>Additional Skills and Approaches</u>

- **Timers: are useful for getting children to start a behavior. For example, the parent can set the timer for 10 minutes and ask the child to get dressed and beat the clock**
- **Charting: A simple charting system that lists 2 or 3 expected behaviors down the side and the days of the week across the top can be created. Placing stickers on the chart for younger children or scores for older children may be all that is required to get children to engage in a desired behavior. In some cases, a more elaborate behavior modification system (see Behavior Modification module) may be required enabling the child to convert stickers and points to tangible rewards**
- **Being empathetic and articulating for young children: Parents may wish to articulate feelings for young children who are not yet very verbal. "You are upset because the puzzle pieces won't go together". Recognizing and empathizing with frustration may help head off tantrums and helps to teach young children how to express their feelings verbally**

<u>Teaching a Desired Behavior</u>:

- ***Modeling*: Parents can demonstrate when they themselves engage in the desired behavior and point it out to the child**
- ***Practice*:**
  - **Parents should frame the desired behavior in a clear and positive manner. "I would like you to share your toys with your friend" vs. "Don't be selfish with your friend". Parents should then give children multiple opportunities to practice the desired behavior**

- **Desired behaviors need to be *age appropriate*. Expecting a 2 year old to get dressed by himself in the morning is not an age appropriate expectation**
- **Parents should concentrate on teaching and reinforcing only 1 or 2 behaviors at a time and not attempt to overhaul their child's entire behavior repertoire**

- ***Praise*: Positive feedback should be given when the child engages in the desired behavior**
- ***Reinforcement*: Positive consequences can be initiated when the child engages in the appropriate behavior. Negative consequences should be initiated when the child engages in behavior counter to the desired behavior**

<u>Consequences</u>: When taking a history and evaluating children with behavior problems, it is helpful to think about the A,B and C's of the behavior: <u>A</u>ntecedent – what is triggering or going on prior to the behavior?, <u>B</u>ehavior - what behavior is actually occurring? and <u>C</u>onsequences – what consequence is currently being implemented following the behavior?

<u>1,2 3 Magic Coupled with Time Out</u>

- **<u>Two warnings</u>: "I would like you to put your toys away" "That's 1" Wait several seconds and repeat: "I would you like to put your toys away" "That's 2"**
  Wait several seconds and if child still does not comply: "That's 3- take 5" (time out)
- **Severe infractions of rules such as aggressive or destructive behaviors can lead directly to a time out without giving prerequisite warnings**
- **Parents should not talk ("act don't yak") or display emotion when placing the child in time out ("NO TALKING- NO EMOTION")**
- **Time out should last about 1 minute per year of age but can be longer for more significant infractions**
- **The time out period for preschool children begins when tantrums end (e.g. a four minute time out may actually last longer if the child is**

screaming for the first twenty minutes). For toddlers, be more flexible and keep child in time out until the child starts to settle down

- **Time out can take place in a chair, on a step or in the child's room**
- **If the child's room is used, remove anything that is valuable. If the child trashes the room, do not help the child put things back in place until everyone has calmed down**
- **When in time out, the child should not have friends or siblings present. Time out should be *boring*: no books, games, TV, computers or cell phones**
- **Young children who refuse to go into time out can be taken to their room by their parents. Older children who are too big to be physically carried to their room can experience loss of privileges (TV or screen time) or fined loss of allowances ($1.00 per minute) for every minute that they resist beginning time out**
- **When time out is over, resume normal activities and do not rehash the events that led to time out until everyone has calmed down. Requesting apologies and discussions about expectations, infractions and consequences should be reviewed later during non- emotional down time**
- **Children will act like they don't care if they have to go into time out. If time out is conducted properly most children actually *do* care**
- **Warn parents that children may *escalate* their misbehaviors when time out is first initiated in order to challenge the new system. Parents should remain patient and allow several weeks of consistent use of time out to gage its success**
- **When in *public*, a car can be used for time out**
- **When siblings are fighting, time out can be given to both children unless one is the clear provocateur. Another option is to *time out* the toy they are fighting over**
- **Time out can also effectively be coupled with behavior modification techniques (see behavior modification module) to positively reinforce appropriate behaviors. For example, a child who receives a time out for hitting a sibling can also receive positive reinforcers for playing cooperatively with their sibling**

Dealing With Temper tantrums:

- **Toddlers who engage in tantrums may often be handled by simply ignoring the tantrum until they stop**
- **Proactive interventions may help forestall tantrums. Try not to take young children who are tired or hungry on errands. Toddlers who are heading towards tantrums can be redirected by using *distractions* ("let's look at this book") or by *giving choices* ("which shirt would you like to wear- the red one or the blue one?")**
- **Parents should be advised to allow their children to learn to *self soothe* and experience some frustration even if it leads to tantrums. Parents may wish to leave a child who is experiencing frustration alone (e.g playing with a puzzle) for a while and not jump in to *fix* the situation. Children can be encouraged to express their frustration in words. When the child has calmed down, they can return to the source of their frustration and try to work it out again**
- **The 1,2,3 magic approach combined with time out may be effective for preschool and school age children who engage in tantrums**
- **Another tactic is to change the nature of the interaction during tantrums by "*doing the unexpected*". Parents may actually request the child to "*scream louder*" or to continue the tantrum for an additional 10 minutes. This change in the dynamics weakens the child's hold on the parents and alters the parents' scripted response, making tantrums less tempting to the child and less anxiety provoking to parents**

Temperament: Children with difficult temperament pose special challenges to parents. The first challenge is *recognizing* the child who is "difficult" or "slow to warm up" temperamentally and then demystifying the behavior to parents.

- **Some temperamentally difficult children have difficulty with *transitions*. Such children benefit from a warning several minutes prior to a change in activities e.g. "You will need to stop what you are doing in 5 minutes because we are going to the store"**

- **Some children have low sensory thresholds for loud noises, visual stimulation and the way things taste, smell or feel. They may dislike the feel of new clothes or the textures of new foods. They may spit out food they dislike, vomit if something is foul-smelling or decompensate in a loud or overly visually stimulating location such as a shopping mall. *Recognizing* these children and *demystifying* the child's behavior to parents can be critical. Parents can be advised to be patient when temperamentally difficult children display these behaviors and not to punish children who engage in temperamentally driven behaviors**

Natural and logical consequences

- **Children who misbehave should receive appropriate consequences that reflect the nature of the infraction (e.g. not completing homework may mean the child must face the disapproval of their teacher or coming home late may mean coming in early next time)**
- **Consequences should be *realistic* and *enforceable* (e.g. grounding a teenager for 6 months is not realistic)**
- **Consequences generally involve *loss of privileges* (e.g. no TV tonight, early bedtime, docking allowances) or *restitution* by performing chores or having the child or teen pay compensation if something has been damaged. For older children, experiencing parental disappointment and loss of trust may serve as an effective natural consequence especially if the parent and child have a good relationship**
- **Consequences are appropriate for young children through early to mid-adolescents and older adolescents who are out of control**

Discipline and Teenagers:

Conflict between parents and teens typically stems from different agendas: parental concerns about safety and good decision making versus adolescent concerns about autonomy and creating distance.

Parents have several options when dealing with teenagers:

- ***Do nothing*: pick battles selectively and be prepared to let some things go such as a messy room**
- ***Consultation*: Parents can ask permission to discuss an issue with their teen but need to be prepared if their advice is not heeded**
- ***Negotiation*: "This is what you need and this is what I need- how can we get there?" (see communication module for more details on problem solving with teens)**
- ***Take charge*: Assigning consequences for infractions is appropriate for younger teens and for older teens who are out of control or non-responsive to the negotiation approach**

When dealing with *older* adolescents, an approach that is based on *relationship building* and *open communication* may be most effective particularly when dealing with issues surrounding *sex and substance use*. (see Parent Pledge below) Parents have less ability to control and assign consequences to older adolescents and need to transition to *information sharing* (providing information and seeking information) and *influence* (credibility built up through a sound relationship with their teen). (see Communication module)

PARENT PLEDGE TO THEIR TEENAGER

"I love you and care about you. I do not wish for you to drink, use drugs or have sex until you are older. However, I cannot be there to always monitor you and I have to trust that you will use your best judgment.

If I discover that you are engaging in risky dangerous behaviors, I want you to know that I will be there to help you.

If you are drunk or high, I do not want you to drive. Call me and I will come and get you. If I discover that you are driving under the influence of alcohol or drugs, you will lose your driving privileges until you have demonstrated to me that you are trustworthy to drive again.

If I discover that you are using drugs or alcohol to excess like every day or during school or in the mornings, I will work with you to get you professional help.

If I discover that you are having unprotected sex, I want you at the very least to use condoms so that you do not get pregnant or get someone else pregnant and you do not get HIV or a sexually transmitted disease. I will also help you to obtain proper medical advice so that you can make a wise choice about birth control options.

Be smart and be careful. I love you and care about you and I want you to know that I will always be there to help you to the best of my abilities"

When to Refer:

The practitioner should refer to the child and family to a mental health consultant under the following circumstances:

- **Child or parent has significant psychopathology**
- **Significant marital discord**
- **Patient or parents request a referral**
- **Poor response to primary care mental health interventions**
- **Primary care clinician is uncomfortable managing the case**

Reference:

Phelan, T. W. (2016). 1-2-3 Magic: Effective Discipline for Children 2-12 (6th ed.). Sourcebooks.