

“Help! What Works?” Methods for Dealing with Challenging Behavior

Reinforcement

- All behavior continues because it is reinforced or rewarded in some way, i.e., by a word, an action, etc.
- If you can control the reinforcement or reward, you can control the behavior.
- Reinforcement or reward for a behavior can be either positive or negative.
- If the child cannot get positive reinforcement or rewards, they will settle for negative reinforcement or rewards. A child will do whatever they need to do to get attention. It is a survival mechanism.
- A reward or reinforcement, even when it is negative, is better than no reward or reinforcement at all.
- The reinforcement or reward can be *extrinsic* - external or “outside,” or *intrinsic* - internal or “inside.”
- An internal or “inside” reinforcement or reward is within the person and eventually becomes more powerful than an external or “outside” reward.
- The most powerful reinforcement or reward is one that is given unexpectedly and without a predictable pattern.
- The often-heard phrase, “you can catch more flies with honey than you can with vinegar,” applies to people – children and adults.
- If you are using “hands on” or tangible reinforcements or rewards, keep it “cheap”.
- It is best to reinforce the desired behavior within **five (5)** seconds of it happening. If that is not possible, then reward even if it’s longer than five seconds as soon as is possible.
- **Pop Machine** is the principle of extinguishing behavior by not reinforcing the outcome sought by the child. Children, and adults, will try all the behaviors that have been successful for them in the past, to achieve their goal. If the child or adult “out lasts” you, like a pop machine that will not give you the pop for which you paid, then the behavior will cease. Remember, that the child (or adult) will come back at some point in the future to see if the “old” behavior still works. Be vigilant and mindful – **DO NOT** reinforce the inappropriate behavior by “getting caught” and “giving in” to the inappropriate behavior. If that should happen, start over and be an even better good **pop machine** the next time. Remember, as a good **pop machine**, you only have to outlast your child one minute more (than their behavior).
- It takes five (5) positive comments to balance each negative comment a child receives.
- The comments given the child are best ended with a positive statement (- + or + - +)
- “Second-hand comments” are comments that can be either positive or negative, and occur when the child hears them directly or indirectly. They are comments about the child but said to someone else, not directly to the child. They include compliments, praise, put-downs or subtle sarcasm. Thus, they can be either helpful or hurtful to the child when they hear them.
- A positive, second-hand comment, over heard by the child, is very powerful, maybe even more powerful than a direct compliment.
- What you say positively to someone else about the child, when sincere, doubles or triples the benefits to the child.