

# Transforming the Strong-Willed Child

by Tom Dozier, BCaBA  
Based on the works of Dr. Glenn I. Latham

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Dr. Glenn I. Latham, 1931-2001



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## Baby Temperaments

- At age 2-3 months
  - Easy: 40%
  - Difficult: 10%
  - Slow to warm-up: 15%
  - No category: 35%
- Behavior problems in school
  - Easy babies: 18%
  - Difficult babies: 70%

Source: Chess, S. and A. Thomas. 1987. Evolution of behavior disorders from infancy to early adult life. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.



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## Parenting Styles Most Detrimental to Difficult Kids

- Impatience
- Inconsistency
- Harsh
- Criticism
- Punishment (negative/aversive)



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## Parents teach through modeling

- Whether you like it or not, this is the case. (Sorry about that. ☺ )
- Calm behavior teaches children to be calm.
- Kind behavior teaches children to be kind.
- Polite behavior teaches children to be polite.
- Harsh and demanding behavior teaches to be non-cooperative, harsh, and demanding.
- Having fun working together teaches children to enjoy work.



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## Coercion

- Trying to force others to act or choose in a certain way.
- Trying to deny the child the personal freedom to choose.
- Coercion Encourages People To:
  - Escape
  - Avoid
  - Get Even



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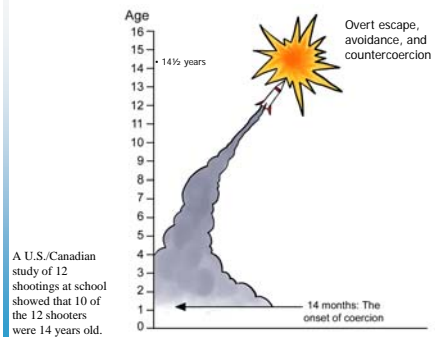
## Top 10 Coercives

- ⊗ Arguing
- ⊗ Logic
- ⊗ Threats
- ⊗ Force
- ⊗ Criticism
- ⊗ Sarcasm
- ⊗ Questioning
- ⊗ Despair (pleading, helplessness)
- ⊗ Nagging
- ⊗ Guilt Trips\*



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## The Long-Term Effects of Coercion



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## !! CAUTION !!

- “Do not suppose that short-term compliance achieved using coercive means leads to long-term gains.
- “Coercion produces only short-term compliance followed by long-term losses.”

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“Research has shown that the most effective way to reduce problem behavior in children is to strengthen desirable behavior through positive reinforcement rather than trying to weaken undesirable behavior using [punishment].”

*Dr. Sidney W. Bijou,  
The International Encyclopedia  
of Education, 1988*



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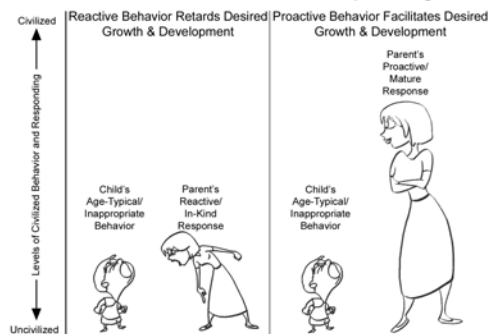
## Using Punishment – **WARNING!!!**

1. Punishment is risky
  - Decreases motivation
  - Decreases cooperation
  - Negative emotions
2. Punishment is more difficult than reinforcement
  - Requires consistency.
3. To be effective, punishment
  - Must be established in advance
  - Must be contingent on the child's behavior
  - Must be consistent
  - Must be reasonable
  - Must be enforceable



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## Proactive vs. Reactive Responding



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## Helping Children Learn Self-Control

- Coercion/Punishment: Trying to force others to act or choose in a certain way.
  - Most of our reactions to child misbehavior is coercion.
  - Coercion causes a child to escape, avoid and countercoerce.
- Structure: Limiting or eliminating behavior choices.
- Positive Reinforcement (rewards): Motivating the child to behave as expected.



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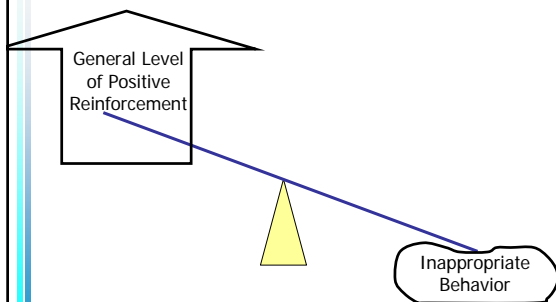
## Attention Builds Child Behavior

- You get more of the behaviors you pay the most attention to!
- Value of adult attention
  - closeness (distance to child)
  - touch
  - words
  - time and
  - emotion
- Your challenge – **STAY CALM**



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## General Level of Positive Reinforcement vs. the Incidence of Inappropriate Behavior



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## Create a Positive Environment

- “The key is for parents to establish the quality of the environment and refuse to allow the annoying, disruptive behavior of unhappy children to dictate the mood or course of their behavior.”
- Have a happy home
  - Smiling, laughter, hugs, and kisses

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8 to 1

POSITIVES to NEGATIVE

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## Love, Compassion, and Empathy

- Love
  - Always and unconditional
  - Overarching principle
  - Willing to do what is best for your child
- Compassion
  - Caring what your child wants/needs
  - Considering how your child is affected
- Empathy
  - Understanding how your child feels
  - SAY IT!
  - Respond to emotion with EMPATHY



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## Teach your children

- Teaching – Communicating information, skills, expectations etc.
  - Work with your children
  - Teach before they need it, or
  - Teach before they mess-up again.
  - Not right after they mess-up.
- Teach and model your values
- Have a family night



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## Positive Reinforcement Skill #1:

Acknowledge appropriate behavior in some positive way.



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## Appropriate Behaviors

- Compliant
- Plays nicely with others
- Reads good books
- Completes chores
- Does homework
- Sitting down at table with school books
- Looking toward you when you call child
- Answering your question
- Picking up fork (as if to eat properly)
- Eating 1 bite with fork after eating with fingers



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## Positive Reinforcement Skill #2:

Acknowledge appropriate behavior casually and briefly.



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## When praising children, parents should:

- Use no more than 8-12 words
- Talk no more than 3-5 seconds
- After 7 seconds, children quit listening.



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## Guidelines for Praise

- Praise must be truthful.
  - False praise hurts children.
- Praise the behavior, not the child
  - Thank you for helping vs. good boy
  - I like your drawing vs. you are a great artist
- Praise for effort or result
- **DO NOT PRAISE ABILITY / INTELLIGENCE**
- Include specific items when possible
- Generally keep it short and sweet
- Occasionally embellish
- Try energetic praise



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## Positive Reinforcement Skill #3:

Acknowledge appropriate behavior intermittently (but very often at first)

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## Grandma's Law

- Eat your vegetables, and then you can have pie and ice cream."
- Doing what is needed gives the child access to a preferred activity.
- Application of Grandma's Law
  - When you finish your homework, you can watch TV
  - "Can I go out and play?" "Sure, just as soon as your toys are picked up."
  - Clear off the dining table, and then we can play with your truck.
  - When you complete your chores, you earn the privileges you enjoy here.
- As adults, we think of this as motivation.

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## Use Routines and Structure

- Establish a schedule and routine for
  - Meal time
  - Nap time (or quiet time)
  - Bath time
  - Bed time
    - Go potty
    - Put on pajamas
    - Say prayers
    - Give hugs and kisses
    - Read a book
    - Lights off, stay in room
  - Daily activities (play, work, learn, etc.)
- Calmly enforce your schedule (for young child)
- Motivation is better than force, even calm force

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## For Young Children - Use Physical not Verbal Control

- Verbal control
  - Nagging, complaining, criticizing, guilt, yelling, logic (too much), etc.
- Physical control
  - Stay calm
  - Hands on shoulders or back
  - Hands under arm pits (from back)

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## When possible, answer with "Yes"?

- ⇒ Child: "Can I go out and play?"
- ⇒ Parent: "Yes, just as soon as you finish your chores."
- ⇒ Child: "I'm hungry. Can I have a cookie?"
- ⇒ Parent: "You can have a cookie after you eat supper."
- ⇒ Child: "Will you take me to the park?"
- ⇒ Parent: "I'll be glad to, just as soon as the clothes are picked up in your room."

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## Questions

- Ask child to choose to participate in an appropriate activity.
  - Would you like to help me set the table? or, Would you please help me set the table?
  - Would you like to see if Daddy is home?
  - Do you want to play with the squirt gun?
- Give your child choices.
  - Would you like to wear the blue or the green outfit?
  - Would you like macaroni & cheese or a peanut butter & jelly sandwich for lunch?
- You must be willing to accept either answer.

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## Requests

- Set the stage
  - Give a warning
  - Use good timing
  - Get the child's attention
  - Don't make requests too often (10-15 per day)
- Effective requests
  - Be pleasant
  - Use statements
    - It's time to get out of the bathtub now.
  - Make requests one at a time
    - Say something positive about your child's efforts
  - Be specific
  - Make realistic requests.

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## Effective Requests, when Compliance is a Problem

1. Make a request. Don't ask a question.
  - Please start your homework. Vs.
  - Shouldn't you get started on your homework?
2. Use "start" vs. "stop" requests
  - Please start your math assignment. Vs.
  - Stop arguing with me or stop playing that stupid game.
3. Get close (3 ft, or touch the child)
4. Make eye contact
5. Use a soft, but firm, voice.
6. Be adequately precise.
  - Please make your bed and pick up your clothes. Vs.
  - Please clean your room.
7. Wait quietly for 5 seconds.
8. Remain calm.

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## Expectations

If At All Possible, Give Expectations a Chance

```

graph LR
    A[The Parent states the expectation.] --> B[The Child repeats the expectation.]
    B --> C[The Parent introduces the possibility of an aversive consequence.]
  
```

A coercive environment in which the child behaves well only to avoid the negative consequence of behaving badly.

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## Proper Use of Expectations

```

graph LR
    A[The Parent states the expectation.] --> B[The Child repeats the expectation.]
    B --> C[The Parent waits... for an opportunity to acknowledge compliance, then does so.]
  
```

A reinforcing environment in which the child learns that by behaving well, he/she enjoys the positive consequences of behaving well.

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## Expectations Suggestion #1.

Tell your children what you expect them to do rather than what you expect them not to do.

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<u>Instead of saying</u>	<u>Say</u>
Don't slam the door.	Shut the door quietly.
Don't talk with your mouth full.	Chew with your mouth closed.
Don't eat with your fingers.	Eat with your fork and spoon.

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<b>Instead of saying</b>	<b>Say</b>
Don't hit your sister.	Play nicely with your sister, Play nice, Be nice, We keep our hands to our self, etc.
Don't use potty talk.	Use good words.

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Expectations Suggestion #2:

State your expectation clearly.

- A 3rd party should understand
- Minimize number of words
- Avoid emotions
- Avoid reason, logic and good sense.  
(when child's emotions are high)

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Expectations Suggestion #3:

Have the child re-state the expectation.

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Keep the communication moving in the right direction.

*The Expectation*

Redirect by focusing on the expectation. Do this using empathy and understanding: "I can tell this upsets you; nevertheless, what do I expect you to do each day after school?"

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Expectations Suggestion #4:

Emphasize the benefits that are **earned** by being compliant.

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Expectations Suggestion #5:

- Never tell children something they already know. Let them tell you.
  - Engage them in conversation
  - Use role-playing to teach
  - Let them be part of the solution
  - Help them self instruct

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### Expectations Suggestion #6

- Allow consequences to teach.
- "Once our expectations have been taught and understood, we must allow our children to choose for themselves, then let the consequences of those choices deliver their messages."

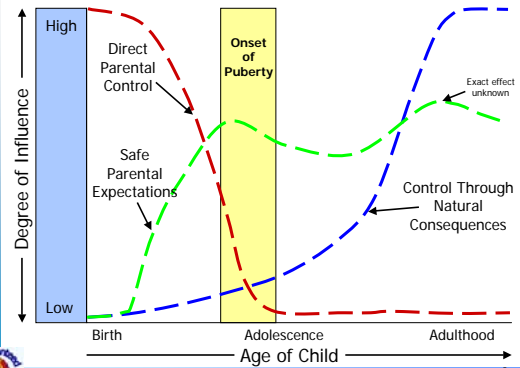
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- Note: Although children must choose, parents must enforce boundaries with young children.

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### Effect on Child Behavior



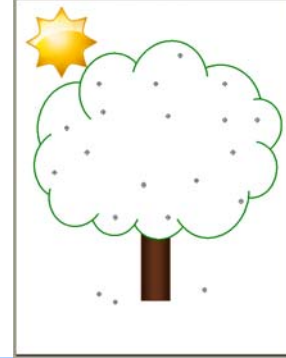
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### Powerful Consequences

- Positive vs. negative?
- Immediate vs. delayed?
- Certain vs. uncertain?
- Preferred vs. non-preferred?
- Large (more) vs. small (less)?
- Deprived of vs. satiated with?
- How much effort to earn it?

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### Try a behavior chart



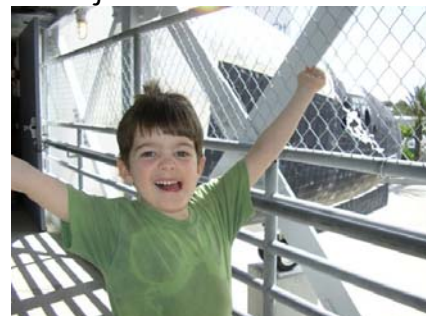
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### Make it a big deal!



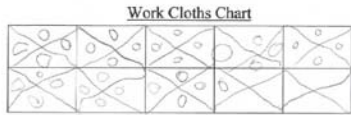
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### This is Benjamin.



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This is Benjamin motivation.



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Katie is not a morning person!



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Or is she?



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### Child Directed Attention (5-10 minutes)

1. Stay quiet and let the child choose something
  - Child is playing with a horse, pretending the horse is jumping over the fence.
2. Comment about that the child is doing
  - Oh, the horse is jumping high over the fence.
  - What color is that horse?
3. Avoid giving directions and taking over
  - Avoid – "Here, make the pig jump over the fence."
  - Don't get bossy.
4. Provide praise and touch (and smiles).

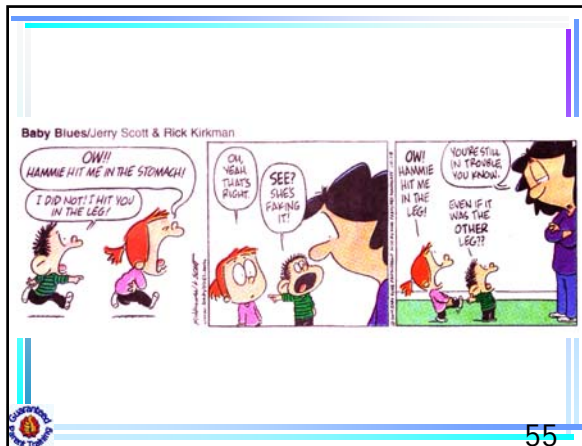
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## Things Parents Should Do When Their Children Misbehave

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Junk Behavior or In-Consequential	Consequential Behavior
Annoys, "bugs," and frustrates.	Hurts, damages, and destroys.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Whining</li> <li>•Tantrums</li> <li>•Mild forms of sibling rivalry</li> <li>•Complaining</li> <li>•Jousting</li> <li>•Stalling</li> <li>•Bad table manners</li> <li>•Sticking tongue out at you</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Hitting to hurt</li> <li>•Purposefully breaking things</li> <li>•Mild forms of sibling rivalry</li> <li>•Saying mean, hurtful things</li> <li>•Damaging to the normal development of other children</li> <li>•Exploiting others</li> <li>•Too disruptive to others</li> </ul>

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When a reinforcing consequence is no longer provided, the behavior will die away.

**This is extinction.**  
(The scientific definition.)

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### #1: Pivot – Purposeful Ignoring

1. Ignore with purpose.
2. Leave behind no messages which indicate that the kid(s) “got to you.”
3. Time the behavior that is being ignored. (Most behaviors will go away within 1 min. and 45 sec.)
4. A short time later, look for opportunities to acknowledge appropriate behavior.

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### Pivot – Purposeful Ignoring

1. If the child comes to you
  - Respond with empathy and understanding
  - Prompt them to leave
2. Move on to other activities
3. Acknowledge appropriate behavior when it occurs

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### #2: “Pivot” to Other Behavior

1. Turn attention to the appropriate behavior of other children.
2. Only give attention to the appropriate behavior of the child; acknowledge only appropriate behavior worth reinforcing.
  - Empathy and understanding may be used for child’s feeling

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### #3: Stop, Redirect, Reinforce

1. Use this skill on consequential behaviors
2. Use this skill when you feel you MUST do something

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## Stop, Redirect, Reinforce


1. With young children, simply turn them to another activity
2. Reinforce the appropriate behavior



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## Simple Stop, Redirect, Reinforce

1. STAY CALM!!!
2. Stop the behavior
3. Redirect
  1. Ask child to state how he should behave
  2. Or, tell the child what to do
4. Empathy and understanding
5. Reinforce appropriate behavior
6. Keep it short and sweet!
7. Remember, STAY CALM!!!




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## When Emotions Are High:

1. Never tell a child something he/she already knows.
2. Never ask or answer questions.

**Rather:**

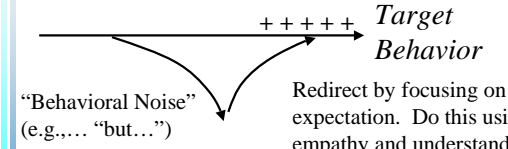
1. Use empathy and understanding.
2. Focus on expectations.



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## Keep the communication moving in the right direction.



*Target Behavior*

“Behavioral Noise”  
(e.g.,... “but...”)

Redirect by focusing on the expectation. Do this using empathy and understanding: “I can tell you are very upset; but what do I expect of YOU, even when you’re upset?”




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“High levels of self-instruction correspond with high levels of correct responding... [and] produce desired behavior change.”


\*Toward a Functional Analysis of Private Verbal Self-Regulation\*  
Ian Taylor and Mark O'Reilly, Journal of Applied Behavior Analysis  
Spring, 1997, Vol. 30, No. 1, pp.43-58



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## Ask, Don't Tell

1. STAY CALM!!!
2. Have the child tell you what you expect them to do (or tell them if they do not know).
3. Respond to the child's protests with empathy and understanding, then return to the expectation.
  - “What do I expect you to do right now?”
  - “What do I expect you to do when...”
4. If the child protests a 4<sup>th</sup> time, end the conversation (you just move on).
5. When the child repeats the expectation, be positive.
  - “Thanks, I am glad you understand that I expect you to get your pajamas on now.”



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## The Way Things Are

1. State how the child feels (empathy)
  - You had a lot of fun playing, and you would like to play some more.
2. Statement – the way things are! (or question)
  - Right now we need to go home and eat lunch
3. Empathy
  - I know you are not hungry yet.
4. Statement or question
  - Right now you need to put your shoes on



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## If Rewards Don't Work, Establish a Punishment

- Establish a punishment **in advance**.
  - Should you choose to hit your sister, there will be a cost. You will deny yourself the privilege of (riding your bicycle) for 2 days.
- Punishment should be as short as possible.
  - No TV/computer/video for 1 day
  - vs. missing favorite TV show for one month
- Punishment should be based on the things you control.
- Avoid using words, "I'll take away" or "I won't let you"
- Let the consequence do the nagging for you.



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## Time-Out (from positive reinforcement)

- Decide what earns a time-out
- Choose a place for time-out
  - Appropriately secure (based on child)
  - During time-out, there must be no communication with child
- Teach what "earns" a time-out
- Role-play time-out
- Time-out for 3 minutes.
  - If child is calm after 3 minutes, child can come out
  - If child is not calm, extend time-out for 3 minutes
- One warning is OK at first.



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## After a Surprise or First Time Problem

1. STAY CALM!!!
2. Stay positive (don't grumble or complain)
3. Ask child to state how he should behave (What did you expect him to do?)
4. Respond to complaints with empathy
5. Appreciate the child's correct reply
6. Keep it short and sweet!
7. Remember, STAY CALM, Stay Firm!!!
8. No threats or punishment!
9. Allow child to make amends (restitution)
10. For repeating problems, MAKE A PLAN!



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Appropriate Behaviors	Junk Behaviors	Consequential Behaviors



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## Be Prepared

Anticipated Behavior	Noncoercive Response



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Behavior and Rewards	
Expected Behavior	Earned Reward
Get up to alarm clock, get dressed for school, and come to kitchen for breakfast by 7:30am	Special snack in lunch (or) Game with mom after school
Staying in control and talking politely to family members. Politely means using inside voice, good words, and polite language.	Watch TV for 30 minutes (or mystery motivator)
All children put shoes on and get into car in 5 minutes or less.	Piece of candy.

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### Behavior Science

- Behavior results from the person's experiences (meaning behavior is learned).
- What causes behavior
  - Feelings?
  - Consequences?
- Behaviors that repeat, serve a purpose. The child either
  - gets something or
  - avoids / delays something

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### Positive vs. Negative Consequences

Negative Consequences (child is avoiding something)	Positive Consequences/Rewards (child is getting something he wants)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reduce child's ability and desire to behave</li> <li>• Reduce parent's positive influence</li> <li>• Produce only enough behavior to avoid the consequence.</li> </ul> <p>The behavior can take on the feelings of the consequence</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increase child's ability and desire to behave</li> <li>• Increase parent's positive influence</li> <li>• Produce behavior to earn the consequence, plus extra, discretionary effort to earn more positive consequences.</li> <li>• The behavior takes on the feelings of the consequence.</li> <li>• Behavior will generalize to other behaviors. The child will become creative looking for good things to do, even in totally unrelated areas.</li> </ul>

Everyone is happier with positive consequences!

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### The Golden Rule of Parenting

"The most effective way to reduce problem behavior in children is to strengthen desirable behavior through positive reinforcement."

*Dr. Sidney W. Bijou,  
The International Encyclopedia  
of Education, 1988*

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Thank you.

If you liked what you have heard,  
there is a 16 hour parenting skills course,

"Guaranteed Parenting Tools for  
Positive Behavior Change"

For help call or email Tom Dozier.  
925-371-1576      tom@guaranteedpt.com

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