

*Kern County Consortium SELPA*

*Improving Your Child's Behavior*

# Strategies for Parents and Caregivers



Office of Larry E. Reider  
Kern County Superintendent of Schools  
1300 17th Street – CITY CENTRE  
Bakersfield, CA 93301-4533  
Advocates for Children

# Introduction

One of life's great disappointments is that children do not come in a box, with an instruction manual. From the moment of their birth, children alternately confound, challenge, and charm the adults in their lives. As adults, we spend most of our time questioning whether or not we are doing "the right thing" or making the right decisions in response to the behavior of the children we nurture at home and at school.

This presentation is intended to acquaint you with the basic principles of behavior:

- Environmental influences on behavior
- The importance of modeling
- The importance of consistency
- The power of unconditional positive regard
- How to "decode" the functions or purposes of behavior
- How to tailor your response to fit the function
- Reward versus punishment

Behavior is a big topic. It would be impossible to cover every aspect of behavioral theory and practice in one brief session. You are encouraged to read these materials carefully, and to read the recommended books on the last page of this manual. Parent and teacher groups who would like to receive additional information or training are welcome to call the SELPA office to arrange training or materials specific to your needs.

## Environmental Checklist for Parents

Physical Environment	Interpersonal Environment	Instructional Environment
The house is free of clutter.	You refrain from humiliating and insulting your children.	You have well-established schedules and routines.
The house is clean.	You refrain from calling your children names, and you do not tolerate name-calling or bullying.	You set aside a time for study and homework every day, and if your children don't bring work home, you supply educationally relevant work for them to do.
Frequently used items are accessible and stored in the same place every day.	You refrain from excessive physical punishments.	You either read to your children every day, or you designate a reading hour—say, the hour before lights out. During this hour <u>everyone</u> reads, including you!
Clothes and toys are put away, not scattered on the floor.	You refrain from playing out your adult dramas in front of your children.	You take your children to the library and get them library cards.
You try to limit the amount of noise by playing televisions or stereos at soft volumes.	You do not use foul language in front of your children.	You limit television watching, and carefully monitor the programs watched.
You designate certain times as television-free: during meals, for instance, and at night during the hour preceding lights out.	You have clear rules for behavior. There are consequences for breaking the rules, and rewards for compliance.	You limit internet access, computer games, and video games.
You provide a variety of healthy foods and snacks.	You only make promises that you and—and do—keep.	You schedule family outings of an educational nature.
You involve your children in meal planning and meal preparation.	You limit yelling and nagging, since you know that yelling and nagging drive a wedge between you and your children.	You have books in your house, including dictionaries and other reference materials.
	You eat meals as a family, and you turn the television off during meals.	You limit access to videos and movies that have themes of violence or that celebrate inappropriate social behaviors.
	You find time every day to talk to your children about <u>their</u> day.	You do not indulge your adult habits in front of your children (sex, cigarettes, alcohol, or controlled substances).
	You let your children know—in words and deeds—that you love them and put them first.	You have clear rules for behavior and you model the behavior you expect (walk your talk!)
	You are in charge of your house, but you allow your kids some freedom of choice.	Your children have regular chores to teach them responsibility.

## **The 11 Commandments of Nanny 911**

1. Be consistent.
2. Actions have consequences.
3. Say what you mean and mean it.
4. Parents work together as a team.
5. Don't make promises you can't keep.
6. Listen to your children.
7. Establish a routine.
8. Respect is a two-way street.
9. Positive reinforcement works much better than negative reinforcement.
10. Manners are universal.
11. Define your role as parent.

## **The Six “Rewards” of Misbehavior**

Most contemporary behavioral theories have as their cornerstone the notion that all behavior is learned. People learn to behave in particular ways, because those behaviors enable them to succeed in satisfying a specific need. The following chart describes six distinct functions, or “rewards” of misbehavior.

Watch and listen for particular messages in the behavior you observe in order to determine the behavior’s function:

<i><b>Function</b></i>	<i><b>Message</b></i>
<u><b>Acquisition:</b></u> <i>Wanting to get or have something</i>	“I’m hungry.” “I want to listen to music.” “I want the football.” “I want to play a computer game.” “I want to wear the red sweater.” “I want money to buy a two-door Lexus sports coupe.”
<u><b>Avoidance:</b></u> <i>Wanting to remove or get away from something</i>	“Get away from me.” “I don’t like this activity.” “This task is boring/frustrating/difficult.” “Stop nagging me.” “I’m feeling frightened/overwhelmed.” “I feel sick.”
<u><b>Attention/Social Interaction:</b></u> <i>Wanting to interact and/or be noticed</i>	“Look at me!” “Come over here.” “I want you to help me.” “I want the other kids to notice me.” “I want to be included.”
<u><b>Stimulation:</b></u> <i>Wanting to do something that feels good.</i>	“I enjoy this.” “This feels good.” “This is soothing.”
<u><b>Power:</b></u> <i>Wanting to control a person or situation</i>	“You don’t know anything.” “I don’t have to do what you say.” “Make me.”
<u><b>Protest/Expression of Anger:</b></u> <i>Venting or retaliating when things don’t go your way</i>	“You’ll be sorry.” “I know where you live.” “That’s your new Lexus, isn’t it?”

## **Matching Response to Function**

### ***Acquisition***

- Redirect or give verbal cues.
- Teach negotiation skills.
- Teach collaboration and sharing.
- *Acknowledge and reward appropriate replacement behavior.*<sup>\*</sup>

### ***Avoidance***

- Acknowledge the problem.
- Be sympathetic and supportive. Recognize the underlying message.
- Restructure the schedule or activity to produce less fear/anxiety.
- Do the task or activity together with your child instead of telling them to go it alone.

### ***Attention***

- Give immediate attention for appropriate behavior.
- Minimize attention for inappropriate behavior (remove the “reward”—give time out).
- Clarify the expected behavior.
- Legitimize the behavior.
- Proximity praise/compliance praise.
- Teach appropriate attention seeking and initiation skills.
- Work on peer relationships.
- Focus on a talent/specific skill.
- *Look for special helper jobs.*

### ***Stimulation***

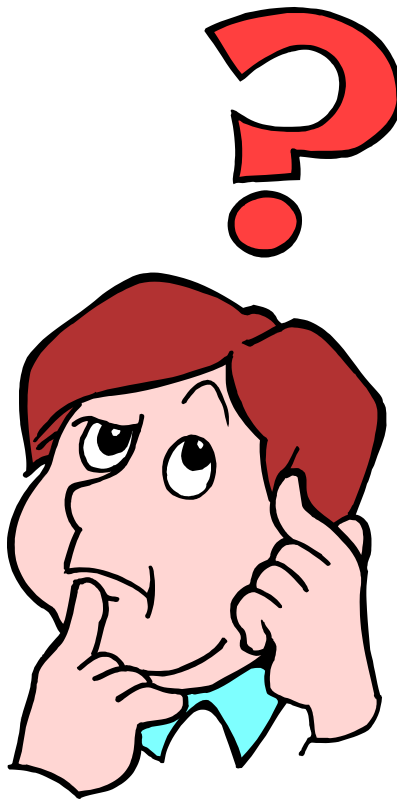
- Teach alternate leisure/play skills.
- Increase opportunity for physical movement and activity.
- Use physical prompts and cues.
- Shape a replacement behavior.

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<sup>\*</sup> Acknowledging and rewarding appropriate behavior should be an automatic component of any behavior change program, regardless of behavioral function.

### ***Power & Protest***

- Focus on behavior, not on child.
- Allow child to have the last word.
- Avoid directives.
- Avoid public face-offs.
- Give space to avoid escalating the behavior.
- Acknowledge the child's power.
- Agree with the child.
- Remove the audience.
- **Increase choices and self-determination.**
- Allow time for child to process alternatives.
- Teach techniques for appropriate self-assertion.
- Teach flexibility and problem solving.
- Teach anger management, including self-initiated time out.
- Allow logical consequences when appropriate.



**Reactive Techniques** are the strategies used to respond to reoccurrences of the problem behavior.

**A sampling of reactive techniques:**

- Redirect the child to an appropriate activity.
- Acknowledge the message of the behavior (“I can tell you are feeling really excited/angry/frustrated/sad right now.”).
- Prompt the child to use an already learned alternative skill.
- Provide respectful corrective feedback.
- Withdraw attention
- Implement age-appropriate negative consequences (loss of privileges, response-cost [loss of tokens], time out, restitution of the environment).
- Crisis interventions (provide a calming activity, remove the audience, give space, allow a supervised escape).

## **Use Punishment Sparingly**

**Ill effects include:**

- Decrease in positive self-concept.
- Decrease in positive attitudes about school, schoolwork, and/or home life.
- Increase in withdrawal, tardiness, and truancy.
- Increase in aggression and face saving behavior.
- Teaches kids to handle conflict aggressively.
- Damages the adult-child relationship: the punisher comes to be associated with the punishment, so that the child withdraws from the punisher.
- Causes habituation—the punisher must find a bigger and bigger “stick”, which only increases ill effects.



## **Avoid Aversive Strategies!**

**Why?**

- **Kids develop an aversion to adults who use aversives.**
- **Studies indicate that positive strategies are more effective.**
- **Aversives can cause physical and emotional trauma.**

## **Giving Choices Instead of Orders**

Children who are oppositional and defiant rarely respond well to orders. To this type of child, an order is merely an opportunity to do what she/he does best: oppose, refuse, and defy.

Choices are always better than ultimatums, even for children who follow directives without excessive resistance. Choices help children build crucial decision-making skills and give them the power of self-determination. Since power-seeking students tend to seek power inappropriately, you have the opportunity to help them make the connection between the choices they make and the natural consequences of those choices. Although it can be agonizing for adults to step back and allow children to make less-than-perfect decisions, bear in mind that children learn best by experiencing the natural consequences of their decisions. It's okay to let children make mistakes! Mistakes are educational!

## **Keys to Choice Making**

1. Limit the field of possible choices to 2 or 3.
2. Never offer a choice you can't live with.
3. "My way or the highway" is NOT a real choice.
4. When giving choices, make sure to discuss the potential outcomes of each choice. This is a good opportunity to practice decision-making skills (Appendix 2).
5. Don't interfere or tamper with the outcome of a particular choice, as long as the outcome doesn't put the child in physical danger. Interfering with the outcome teaches your children that they don't really have to take responsibility for their decisions. It sends the wrong message. Let your children experience the consequences of their decisions. Be empathic, but refrain from rescuing, and by all means, follow through with consequences!

## **Giving Choices to Persistently Disruptive Children**

When children are disruptive, first offer reasonable choices. If the child continues to disrupt, it is then appropriate to give a time out choice. When offering a time out choice, offer the preferred choice first, followed by the time out choice.

<b>Misbehavior</b>	<b>Desired Behavior</b>	<b>Time Out Choice</b>	<b>“You Decide”</b>
Child repeatedly leans over and pokes or hits siblings while watching television, making rude remarks at the same time.	“You may keep your hands to yourself and stop making comments”	“or you can take a time out in your bedroom.”	“It’s your choice.”
Child makes a rude remark about you while you are giving directions.	“You may sit quietly and listen to what I’m saying”	“or you may go to the time out corner.”	“The decision is yours.”

### **Okay, Now You Try:**

<b>Misbehavior</b>	<b>Desired Behavior</b>	<b>Time Out Choice</b>	<b>“You Decide”</b>
Child is taunting his little sister, who is becoming upset.			
Child is making faces and mocking you when you tell her that it’s time to put away her toys.			
Child wants to have pizza for dinner and will not stop whining about it, even though you have already said no.			

## Token Economies

A token economy is simple system of offering particular rewards for appropriate behavior. As adults, we have lots of experience with token economies: they are the foundation of our grown up lives. Work is a token economy: if you perform a particular set of behaviors, you are given a paycheck. The paycheck translates into tokens (dollars) that you can trade for high-interest items like food, clothing, shelter, transportation, and all sorts of entertaining toys. Token economies for children work in the same way. We establish a particular set of behaviors for which the child can earn tokens. The behaviors should be clearly understood by the child, which means you have to make sure that the child is not only willing, but able to perform the behavior. You establish the expected behavior and award it a point/token value every time it occurs. A child who earns tokens can then trade them in on an hourly/daily/weekly basis for high-interest items. Simple, right? Right! However, in order for a token economy to succeed, remember these few simple and important rules:

- The behaviors you reward should be positive behaviors that replace the inappropriate behavior you are trying to extinguish.
- You must reward the replacement behavior consistently, every time it happens.
- The inappropriate behavior must have a corresponding cost. If the child earns tokens for the appropriate behavior, he must lose tokens for the inappropriate behavior. You must also be consistent in collecting these behavior “fines”.
- Try not to levy a behavior fine when the child is in an elevated state of high emotion: it may trigger continued misbehavior. Levy the fine later, when the child has calmed down and is able to communicate calmly.
- **The child must be able to redeem the tokens for items that are high-interest. This means that you have to find out what reinforcers will motivate the child.**
- It is important to have short-term as well as long-term reinforcers that the child can purchase with the tokens. Daily reinforcers must be offered in addition to longer-term, more “expensive” reinforcers.
- Try not to solve every behavior at once. Work on a few behaviors at a time. Make sure that you are modeling the behavior that you expect: in other words, walk your talk!
- Charting the behavior will give children a visual way to track their behavioral progress. Charts can be maintained with stickers, stamps, smiley faces, etc. (See Appendix 3)

Sometimes you will have to shape a desired behavior: that is, you have to move toward the behavior in small steps instead of great leaps. Your child's room may look like a disaster area. Work on rewarding him for one piece of clean up at a time, gradually building toward the ultimate goal of a tidy room.

After the behavior has generalized (it has been demonstrated over an extended period and seems to have taken “root”), you will need to slowly start fading the reward. Don't fade too soon or too quickly, or the old inappropriate behavior might return. This would be the time to find a new target behavior to work on. For instance, it seems as though your daughter is finally able to make her bed without having a meltdown, but the rest of the room still looks like the town dump. This would be the time to congratulate her on conquering her bed-making demons, and suggest that the two of you work on a new challenge—for instance, hanging up clothes instead of throwing them on the floor. Establish the new behavior, and establish the rewards and response costs. Make sure that she understands how to perform the new behavior and what your expectations are, and you're all set.

Remember: one step at a time!



## Appendix 1: Advance Organizers 1 Child

TIME	ACTIVITY	M	T	W	TH	F	SAT	SUN

PUT A CHECK MARK, PICTURE, OR STICKER IN THE BOX WHEN YOU HAVE FINISHED EACH ACTIVITY. AT THE END OF THE DAY, WHEN YOU HAVE FINISHED ALL YOUR ACTIVITIES, TURN IN YOUR SHEET FOR A REWARD.

AT THE END OF THE WEEK, IF YOU HAVE FINISHED ALL OF YOUR ACTIVITIES EVERY DAY, TURN IN YOUR SHEET FOR A BIGGER REWARD!

## Appendix 2: Behavior Progress Chart: Daily

Day: \_\_\_\_\_

Who? \_\_\_\_\_

What? (Specify the desired behavior): \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

☺ = GREAT JOB!

☹ = TRY AGAIN!

TIME	PERFORMANCE	
	GREAT JOB!	TRY AGAIN!
8:00 – 9:00 AM		
9:00 – 10:00 AM		
10:00 – 11:00 AM		
11:00 - NOON		
NOON – 1:00 PM		
1:00 PM – 2:00 PM		
2:00 PM – 3:00 PM		
3:00 PM – 4:00 PM		
4:00 PM – 5:00 PM		
5:00 PM – 6:00 PM		
6:00 PM – 7:00 PM		
7:00 PM – 8:00 PM		
8:00 PM – 9:00 PM		
9:00 PM – 10:00 PM		
Daily Totals:	Positive Points:	Behavior Fines:

\_\_\_\_\_ – \_\_\_\_\_ = \_\_\_\_\_  
 Positive Points – Behavior Fines = Total Daily Tokens

## Appendix 3: Weekly Behavior Chart

Week of: \_\_\_\_\_

Who? \_\_\_\_\_

What? (Specify the desired behavior)\_\_\_\_\_

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	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
20							
19							
18							
17							
16							
15							
14							
13							
12							
11							
10							
9							
8							
7							
6							
5							
4							
3							
2							
1							

This chart plots frequency of desired behavior, per day. Put a sticker or symbol in the box corresponding to the number of times during the day that the desired behavior was demonstrated. Connect the symbols to get a frequency line graph! If the reinforcers are effective, the line should go up!

## Good Books

Children with Challenging Behavior in Childcare: Resources for Reflective Thinking by Linda Brault. Child Care Planning Council (publication set for fall of 2003).

Complete Early Childhood Behavior Management Guide: by Kathleen Pullan Watkins and Lucius Durant. Center for Applied Research in Education. ISBN 0-8762-8261-3.

Do-Watch-Listen-Say: Social and Communication Intervention for Children with Autism by Kathleen Ann Quill. Brookes Publishing. ISBN 1-55766-453-6.

Navigating the Social World: A Curriculum for Individuals with Asperger's Syndrome, High Functioning Autism, and Related Disorders by Jeanette McAfee, M.D. Future Horizons, Inc. ISBN 1-885477-82-1

Nanny 911. Deborah Carroll and Stella Reid

The New Social Story Book by Carol Gray. Future Horizons, Inc. ISBN 1-885477-66-X

Practical Ideas for Addressing Challenging Behaviors: Division for Early Childhood Monograph Series from Young Exceptional Children. Sopris West, 1999.

Solving Behavior Problems in Autism by Linda Hodgdon, M.Ed. Quirk Roberts Publishing. ISBN 0-9616786-2-3

Taking Charge—A Parent and Teacher Guide to Loving Discipline: by JoAnne Nordling. R&E Publishers, 1992. ISBN 0-88247-906-7.

The Tough Kid Tool Box: by William R. Jensen, Ph.D, Ginger Rhode, Ph.D., and H. Kenton Reavis, Ph.D. Sopris West, 1994. ISBN 1-57035-000-0