

Counselling Connection:

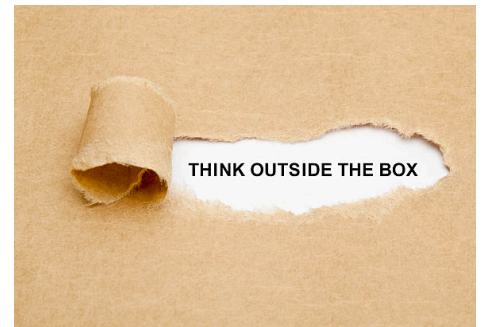
Positive Discipline Strategies

For more information on Positive Discipline techniques, contact Paula Knox, School Counsellor.

ARE THE CHILDREN IN YOUR CARE NOT RESPONDING TO YOUR DISCIPLINE STRATEGIES?

It is common for caregivers to struggle with effective ways to guide children and adolescents. Adults might feel that they are not respected, that children in their care do not listen to them, and the consequences they give do not work. Consequences can help to teach basic lessons about right and wrong and provide incentive for positive behavior. For some children, consequences are effective! However, many young people require more from us. They need to be *taught* the skills that will allow them to become confident in handling life's behavioral, emotional and social challenges. Most young people *do* know what is expected of them and want to do well. When demands are higher than a child's capacity, this is when challenging behaviors arise (Greene, 2014). Different strategies can be used for different children. Try to refrain from a "one size fits all" approach!

Consequences that punish might not work because they don't teach thinking skills or problem solving strategies.



WOULD YOU USE ANY OF THESE WORDS DESCRIBE THE CHILD(REN) IN YOUR CARE?

- Annoying
- Rude
- Disrespectful
- Lazy/Unmotivated
- Aggressive
- Wild
- Dramatic
- Dishonest
- Obnoxious
- Impulsive
- Verbal
- Abusive
- Frustrating
- Manipulative
- Provocative
- Exhausting
- Attention Seeking
- Self-Absorbed
- Hostile
- Out of control



Is The Consequence:

- **Respectful? (Does not hurt physically or mentally)**
- **Related to Behavior?**
- **Reasonable in duration? (Age/Developmental Level)**
- **Revealed in Advance?**
- **Repeated Back? (Ensure child knows ahead of time)**

Amy McCready (2011)

WHAT COULD THE CHALLENGING BEHAVIOR BE TELLING US?

Diminishing troubling behaviors requires us to learn to decode messages: (Appelstein, 1998; Greene, 2014).

- I need to be noticed
- This is too hard
- I'm not good enough
- I hate myself
- I am jealous
- I'm lonely
- I don't trust you
- I'm hurting
- I'm uncomfortable
- No one notices me
- I'm hungry
- I don't know how to act
- I'm tired
- I'm so mad inside
- I feel anxious or unsafe
- I am insecure
- I can't focus
- I have no consistent structure
- I'm shy
- It's hard to change what I'm doing
- I don't feel empathy
- I'm overwhelmed
- I don't understand

The messages beneath the challenging behavior might suggest there are skills that need to be taught and developed. Addressing these lacking skills can result in long term decreased challenging behavior. Perhaps the child has genuine difficulty with:

- Making transitions and adapting to change
 - Adapting to change in routine
 - Regulating emotions
 - Responding to social cues
 - Observing how he/she is perceived by others
 - Dealing with uncertainty
 - Considering outcomes
 - Communicating emotions
 - Seeking attention in appropriate ways
 - Considering alternate perspectives
 - Expressing concerns
 - Use of sensory and motor skills
 - Knowing how behavior will affect others
 - Understanding expectations
 - Managing irritability and anxiety
- (Greene, 2014)

Implementing Positive Discipline Techniques. What You Can Do....

- Show Empathy/Validate emotions and try to understand child's perspective ("I can see that you are feeling very angry and overwhelmed...")
- Ask questions about challenging behaviors. Can you identify the challenges that are driving the behavior? "I've noticed that you are calling your brother rude names, what's going on?"
- Gain information on *why* the challenging behavior is there so that you can problem solve ("So, you swore at your brother because you wanted to play the video game. Is that correct?")
- Refrain from attaching negative labels to the child. Instead, label the behavior as negative. (Swearing is hurtful to your brother, and to me.)
- Be firm and respectful ("You were so mad, you felt you needed to swear at your brother, but name calling is never acceptable in our house.")
- Talk collaboratively about alternatives. The goal is to teach the child skills. Ask the child to help to come up with strategies to use when he/she is mad. This will create a sense of empowerment and ownership ("You really wanted a turn on the video game, however swearing at your brother only creates more problems. Do you have some ideas about how you and your brother could share the video game?")
- Offer choices ("Would you like to apologize to your brother and tell him what set you off, or write him a letter?")
- Model personal experience and create a learning opportunity for child ("I get so mad sometimes that I feel like striking someone. It helps me to do 20 pushups alone in a room. I feel much more calm after.")
- Set clear and consistent boundaries and consequences that are related to behavior ("It is not okay to hit others in our family. Together we will come up with a solution to share the video game. Until then, no one will be playing.")
- Be Patient. Adjusting perspectives on discipline is a process that will take time. Remember that the goal is to empower the child to gain skills that will result in positive behaviors. The goal is not to hurt or punish.
- Reach out for support if needed. You are not alone!

References

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- Bhandarkar, S. (n.d.). *Positive discipline 101: how to discipline a child in a way that actually works*. Retrieved from <https://afineparent.com/be-positive/positive-discipline.html>
- Greene, R. (2014). *Lost at school*. New York, NY: Scribner
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