

Things All Parents Need to Know About Supporting Positive Behavior

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- Kiddos need to be taught appropriate, expected behavior! We tend to excuse or ignore behaviors, both good and bad, depending upon how we have “pigeon-holed” particular kiddos – we should not excuse or ignore, but correct and encourage - we need to teach using examples of what to do and what not to do and let kiddos role play!
- Kiddos thrive on positive attention and encouragement! All of us need someone to provide us with daily encouragement, like washing and brushing our teeth! Persistent positive feedback is essential! The minimum ratio of positive to corrective feedback and attention we should strive for with our kiddos is 4 : 1!
- It is not enough to stop misbehavior. Stopping bad behavior is never sufficient to change bad behavior – we must also teach appropriate, *functionally equivalent* replacement behavior; consequences should interrupt bad behavior, not necessarily punish it; try to remove the kiddo from the situation and remind him/her of your positive behavior expectations when correcting behavior!
- Try to always plan ahead in order to avoid waiting – kiddos generally do not handle waiting very well!
- Kiddos are quick to get emotional. Emotional responses and reactions from the parent or other adult reinforce kiddos’ tendency to react or respond to situations emotionally rather than rationally – pull kiddos from their *emotional mind* to their *logical/rational* mind by physically moving them away from the area of conflict and asking them rational questions!
- Kiddos believe your messages about them whether positive or negative – so always characterize them in positive, not negative, ways. Kiddos believe what you tell them – try not to label them!
- Be consistent! Inconsistency creates and reinforces misbehavior. Kiddos are always watching what we do in response to their behavior and that of others. So don’t send mixed messages!
- Yes, it’s true, kiddos will tell you lies! - generally because we teach them, or set them up, to do so! Don’t ask questions that might encourage them to lie to avoid punishment – rather, remind them of your positive behavioral expectations and give them your best description of what they have done that is different from the expectations!
- Small successes can be leveraged into major changes in behavior! It’s easy to only see the bad behavior in kiddos who exhibit very large amounts of inappropriate behavior; look for small successes and affirm and reinforce them – remember these important *phrases of wisdom*:
 - “I noticed you were being respectful just now (helpful, safe, kind, etc).”
 - “That tells me you’re good at being respectful (helpful, safe, kind, etc).”
 - “I really like it when you’re respectful (helpful, safe, kind, etc).”
- Kiddos will mimic behavior of others! Is there anything you are doing that you would not want your kiddos to do? If so, change it! What you do speaks so loudly, they can hardly hear what you’re saying!

- Kiddos act out for a reason – so empathize with them! Try to reflect what you perceive to be the kiddo’s underlying need for acting out: *“I can see you’re mad (or tired or frustrated or hungry) right now.”* Also try to clarify their desire to act appropriately, or their underlying positive intentions: *“I know you didn’t really want to hurt anyone, but sometimes that happens when we’re mad and we don’t stop to think of other solutions.”*
- We must clearly define, enforce and reinforce our rules and expectations. Kiddos are like horses – but in a good way! When put in a corral, they run the perimeter. When given the opportunity, they will test the boundaries and try to escape if possible. Kiddos prefer boundaries! We need to make sure they know the boundaries!
- Commands usually do NOT work! When asked, requested or invited to do something with a smile, kiddos are more likely to comply and less likely to defy; and they also will learn not to be demanding (but encouraging toward others) when we ask them more than command them! ALWAYS avoid power struggles – use close proximity and calmness, offer choices, avoid embarrassment, shaming and sarcasm, and remain calm and controlled!
- Kiddos learn through repetition! You need to practice and repeat and practice some more - good practice leads to good behavior! *Bad practice* does not make perfect!
- Kiddos are all different! Sometimes you have to try a few different strategies before you find the one that works for that kiddo in that situation - it always helps to get ideas from teachers, friends, colleagues, etc. And just because something does not work the first time does not mean it will not work at all; the key is to be open to different strategies and to NOT keep using the same strategy when it’s not working!
- Our kiddos need us to be more stubborn than they are! Learn to use the broken record strategy and learn to enforce your positive behavior rules and expectations ALL the time, EVERY time!
- Don’t be hard on yourself! We all make mistakes! You need support and encouragement, as a parent, as much as your kiddos do! Don’t be afraid to apologize to your kiddos when you make mistakes! Your apologies will teach them the importance of humility, taking responsibility, accountability, and making amends!

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