Positive Parenting During Shelter in Place

Parenting is hard, and parenting during a pandemic is even harder. During a crisis like this, positive parenting strategies can help increase desired behaviors, reduce conflict, and build your child’s capacity to cope in times of uncertainty.

Keys to Success

- **Model how to cope and how to behave:** as a parent, you function as a teacher for your child
- **Put your own oxygen mask on first:** parents must care for themselves in order to care for others. Make time for self-care.
- **Lend kids your calm and avoid joining the chaos:** parents must be the lighthouse in the storm
- **Strive for a balance between expressing warmth (incl., praise, love, enjoyment, humor) and consistent and predictable limit setting**
- **Remember, we are all doing the best we can, and tomorrow is always an opportunity to try again**

The Power of Attention

**Labeled Praise**

- **What**
  
  Provide specific, immediate, positive attention to behaviors you want to increase and/or maintain

- **How**
  
  “Thank you (praise) for watching your sister while I worked (labeled behavior)”
  
  “Great job (praise) for putting your dish in the sink (labeled behavior)”
  
  “Thank you (praise) for using a calm voice and telling me how you feel (labeled behavior)”

- **Why**
  
  Teaches kids what behaviors are appropriate and what you want to see, helps shift your focus onto the desired (“good” behavior) and builds your child’s confidence. The more you notice your child’s efforts, it feels good and they are motivated to do more.

**Selective Attention**

- **What**
  
  Attend to and model behaviors you want to increase (e.g., using words to express needs, being polite, sharing, cooperating, listening right away)
  
  Do not attend to and do not model behaviors you want to decrease (e.g., yelling/screaming, baby talk, sassing/swearing, uncooperative)

- **How**
  
  • Use your labeled praise, eye contact, hugs/affection, high five, sticker/token, rewards to reinforce behaviors you want to increase
  
  • **Actively Ignore:** be silent, redirect to something different, look/turn away, “pretend” to engage in another activity (e.g., read), walk away, do not engage with inappropriate behavior/behavior you want to decrease
  
  • **When/then statement:** “When you use your indoor voice (or appropriate language), then I can respond to your question.” or “When you are playing gently then I can come back and play with you.”
  
  • Never ignore danger behaviors
  
  • You are still supervising your child, just avoiding giving attention to the undesired behavior

- **Why**
  
  Teaches kids their current action is/is not an effective way of getting their needs met and shifts the focus and attention towards the more appropriate behavior
### Positive Parenting During Shelter in Place

#### The Power of Consistency, Predictability and Follow Through

When children know what to expect, we set the stage for success; be intentional about creating structure and respond to misbehavior in a consistent and predictable manner.

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<tr>
<th>Schedules and Routines</th>
<th>Prompting Effectively</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>What</strong></td>
<td><strong>What</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Create flexible routines and offer options to introduce flexibility within a schedule</td>
<td>Be specific and direct in telling your child what you want them to do (and avoid saying what you don’t want them to do) and praise/acknowledge compliance every time</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>How</strong></td>
<td><strong>How</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Flexibility</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Routine ex:</strong> chunk the day into meaningful activities: learning time, mealtime, quiet time, play time etc.</td>
<td>• Model a neutral, calm tone</td>
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<td><strong>For younger children:</strong> offer two choices</td>
<td>• Frontload by giving carefully timed explanations</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>School aged:</strong> multiple choice (3-4 options)</td>
<td>• Focus on essential tasks and avoid giving too many prompts at once</td>
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<td><strong>Tweens/teens:</strong> collaborative decision making</td>
<td>• Follow through in a consistent and predictable manner</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Why</strong></td>
<td><strong>Why</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Teaches clear expectation of specific behaviors that must be completed (and when) versus what is flexible.</td>
<td>Teaches children exactly what is expected, helps set the stage for successful listening and follow through, shows that your responses are consistent and predictable and increases likelihood of compliance</td>
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<tr>
<td>Helps sets stage for optimal learning and give sense of control and increase sense of safety and stability</td>
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#### Consequences (USED SPARINGLY)

**What & How**

- Offer a “warning” for an opportunity for corrected behavior (e.g., “if you do not turn off your video game, you will not be allowed to play later.”) before consequences
- Consequences be used in conjunction with positive attention (see above) for appropriate behavior

### Time Out (kids under 8)

- Time out from reinforcement; builds emotion regulation and self control
- Keys to success: clear, easy to follow procedure; remove all reinforcement; provided immediately following misbehavior

### Loss of Privilege (ages 6+)

- Emphasizes personal responsibility
- Keys to success: something the child likes/gets often and can be easily removed (without impacting you!); removed for short time; age appropriate

### Natural & Logical Consequences (any age)

- Result of a child’s own actions
- Keys to success: reasonable, closely tied to the behavior

**Why**

Teaches consequences result from choices children make about their behavior, builds responsibility for one’s actions, and removes reinforcement of the undesired behavior.
The Power of 1-1 Time

**What**
Build opportunities for child/teen directed 1-1 time each day
Strive for 5 positives for every negative (5:1 ratio) throughout the day

**How**
- **Younger Children:** 5-15 minutes of child directed play time
- **Tweens/Teens:** Sitting together quietly, talking about something or watching something they are interested in, or shared activity – cooking for the family, virtual yoga

**Why**
Teaches kids stability, reinforces safety and security, builds warmth and strengthens relationships.
One can have positive interactions despite challenges that may have come up in the day.
Breaks negative behavior cycles

The Power of Words

**Active Listening and Validation**

**What**
Pay attention, reflect/summarize what you are hearing, show you are listening (e.g., eye contact)

**How**
- Take a nonjudgemental stance
- Highlight your child’s emotional experience, without shifting to problem solving or defensiveness

  “That sounds challenging”
  “I understand it is frustrating graduation was cancelled”
  “I hear you”
  “wow, that must feel really awful to think I never listen to you”

**Why**
Teaches kids you care, and you hear them, their voice is important, and their experience and emotions are valid. Can reduce escalation.

**Coping Language**

**What**
Label the reality of the challenge, your family’s ability to cope, and what you are doing to stay safe

**How**

  “This is hard and you can do it”
  “I don’t know what will happen this summer and I know we will figure it out together”

**Why**
Teaches kids how to build bravery, tolerate uncertainty and distress and empowers children and gives them a sense of control

Additional Resources

https://med.stanford.edu/psychiatry/about/covid19.html
https://www.aap.org/
https://www.childmind.org
https://www.nctsn.org
https://healthychildren.org/
https://www.understood.org/