

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

The more you attend to a behavior, the more likely it is to occur

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



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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

Schedules and Routines

What

Create flexible routines and offer options to introduce flexibility within a schedule

How

Routine ex: chunk the day into meaningful activities: learning time, mealtime, quiet time, play time etc.

Flexibility

For younger children: offer two choices
School aged: multiple choice (3-4 options)
Tweens/teens: collaborative decision making

Why

Teaches clear expectation of specific behaviors that must be completed (and when) versus what is flexible.

Helps sets stage for optimal learning and give sense of control and increase sense of safety and stability

Prompting Effectively

What

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

How

- Model a neutral, calm tone
- Frontload by giving carefully timed explanations
- Focus on essential tasks and avoid giving too many prompts at once
- Follow through in a consistent and predictable manner

Example

Prompt: *"It is time to go for a walk. Please put your shoes on."*

Child starts putting shoes on

Follow through: *"Thank you for listening right away. Now we will have more time to play outside."* (labeled praise)

Why

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

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

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The Power of 1-1 Time

Make an effort to reset the balance by creating time to connect without an agenda

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

The way we communicate can reduce tension, deescalate conflict, and improve connection

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/>