

Positive Parenting: Practical Solutions for Positive Results

Presented by:
Randy Sprick, Ph.D.

CASE & Glenbard School District 87
Glen Ellyn, IL
October 12, 2015



For more information contact Safe & Civil Schools
800-323-8819 or info@safeandcivilschools.com

Introduction

Some thoughts on freedom and limits

Some thoughts on the mistakes we make as parents: Get it right at least 51% of the time.

1. Be aware of where you are going as a parent. Keep your end goals in mind each day.

List some words you would like to use to describe your child or children when they are grown.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____

Some possibilities to consider:

Compassionate	Honest	Respectable
Creative	Honorable	Respectful
Curious	Humble	Responsible
Ethical	Independent	Self-directed
Flexible	Joyful	Self-disciplined
Forgiving	Kind	Spiritual
Grateful	Loyal	Strong
Hard worker	Moderate	Thoughtful
Has integrity	Perseveres	Thrifty
Healthy	Polite	

2. Recognize that misbehavior drives every parent crazy.

List some misbehaviors or attitudes that are most bothersome.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____

Some possibilities to consider:

Argues	Jealous	Snotty
Clingy	Loud	Spoiled
Complaining	Manipulative	Talks all the time
Crying	Name calling	Tantrums
Daydreams	Negotiating	Whiny
Demanding	Procrastinator	Won't do chores
Forgetful	Refuses to follow directions	Won't pay attention
Fussy		
I can't	Selfish	

Respond to preliminary and mild misbehavior with easy, common-sense procedures. Never use negative labels.

Gentle corrections (privately, if possible)

Discussions

Emotional reaction (infrequently and respectfully)

Humor

Respond to chronic problems by setting limits, then calmly and consistently implementing mild consequences. Never use negative labels.

- Timeout
- Time owed
- Loss of privileges
- Earlier curfew
- Grounding
- Ignoring

3. To move from the misbehaviors to the positive traits you value, spend TIME and pay ATTENTION. Engage in family activities— with the television and video games off.

- Talk
- Eat together
- Do chores together
- Play games
- Attend church or other organization
- Make decisions together
- Work on projects
- Arrange child's special time with adult
- Help with homework, but do not do the homework for the child.
 - Set up a place.
 - Set a time.
 - Provide help, support, and encouragement.
 - Help with due dates and timelines.

Notes:

4. Give meaningful and relevant praise. Keep the focus on effort, not on skill or ability. Use the words you listed on p. 1.

a) Praise

- Meaningful
- Accurate
- Specific and descriptive
- Nonembarrassing
- Given in a manner that fits your style

b) Interactions

c) Extra responsibilities

d) Special privileges

5. Be aware of ratios of interactions. Are you paying more attention to the child when the child is misbehaving or when the child is behaving in the ways that will help him or her become a responsible adult?

Read the text at the end of this handout for ideas.

6. Try to model the behaviors you want your children to develop. (And if you can't model the thing you want, discuss this with child.)

7. Monitor your children's activities. You need to know where they are, whom they are with, and what they are doing. This may drive them crazy. Increase freedom and independence gradually, and as it is earned.

Suggested Readings

- Dreikurs, R., & Soltz, V. (1964). *Children: The Challenge*. New York, NY: Hawthorne Books.
- Patterson, G. R. (1977). *Living with Children: New Methods for Parents and Teachers*. Champaign, IL: Research Press. (132 pages, \$13.95)
- Sloane, H. N. (1979). *The Good Kid Book: How to Solve the 16 Most Common Behavior Problems*. Champaign, IL: Research Press. (350 pages, \$18.95)

A Powerful Strategy to Improve Your Children's Behavior (Part 1 of 2)

Let's face it—no matter how much you love your children, sometimes their behavior can drive you crazy. You have to nag them about homework, about chores, about treating siblings well, and on and on. Well, it's possible that the frequency of your nagging and arguing is actually making the situation worse.

One proven strategy for improving children's behavior is to increase the amount of attention you give to your children when they are doing what you want so that they are getting much more attention for behaving responsibly than when they are misbehaving. We call this "ratios of interactions." Specifically, has the child discovered that it is easier to get your attention when she behaves well or when she misbehaves?

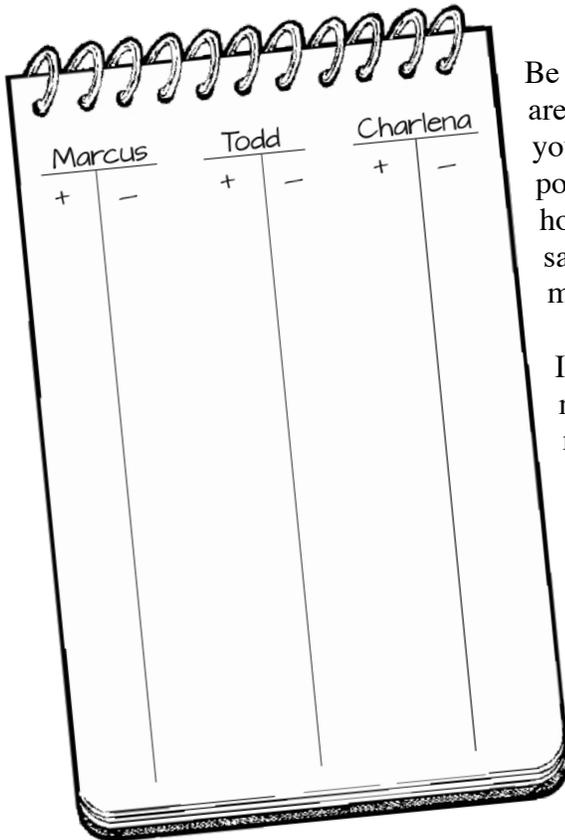
Here is what this is based on: From the child's perspective, you as parents are the most important people in his life—even though he may act like he does not even like you at times—and attention from you is vitally important. Over months or years, the child may have discovered, "When I behave well, these important people, my parents, only notice me sometimes. On the other hand, when I misbehave, especially if I do something that annoys them, they notice me, they talk to me, they scold me." To a child, being noticed and getting attention is always better than not being noticed at all.

The strategy is this: The child should get at least three to five times more attention when she is behaving responsibly than when she is misbehaving. This is simple to understand, but very difficult to do given how busy we all are each day.

Check this out

During one evening, keep a card in your pocket or near you. The card should have a positive column and a negative column. Every time you talk to your child, you are going to count that as one interaction. You are going to mark that interaction in the positive column if the child was behaving well immediately before you started the interaction. If the child was misbehaving right before you started the interaction, or if you are scolding about something that happened earlier (Why didn't you finish your homework?), you will mark it in the negative column. If you have more than one child, do this separately for each child.

Your card might look something like this:



Be sure that you understand what you are marking. You are not counting if *you* are positive or negative. Rather, you are marking whether the child is getting attention for positive behavior or for negative behavior. No matter how nicely you say it or how positive the tone, if you say, “Now stop hassling your sister,” you are going to mark the negative column.

If, at the end of the evening, you find that you have more marks in the negative column, or if you find more marks in the positive column but you know you nagged less and praised more because you were recording, then on a typical day your attention is probably skewed to paying more attention to the child’s negative behavior.

Repeat this “monitoring of interactions” process about once per month.

What to do

On a daily basis with each child, make a concerted effort to notice the child when he is not misbehaving and interact with him at those times. Some of these interactions will involve praise (“You were very polite to the clerk while we were in the store”), and some of these interactions will just be conversation (“Tell me something about your day”). Your goal each day is to give at least three times more attention to positive behavior than you give to negative behavior. We call this the 3:1 ratio strategy!

It is as simple as that. Work on this! Change what you pay attention to and you will find that the child’s behavior will gradually improve and your family interactions will be far more pleasant.

In Part 2, we will take a look at making the positive interactions an even more powerful force in shaping your children toward responsible, kind, and independent behavior.

A Powerful Strategy to Improve Your Children's Behavior (Part 2 of 2)

Part 1 of this strategy suggests that whatever you pay the most attention to, you will get more of in the future. If you mainly pay attention to misbehavior, you mainly get misbehavior. If you mainly pay attention to positive behavior, you mainly get positive behavior. This part explores how to make positive interactions an even more powerful force in shaping your children's behavior toward responsibility, kindness, and independence. To keep things simple, this will refer to a single child. If you have more than one, think about doing this with each individual child.

Do things with your child. Guiding your child toward becoming a responsible adult requires that you spend time with her. This does not mean expensive trips or “quality time.” It means quantity time and interaction time—doing things together and talking about those things while you are doing them. When you are in a store, talk to your child and have her help to the degree that her age allows. Do not ignore her when she is behaving well, or she will start to misbehave to *demand* your attention.

When you are at home, do chores *with* the child and interact while you are side by side. Your child needs to feel that what she does is important and useful. When you are in the car, talk to your child. Share aspects of your life—those things that are going well, but also your concerns. If you are concerned about money, it is reasonable to share as much about those concerns as seems age appropriate. Invite the child to share aspects of her life. (“Tell me something about your day” is more likely to yield information than “How was your day?”) This should not focus entirely on the child—she should learn about the world around her and learn to share the limelight.

Time is a problem. We never have enough, and your first thought may be, “I do not have time to do this.” In many homes, the television and computer are on far too much and consume way too much time that could be spent interacting—doing things together. If the TV is on all the time, limit use to a set maximum number of hours per week.

Finally, remember that the older your child gets, the less time you will have because she will move toward developing her own activities with peers. Even when your child is a teenager, you need to find times to interact in ways other than nagging and criticizing.

Use positive labels to describe your child. Choose some traits that you hope will describe your child when he is an adult, such as *responsible*, *kind*, *independent*, *strong*, and *respectful*. Use these words frequently when you are talking about your child's behavior. Sometimes when giving specific praise, end the praise with “. . . and that is a great example what a respectful person you are.”

Sometimes when you are correcting misbehavior, act *as if* you are a bit surprised. “You are such a responsible person, I am surprised that you did not remember to . . .” The philosopher/poet Goethe said, “Treat people *as if* they were what they ought to be and you help them become what they are capable of being.” Note that we often use negative labels such as, “You are so irresponsible!” Avoid that because your child will believe the labels you use to describe him.

Provide specific praise. When your child is behaving well, praise her. Let her know that what she is doing is helpful and important. This sounds easier than it actually is. For example, if you are busy fixing dinner or paying bills and the child is not misbehaving, it is easy to stay so focused on your task that you do not even notice the child. However, the fact that the child is not misbehaving at that moment is a great time to praise her for her independence.

Praise should be more than just “Good job.” It should describe the behavior you are praising. “You remembered to set the table without needing to be reminded. Thanks.”

Praise should be reasonably private. Praise that is too public may be embarrassing. You do not have to be secretive, but praise given quietly is less embarrassing than something that seems like a public announcement.

Praise should be timely and appropriate. You do not have to praise everything that the child does, but any behaviors you have had to correct or scold about should be an area that you target for praise. For example, if being respectful has been a problem, look for every opportunity you can find to praise the child for being respectful. If doing chores has been a problem, look for times the child starts chores without being asked and comment on what you see.

What if the child reacts negatively to these interactions or to the specific praise? At first, some children may respond negatively to your efforts to provide positive feedback. For example, shortly after being told that he is behaving in a mature and responsible manner, a child may exhibit the worst behavior ever. This can lead you to decide that the child should not be given any future positive praise

One reason a child may misbehave immediately after receiving positive feedback is that it embarrasses him. The following suggestions may result in a more positive reaction from the child:

- Make the feedback more private.
- State the feedback in a more businesslike or brief way.
- Eliminate pauses after you provide positive feedback.

Treat the misbehavior as a momentary interruption in the child's success. The key here is to refrain from communicating anger or disappointment. This can be tough. When the child falls apart after you acknowledge his success, it is natural to feel angry or disappointed. You may want to say something like:

Jamie, you were doing so well and now you go and do this sort of thing. I just don't understand, and I am very disappointed.

At a neutral and reasonably private time, talk to the child about his tendency to misbehave after getting positive feedback. See if he can give you any insights into why this occurs. Ask him if he has any suggestions about ways you can give him positive feedback that will reduce the chance that he will feel a need to misbehave afterwards. Try experimenting with any reasonable suggestions the child makes.

Summary

Remember, the goal is to interact three to five times more frequently with the child when he is behaving well than when he is behaving poorly. These positive interactions will include:

- 1) Simply doing things together and interacting with each other while doing so.
- 2) Using positive labels to describe the child.
- 3) Providing frequent, age-appropriate praise.