The Power of Positive Reinforcement

APRIL 2012 NEWSLETTER

Parents bring children to counseling with a long list of concerns about their child’s behavior at home and/or school. When the presenting problem is explored I find parents often reinforce the negative behaviors by over-correcting the child for the actions he or she is doing wrong. By focusing only on the problem behavior the child is receiving negative attention and his or her good behavior is not being noticed or rewarded. This dynamic then discourages the child from displaying better behaviors as they are not being reinforced. A simple step on the road to improving a child’s behavior is by using Positive Reinforcement.

What is Positive reinforcement?
Positive Reinforcement is “catching” a child doing something you want them to do and rewarding it. The child gets attention and reward as positive reinforcement for doing the right thing and will focus on repeating that behavior

Why does Positive Reinforcement work?
Positive Reinforcement works because it gives children positive goals to work towards instead of only focusing on negative consequences to avoid. Positive reinforcement fulfills strong basic psychological needs of every child as well as setting a more positive and healthy tone for the caregiver-child relationship.

How to do this technique:
Instead of correcting every time the child is misbehaving or talking out of turn for instance, “catch” your child being cooperative, polite, helpful, compliant and use verbal praise to recognize you really noticed and appreciated their behavior. It sounds too easy to work but it does! Just remember the last time your boss praised you for covering a sick co-worker’s shift, or for achieving a sales goal. You are more likely to help in the future, rather than if your boss would’ve demanded you to stay or said achieving your sales goal is “just your job”.

People like praise and recognition and will repeat good behavior to receive it. Next time your child shares, uses manners at the table, helps you around the house, completes homework without arguing, make sure you use praise to recognize their effort.

Here are some examples:
Do: “Thank you for taking your plate to the sink”, “I like it when you share with your sister”, “The cat sure was hungry and you cared enough to feed it”, “Good job on getting a higher math score”

Don’t: “You know you’re supposed to take your plate to the sink”, “Share with the computer now!”, “I’m getting rid of the cat if you don’t feed it”, “Getting good grades is just your job”.

Remember to be genuine in your praise and use a positive tone and manner when doing it. Children can read your facial expressions and sarcasm in your voice, so be sincere. If you consistently praise your child, you will be on your way to increasing the times their good behavior is displayed as they will seek your positive attention and approval.

Quotes of the month:
“Exude happiness and you will feel it back a thousand times”
Joan Lunden

“Life is like a mirror. Smile at it and it smiles back at you”
Peace Pilgrim

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