

Supporting Behavior at Home: Understanding and Strategies

- Define “behavior” and measure it. Identify coping skills and replacement behaviors.
 - Behavior is anything people do. Most behavior can be observed.
 - Therapeutically, problem behavior is disruptive, or a safety concern, or may interfere with a person’s learning or progress.
 - Replacement behaviors are more appropriate and desirable behaviors which satisfy the individual the same way the problem behavior did. For example, requesting “break” with words, pictures, or other communication device is more appropriate than running away. Alternative behaviors are sometimes “incompatible” with problem behaviors. Learning replacement and alternative behaviors can reduce problem behaviors.
 - Coping skills help people to tolerate less-preferred situations. Developing coping skills can be an important part of a behavior intervention strategy.
 - To understand problem behavior, first define it objectively. Describe the behavior exactly as it appears. For example “he screamed and fell on the floor”, rather than “he had a fit”.
 - Take a simple baseline. A baseline quantifies the problem. It provides a basis for comparison to evaluate behavior change over time, due to a strategy, medication, diet change, health, other reason. For example, count how often the behavior occurs within a specific time frame e.g. 3 times per day.
- Examine the “A-B-C’s” of behavior
 - A = Antecedents- these occur *prior* to the behavior of interest. Antecedents can include immediate triggers such as denial of something preferred, or more distant “setting events” such as a poor night’s sleep, earlier problems, changes in routine, etc. We talk about antecedents for both problem and desirable behaviors.
 - B= Behavior- when thinking about the ABCs of behavior, the B is always the behavior of interest; that is, the problem behavior or the replacement behavior.
 - C = Consequence- this is what happens *after* the behavior of interest. This might include something the individual enjoys- in which case the consequence is a “reinforcer”, and will increase the behavior of interest. It might include the loss of a privilege, which will decrease the behavior which it follows.
- Identify the reasons for behavior: To support more appropriate behavior, we first must understand the reason for the problem behavior, from the person’s perspective.

*Get something – tangible / activity

*Get attention

*Escape from something aversive

*Sensory or Automatic- manage one’s internal sensory / physiological experiences

We can understand much human behavior as occurring for one or more of these reasons. Consider why people:

- Go to work
- Eat
- Run out of a room
- Say “no”

- Use 4 approaches to support appropriate behavior: we use these to reduce the person's need to use problem behavior, and to increase their use of more appropriate replacement and coping skills. Note: Parent self-care can be a powerful strategy to support change in a child's behavior.
 - Health, medical management: this can include treating a medical problem, using sleep hygiene strategies to support better sleep, improving diet to support health and brain, and parent self-care.
 - Manage the triggers: learn which environments, situations, and demands are associated with more behavior problems. Manage these to support coping, and prevent your child from becoming overwhelmed and using inappropriate behaviors. Strive for your child to negotiate "just right" level of challenge. Key management strategies include maintaining daily routines, previewing upcoming situations and challenges, using visual schedules and cues, ensuring a manageable amount of triggers at one time, and parent self-care.
 - Teach coping skills and replacement behaviors:
 - everyone benefits from having a coping skills repertoire, including waiting; tolerating "no"/ not getting what you want; tolerating attention to others; independent time; tolerating less-preferred situations and triggers. Teaching strategies should be individualized
 - replacement behaviors depend on the reason the individual is using the behavior- to get something tangible, get attention, escape, or for automatic reinforcement. Consider the ABCs to understand WHY your child is using problem behaviors, and teach more appropriate ways to get the same thing.
 - Use rewards and loss of privileges to teach skills and support appropriate behavior
 - Notice and celebrate when your child is behaving appropriately. Plenty of small daily celebrations go a long way to supporting appropriate behavior.
 - Use prompts early on (e.g. when you see warning signs)- to remind your child to use their skills.
 - Identify preferred activities and/or tangibles to use as reinforcers for using coping and alternative behaviors. Try a sticker (token) system with prizes, for tracking and rewarding desirable behaviors.
 - Some children do best with a combination of reinforcers for appropriate behaviors, and loss of privileges for using significantly disruptive or dangerous problem behaviors e.g. loss of screen time, no dessert.

Example: Very Veruca: Problem = lip quiver (*warning sign*), whines screams, spits at, hits, bites, and kicks, 1x weekly, when denied something she wants.

BEFORE: Very Veruca is shopping with her parents and she sees the ice cream (antecedent). Veruca whines, cries, screams, kicks, bites, hits, spits (behavior). Her distressed and embarrassed parents give her an ice cream right away (consequence).

PLAN: Mr. Salt uses mindfulness meditation to support his awareness of Veruca's triggers, and to be less reactive to her problem behaviors. He creates a regular bedtime routine for her, and manages her evening screen time. He takes her shopping on Saturdays, to help her developing coping skills for waiting, and not always getting what she wants. He rewards her coping and does not reward her when she uses problem behaviors.

AFTER: Mr. Salt does his 20 minutes of mindfulness on Saturday AM, and wakes Veruca. They go to the supermarket as always. Before they enter, she picks ice cream as her reward for inside voice and safe body. If she does not follow the rules (no disruptive behaviors), no treat. He shows her a picture shopping list and has her help find the items and put them in the cart. Veruca sees the candy aisle (*antecedent*), and her lip starts to quiver (*warning sign*). Mr. Salt takes a deep breath. He reminds her of the rules and her prize. He lets her select the ice cream and put it in the cart. They finish getting all the items on the list, and pay. Then they eat ice cream (*consequence*) in the parking lot.

Supporting Behavior at Home- Worksheet

Define the behavior of concern:

Baseline: how often is this happening? How many times per year / month / day / hour ? How intense (rate 1-5)

Reason for the behavior:

Get tangible/activity

Get attention

Escape from less preferred demand / situation

Automatic / Sensory Reinforcement

Plan to manage health and medical:

Plan to manage triggers

Plan to Teach Coping Skills and Replacement Behaviors:

Plan Rewards and Loss of Privileges: