

Improving Behavior by Increasing Communication



Helping young children learn appropriate behavior is a concern for parents. Behavior management can be complex but families can begin at “A” by considering abilities, approaches, awareness, affirmation and actions.

Abilities

A child’s smiles, scowls, kisses and cries all convey feelings. To understand why a child is content or upset involves communication. As children change, so do their abilities to share their thoughts. Families realize that infants may cry, toddlers may use single words and preschoolers may create simple sentences but at any age there is a range of abilities. When they are upset, children may not be able to fully use their communication skills!

If children are unsure what is expected or do not understand what is happening, they become upset. When children can participate events and convey their wants, frustrations are reduced. Learning to control one’s own behavior is a developmental process and problems occur when there are communication challenges. The solutions for improving behaviors are connected to increasing communication.

Approaches

Everyone can remember being confused and needing multiple explanations to understand. Curiosity and confusion are part of children’s everyday learning. Through daily interactions families help their young children with hearing loss gain language through spoken language, sign language, cued speech or a combination of approaches.

When a child is angry, frustrated, or aggressive parents can expand their own communication. Guidance can be provided in more than one way to enhance comprehension. Directions and explanations may be given multiple times to allow a child time to process information. Families might say something and act it out, or sign and draw a picture.

Combine more than one approach:

- Gestures
- Pictures
- Pantomime
- Modeling
- Spoken language (speech)
- Sign language
- Awareness

If parents can see a pattern to a child’s behavior, they can plan ahead to increase communication in certain situations. When families can follow routines, children learn what to expect. If a child knows the sequence of activities, he can be calmer. Children benefit from repeated explanations about their activities so they can learn the words to discuss them!

Children may become frustrated when they are told to change activities. If this is noticed as a behavior pattern, families can plan their communications for these situations. Families can help children be aware of what’s next. For example, parents can be prepared to set a timer for five minutes and explain soon it will be time to come inside to eat. If families know a child becomes upset about getting into a car, drawings might be made to show what the child will do when the rides end.

If a family becomes aware of behavior challenges when telling a child to do tasks, they can change how this expectation is presented. Providing choices encourages a child to communicate and decreases behavior issues. A child can be given a choice between a yellow or blue shirt instead of simply being told to put on a shirt. Being involved in the preparations for activities helps children understand what is happening. Before the bus comes, a child can help collect items to take to school and put them near the door.

In dangerous situations, families can act quickly and firmly when needed. For example, if a child is too near a stove, he can be moved and told it is not safe. If children hit, bite, kick or throw things, they could be required to sit until calm for a minute. Parents can then help the child briefly do the appropriate behavior, and follow up with much praise.

Affirmation

Children learn from their experiences and what they see others do as well as from what they are told. Everyone benefits from success. When children participate and are praised, they want to repeat that behavior. If children are physically aggressive and experience physical discipline, then children may continue to show aggression. When desired behaviors are modeled, then children see again and again what is expected. If parents make many attempts to be clear, children will learn to keep trying to explain themselves too.

Actions

To increase communication and improve behavior include:

- Tell a child before changing tasks
- Show a child what will happen next
- Offer choices to a child within an activity
- Involve a child in preparations and routines
- Expand communication in challenging situations
- Anticipate when a child needs more explanations
- Create picture schedules of first this/then that
- Remember behavior skills take time to develop
- Review with a child what happened and why
- Praise a child often for good behavior

By considering carefully their children's communication needs, parents assist them with behavior skills, too.