Building Better Behaviors: Mental Health Solutions for Child Behavior Problems

Mental Health Series

Mirror, Mirror: Parents Must Be The Role Model

The first rule when parenting unwanted behavior is to first give yourself a behavior audit. Encouraging good behavior comes by parents modeling and reinforcing positive actions.

The reality is children notice more things than we realize and learn by watching those around them.

This is something we think a lot about when our kids are little but the same principle holds true as your kids enter adolescence.

Here are some quick tips:

Practice what you preach when it comes to good behavior.

Point out positive interactions, especially between adults, such as sharing, communicating effectively, using good manners, and taking turns.

Model how to calm down by taking deep breaths together or drinking a glass of water together, whether it's the child who is frustrated or you.

Use Feelings. Instead of using critical statements that might attack the other person, express your actual feelings by saying, "I am feeling sad/frustrated/angry" rather than "You are driving me crazy."

Catch your child doing the right thing. Avoid giving attention to negative behaviors acknowledging and give praise to your child's positive behavior.

Recognize the little things such as small acts of kindness, like saying please and thank you, actively listening, speaking at a lower volume, and sharing. Simple phrases like "Good job doing _____!" or "Thank you for _____" can go a long way. Reinforce positive behavior and encourage your child to continue making good choices starts with you! By focusing on and reinforcing good behavior, you help your child understand the value of their positive actions.

LOOK FOR THE GOOD

What to expect in each stage...

Navigating Behaviors: Needs that can cause behaviors

Infancy (0-2 years):
- Need to begin exploration of basic emotions

Early Childhood (3-6 years):
- Need to communicate and solve simple problems
- Need to understand feelings and make friends

Middle Childhood (7-11 years):
- Need to be with friends and feel accepted
- Need to be self-starter and do things on their own

Adolescence (12-18 years):
- Need to navigate big feelings
- Need of wanting/having a romantic relationship
- Need to question complex thinking

Early Adulthood (19-25+ years):
- Need to find purpose in career goals
- Need to establish financial independence
- Need to explore personal identity

Featured articles

Parenting Role Models: Insights from "The Formula"

Have you heard of the book "The Formula: Unlocking the Secrets to Raising Highly Successful Children"? Harvard Kennedy School Professor Ronald Ferguson and journalist Tatsha Robertson explore the pivotal role of parenting in shaping children's success. They highlight the importance of modeling good behavior, emphasizing that children learn by observing their parents and other adults. Simple acts like sharing, using good manners, and effectively communicating can significantly influence a child's behavior. Ferguson identifies "the model" as one of the eight essential roles of master parenting, stressing the significance of parents being the kind of person they want their children to emulate.

So, what are the eight essential roles of master parenting? Take a look:

1. **Early Learning Partner:** Spark early curiosity and problem-solving.
2. **Flight Engineer:** Ensure vital educational support.
3. **Fixer:** Advocate fiercely for opportunities.
4. **Revealer:** Show the world's wonders.
5. **Philosopher:** Guide purposeful conversations.
6. **Model:** Lead by example.
7. **Negotiator:** Teach respectful assertiveness.
8. **GPS Navigational Voice:** Offer continuous guidance.

The bottom line is, by consistently exhibiting positive behavior and engaging in meaningful interactions, parents can help their children develop a strong foundation for success.

Strategies to Prioritize Mental Health

Behaviors as Mental Health Warning Signs

Has your child's teacher called you more than once about your child's behaviors? If so, it is time to consider whether your child's in-school behaviors are trying to hint at something they may be going though. Your child may not have the cognitive function (remember a person brain is not fully developed until age 25) or words to describe how they are feeling. It is important to remember even a teenage does not have as much lived experience as an adult. So, behaviors can often hint at a child's mental well-being or lack of mental wellness.

Changes like social withdrawal, increased irritability, or declining grades may signal underlying issues. Similarly, frequent absences, defiance, or mood swings might indicate more serious conditions like depression. Recognizing these behaviors early allows parents and educators to provide timely support, fostering a supportive environment where children feel comfortable discussing their emotions and seeking help when needed.

Understanding Your Child's Emotional Development: 11–14 Years of Age

Begin Course

Click to view

Take a no-cost course at ParentGuidance.org

Dr. Skinner teaches the common issues children between the ages of 11-14 face that can either negatively or positively impact a child's emotional development. Additional courses in this series address ages 5-10,10-13, 14-18 and 19+.

Need more support or info?
Click the ParentGuidance.org medallion to explore an e-Course or visit Ask-A-Therapist.

Works Cited

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