



Mental Health Care in the Pediatric Clinic

Parent Management Training

Objectives

By the end of this chapter you will be able to:

- Understand the ways in which coercive interaction cycles and ineffective supervision contribute to children's behavioral problems
- Know some straightforward parent management training techniques that you can offer parents who are struggling with their children's behaviors

How Do Parents Contribute to Children's Behavior Problems?

- Power Struggles
 - Coercive interaction cycles: negative behaviors on the part of both parent and child are reinforced and perpetuated
 - Reciprocal interactions
 - Methods of coercion escalate over time
- Ineffective Supervision

Positive Reinforcement

- When a behavior is followed by an experience (reinforcer) that makes it more likely that the behavior will recur
- A reinforcer can be anything
- A reinforcer is person specific
- Reward is "in the eye of the beholder"

Positive reinforcement is pretty intuitive. If I do something and am rewarded for it, I will likely continue to do it. If my dad looks proud when I practice hard at baseball, I will keep practicing. But positive reinforcement does not always refer to positive behavior. If I talk back to the teacher and my friends laugh, that is positive reinforcement. If I have a tantrum when I want a cookie and my mom gives me a cookie, I now know how to get a cookie.

Negative reinforcement

- When a behavior is successful in decreasing a noxious stimulus, it is more likely to re-occur next time the noxious stimulus is presented.

Negative reinforcement occurs when a behavior makes something you don't like go away. Therefore, you are likely to engage in that behavior every time that thing you don't like occurs. If you ask me to turn off my game and get ready for bed, and I scream and yell and you go away and let me play some more, I am highly likely to do the exact same thing next time you ask me to turn off my game and get ready for bed. I have been negatively reinforced.

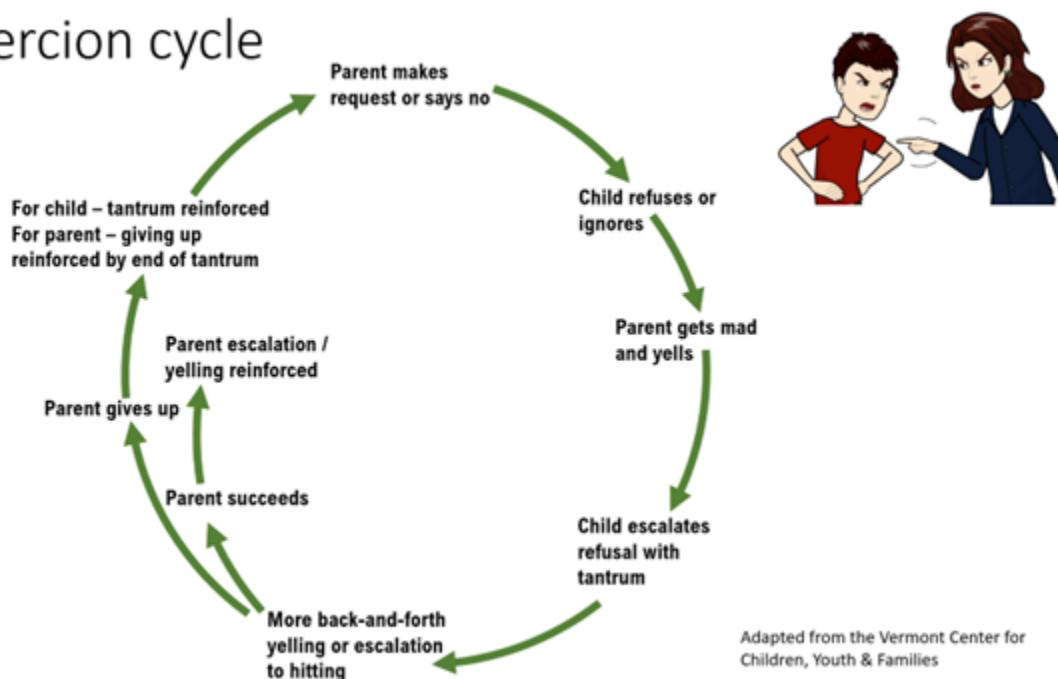
Coercive Interactions and Positive Reinforcement

Paying attention to problem behaviors increases the likelihood that they will recur.

Even when the attention children get for their behaviors is subtle ("the look") or unpleasant (arguing, yelling), it can still be powerfully reinforcing.

A common comment about a child who is misbehaving that "he just wants attention." By engaging problem behaviors, we are often inadvertently rewarding them with attention.

The coercion cycle



Cycles of reciprocal coercive interactions are understandable in this light. A parent is trying to impose her will, and the child presents a noxious stimulus to try get the parent to back off. If the parent engages with the noxious stimulus, usually a tantrum, the cycle tends to escalate. Eventually, either the parent or child "wins", but it is not a victory for either because they have mutually reinforced the coercive behavior.

Escalation of Behaviors

- Parents and children get frightened when they do not feel in control

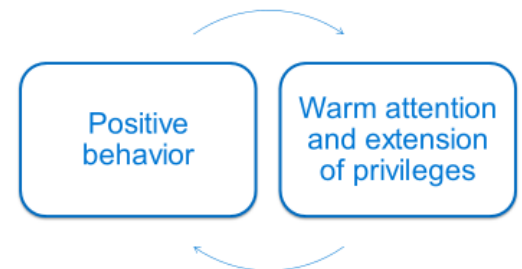
Parents and children develop "learned helplessness"

- Parents stop making requests
- Children have fewer opportunities to develop self-efficacy

Parents and children both feel out of control, frightened and unhappy in these escalation cycles, but they also feel trapped in them. Parents will often report that they have "tried everything" with their child and nothing works.

Reverse the cycle by changing the focus from negative to positive behaviors. Sometimes people will say, "Catch your child doing something good." The idea is that if the preponderance of interactions reinforce positive behaviors, addressing negative behaviors becomes easier and a less frequent need.

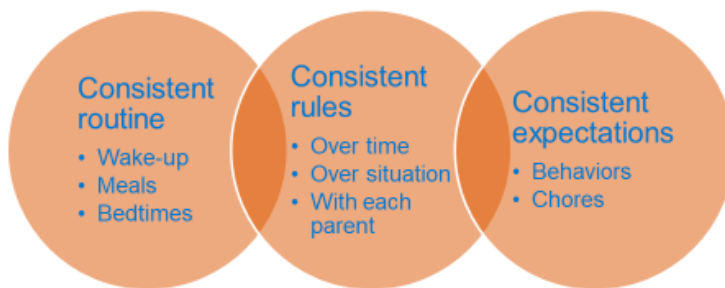
Reversing the cycle



Supervision

- Paying attention to the details
 - Knowing where the child is
 - Knowing what the child is doing
 - Knowing who the child is with
- Providing consistent structure

Supervision includes consistent structure



Supervision includes the application of consistent structure. Children and adolescents who have regular meals and regular, structured sleep patterns have less mood and behavioral problems. Parents have to actively create and enforce these routines. Children also need rules that are clear and consistent so that they know where they stand. Rules must be enforced equally by both parents. If parents are not living together as a couple, it is in their interest to present as much consistency as possible in rules, routines and expectations of children as they go between households.

Supervision involves contact and awareness.

It is the parent actively caring and doing the work of parenting.

It creates the setting in which the child can safely become aware of himself as his own person.

Effective monitoring leads to knowledge of child and parental self-awareness

Supervision is central to the development of:

- Attachment
- Identity
- Conscience

Problems Associated with Poor Supervision

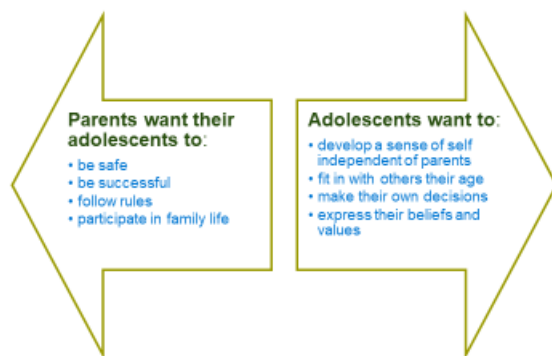
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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Early Childhood <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Accidents ○ Fire-setting | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adolescence <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Substance abuse ○ Premature sexual activity ○ Delinquent behavior ○ Lack of direction and identity |
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Poor supervision is associated with poor health and behavioral outcomes. Accidents and injuries are more common in poorly supervised children. Adolescents with poor supervision engage in risky sexual behaviors, substance abuse, and antisocial behaviors more often than their better supervised peers. They often find that they lack direction, motivation, and a sense of identity.

Supervision and developing autonomy



Teenagers like to complain about supervision. They often feel that independence in certain areas should come a year or 2 earlier than parents think it should come. This can create tension between parents and children, but in most cases this is a healthy tension that decreases incrementally as the adolescent proves herself responsible and worthy of increased independence from supervision. The slide indicates ways which parents' and teenagers' goals may seem to diverge. When looked at more closely, however, both the parents' and the adolescents' goals lead to both autonomy and responsibility.

As you see children and parents in well child checks and other visits, you can address discipline questions early and pro-actively. You know that the parents of 2- and 3-year-olds are often exasperated by tantrums but listen for the ones who seem truly overwhelmed. Help them troubleshoot, listen to their fears, and refer for parenting classes or support if needed. Here are some questions that can help parents assess where they are in their own development.

Early guidance is key

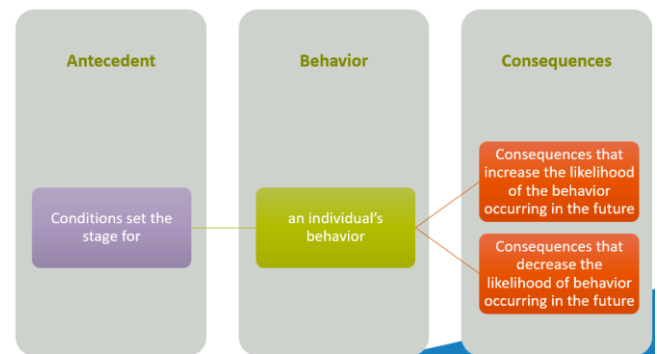
What kind of parent do you want to be?	What kinds of rules did you have as a child?	Do you and your partner see discipline in the same way?
Is it hard for you to set limits with your child?	Is it hard for you to praise your child when he does well?	Are you happy with the way rules and discipline are working in your home?
What's the most challenging thing about your child's behavior these days?	What's your biggest worry about your child's behavior?	What's your child doing that shows he is learning self-control?

Parent Management Training

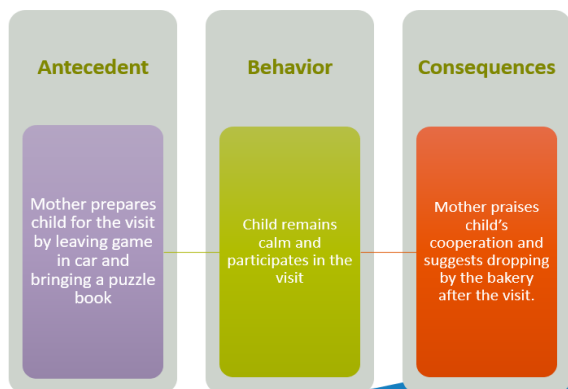
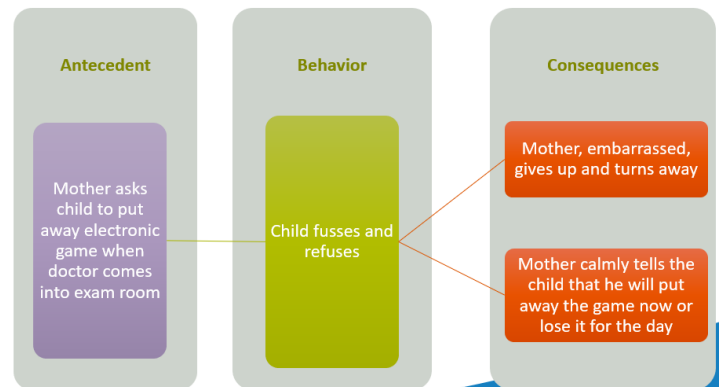
- Time-limited, structured training
- Can be delivered individually or in groups
- Therapist presents strategies and skills to address children's behavioral problems
- Parents practice and role play
- Parents practice at home

Parent Management Training, or Parent Behavioral Management, is a type of time-limited, structured training or therapy that can be delivered individually or in groups. It provides strategies and skills to address common behavioral problems in children. It recognizes that parenting is not easy and is not always intuitive. No matter how skilled parents are, some children are more challenging to parent than others, and so parents can often benefit from extra guidance. We are going to review the basics of parent management training, not so that you deliver all the material yourself, but so that you understand what it is, and you can model elements of it in the office or in brief problem-solving sessions with parents.

Parent management training is behaviorally based; that is, it is based on the idea that you can look at behaviors and understand them causally in terms of what factors increase or decrease them. It starts with analysis of any behavior in terms of the A-B-Cs. **Antecedents** are conditions that set the stage for **behaviors**. **Consequences** are the negative or positive reinforcers that we discussed before. These are the things that either increase or decrease the likelihood of the behavior occurring in the future. Consequences can be tangible rewards, like money or ice cream, punishments like a speeding ticket or detention, or they can be reactions of others, like applause or silence, or internal sensations like pleasure, pride, or satiety.



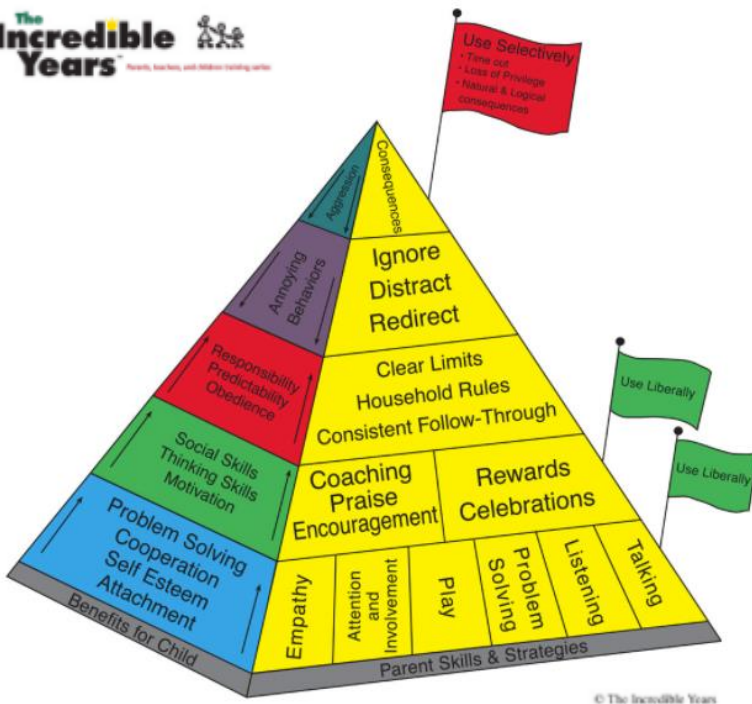
Here is a simple A-B-C series. You enter an exam room for a well child check on an 8-year-old you have treated for years. His mother says, "The doctor's here. Time to put away the game." The child turns away, cradling his electronic game, and refuses to turn it off or put it away. Consequences may vary. His mother may back down quickly, not wanting to provoke a confrontation that she may lose in front of you, or take up your time. She may instead calmly tell the child that he will put away the game or will lose it for the rest of the day.



Managing consequences is effective: if the mother calmly requires that the child put away the phone, and the child complies, that's a good result. The ABC model suggests that you can also try to change the antecedent, or the situation in which problem behaviors arrive. We know that kids don't like to abruptly disengage from electronics. One solution might be to not bring the game into the exam room, or even into the clinic. They might choose an alternate, less engrossing activity to do while waiting. In this way, the mother sets the child up for more successful behavior during the visit, and she can reinforce this by engaging in a pleasant activity after the visit.

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Parenting Pyramid®

The Incredible Years, a book by Carolyn Webster-Stratton, PhD, forms the basis for one method of Parent Management Training. The underlying idea is that increasing positive attention, including listening, empathy, and problem solving, forms the basis for better cooperation and attachment. Praise, coaching, and encouragement foster improved social and thinking skills, and motivation. Clear limits and rules with consistent follow through enhance responsibility, predictability and obedience. The first lines of defense against annoying behaviors are ignoring, distraction and redirection. Consequences, or punishments, are used selectively for problem behavior.

We will go through some elements of parent management training in the following sections, loosely in the order in which they appear in the parenting pyramid.

Attention, play, listening

At the base of the pyramid is improved attachment between parents and children. The core strategy here is setting aside brief periods of child-centered time in which the parent pays attention to the child's play or talk without trying to praise, criticize, or direct it. Parents often have a strong impulse to comment on or question their child's play. This is not always wrong, but in the setting of this special time, the parent should just attend and show interest.

Increase praise and positive reinforcement

Reward appropriate behavior with positive attention

- Be **clear**: "I like it that you got dressed quickly" is better than "Good job!"
- Be **unconditional**: "Thanks for putting away the Legos. Now the room looks great" is better than, "Thanks for putting away the Legos. Why can't you do that all the time?"
- Positive reinforcement can include tangible rewards, but it can also be warm attention, high fives, hugs.

Why? We all work for rewards.

Positive reinforcement involves paying attention to and building up whatever the child is doing well. It does not have to be effusive, or excessive. But realize, most kids with behavior problems hear a litany all day of what they are doing wrong, and rarely hear that they are doing something well. **Shifting that balance is key to shifting behavior patterns.**

When and how to praise and reward

Make it natural, and part of the day.

- *"Since you are ready for school on time, we can have pancakes for breakfast."*
- *"You bumped into your sister and she fell and is crying. Please help her up. Thank you for helping her up. That was very kind of you."*
- *"Thank you for bringing in the groceries. After we unpack them, let's have some of those cookies we bought."*

Give effective instructions

- Be direct (don't say "let's" if you mean "you")
- Don't phrase commands as questions ("Do you want to clean up the toys now?")
- Be close - be sure she can see and hear you
- Use clear and specific commands – what to do, not what to stop doing
- Give instructions one at a time.
- Keep explanations simple.
- Give kids time to process
- Follow through: praise if compliant, consequence if not

Parents are often frustrated when their instructions go unobeyed. Sometimes this is because parents are giving too many instructions and not following through to be sure the child can and has complied.

Here are some strategies for giving children effective instructions. You want to be direct, so the child understands that you are giving an instruction, not a suggestion. You want to have eye contact and ensure that you are heard. Instructions to do something are more effective than instructions to stop doing something. Stopping something by definition means starting something else, and the child has to decide what that something else is. So, "walk, please!" is more effective than "Stop running!"

Younger children, and children with ADHD should be given only one instruction at a time. Kids need a few seconds to process instructions. Then, most importantly, adults need to follow through on instructions, thanking the child for complying, or reminding them, helping them, or giving a consequence if they do not. **Parents who give instructions and don't follow through if they are ignored are training their children to ignore all of their instructions.**

More helpful	Less helpful
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Thanks for picking up those dishes. • I love the way you opened the door for your mom. • Please put these toys in the box. • You may not use that word in our house. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Thanks for picking up. Why can't you do that all the time? • How come you never do what I say? • You need to clean up this room now. • Watch your language!

Set clear household rules

Ask parents:

- What are the rules for your home?
- How do these change over time?
- How do they apply to children of different ages?
- Do parents follow these rules?
- Can everybody in the home identify the rules?
- Does each rule improve safety, cleanliness, respect, kindness, or some other value?

We can't follow rules if we don't know what they are. Parents may assume that everybody in their household knows all the rules but making them conscious and explicit can reduce misunderstandings. It also helps children cognitively internalize the concept of a set of rules that creates predictability and order in their lives.

Ignore, distract, redirect

Ignoring, rather than scolding or punishing minor misbehaviors, is an effective strategy for several reasons. If the goal of the behavior is parental attention, ignoring it reduces positive reinforcement. Scolding is a resource that loses its power if applied too often, so you want to save it for more critical situations. Distracting and redirection are techniques that complement ignoring. If a child is doing something you don't want him to do, invite him to do some other more appropriate activity. If the goal is attention, you are then giving attention as he engages in the appropriate activity.

Ignore behavior that is annoying but not dangerous or destructive.

Offer alternatives:
rather than "Stop doing that!",
try "Come over here and help me with this."

As soon as the child starts behaving appropriately, praise him or her.



Build a token economy

- Child earns points or privileges for positive behaviors
- These can be cashed in for reinforcers- or even just the joy of putting stickers on the chart
- Works best when
 - only a few target behaviors
 - child can regularly earn rewards
 - child receives points or stickers immediately following desired behavior
 - it's simple and consistent



Contingency management

Contingency management is the systematic reinforcement of desired behaviors and the withholding of reinforcement or punishment of undesired behaviors.

- "You may watch an hour of YouTube after you bring me your completed homework to check."

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- “You may go out with your friends to the mall as long as you are home by 5. If you are late, you will not go out for the rest of the week.”
- “You may play your game until 6. If you fuss when I tell you it’s time to stop, you will not play your game tomorrow.”

Contingency management is simply **behavioral rules based on "if-then"**. We all work within contingency management. If I close my charts in a timely fashion, I don't get those painful notes from the billing department. If I get everything done by 9 then I can watch an episode of my show before bed. Parents can use contingency management to extend privileges in exchange for responsible behavior. The eventual goal is that the child learns to create his or her own internal system of contingencies and become self-regulating.

Managing contingencies is an art. **The strategy works best when contingencies are tightly linked to the expected behavior, in time, in proportion, and in content.** Penalties need to be the right size- if they are too heavy or too long, the child will give up. It is also likely that the parent will give in, thus rendering the whole exercise useless. If a penalty is going to last more than a day, **enforce the penalty but do not continue to rehash the event that prompted it.**

The path of parenting is one of guiding children from a state of complete dependence to one of increasing independence and responsibility. Parents will make mistakes, and children will make bad decisions, and the path will involve some backward steps during which trust and maturity can grow. Ultimately, ideally, the child will develop a sense of self as an autonomous being, responsible to himself and to those around him, and ready to participate in the adult world.

Summary

- Power struggles and lack of supervision facilitate the development of maladaptive behavior
- Neither parent nor child are aware of the powerful behavioral forces shaping their interaction
- Decreasing or preventing problem behaviors in children is dependent upon decreasing power struggles and increasing effective supervision
- Parent management training increases positive parent-child interactions, builds attachment and respect, and supports parents in communicating clearly and setting firm, simple limits with children.

Link expectations and rewards or penalties tightly in time and in proportion.

Once issued, do not continue to attach anger, shame, or blame to a penalty.

Avoid “taking away everything” because then the child has nothing to lose.

Avoid making penalties so long in duration the child feels she has nothing to work for.

Avoid any penalty that you don’t have the endurance to carry out.