

# 7

## PARENT INTERVENTION CONTENT: TYPICAL QUESTIONS

---

IN THIS chapter, we present a number of questions and objections which parents frequently raise when we are discussing the various content areas. In raising these issues and offering some explanations we might use in our groups, our intention is to help therapists prepare for the nature of parent discussions. If parents do not raise these questions, out of reluctance or for some other reason, we suggest that the therapist raise these issues him/herself in order to foster problem-solving and discussion.

This chapter, then, serves as an overview of the major content areas covered in our parenting programs. We do not discuss the specific content in detail, as this information has been presented at length in several other texts (e.g., Barkley, 1987; Forehand & McMahon, 1981; Herbert, 1987; Patterson et al., 1975; Webster-Stratton, 1992a,b). Rather, for each major content area we first give a brief rationale and the key points, as we feel it is essential that parents understand the rationale for each component of the program, followed by a discussion of parents' typical questions and objections to the content of our training programs.

### PLAY SKILLS

Regular parent-child play times help build warm relationships between family members, creating a "bank" of positive feelings and experiences that can be drawn upon in times of conflict. Through play, parents can help their children learn to solve problems, test out ideas, and explore their imaginations. Moreover, play is a time when parents can respond to their children in ways that promote children's feelings of self-worth and competence. Play with parents not only helps children feel deeply loved, thereby fostering a secure base for their ongoing emotional development, but also, just as importantly, promotes parents' feelings of attachment and warmth towards their child.

This is particularly important for parents of conduct-problem children who, as we discussed earlier, may be feeling resentful, critical, angry,

distant, and hopeless about their relationships with their children. Typically there is negativity on both sides: these parents feel negative towards their children out of anger over their children's misbehavior, the children in turn are negative towards their parents. Consequently, it is not uncommon to find that parents of such children are not playing with them and are "keeping their distance." Therefore the first step in breaking this negative cycle of behaviors and feelings is to infuse some positive times into the relationship, through play. For parents of highly aggressive children, playtimes could be the first pleasurable times they have had with their children in months or even years.

Good playtime between parents and children not only fosters warmth in the relationship, but also helps children develop the vocabulary they need for communicating their thoughts and feelings. It also helps them learn the social skills of turn-taking and fosters their ability to understand the feelings and perspectives of others. In fact, studies have shown that children tend to be more creative, to have increased self-confidence, and to have fewer behavior problems if their parents engage in regular playtimes with them and, when doing so, give them their supportive attention. Unfortunately, the fact is that many parents of conduct-problem children do not want to play with their children because of the stress associated with their interactions; and when they do, they do so with divided attention or in ways that undermine or interfere with their children's play. Along with the negativity mentioned above, the reason may be that they simply do not know how to engage in supportive play.

Therefore we begin our parent intervention program by asking parents to play with their children for at least 10 minutes every day and by offering them some pointers on ways to play successfully with their children. We discuss the most common pitfalls parents encounter when playing with their children and advise them how to avoid those pitfalls. The following are the major points we highlight:

- Follow the child's lead.
- Pace at the child's level.
- Don't expect too much—give the child time to think and explore.
- Avoid too much competition with children, especially where the adult always wins.
- Praise and encourage the child's ideas and creativity; don't criticize.
- Engage in role play and make-believe with the child.

- Be an attentive and appreciative audience.
- Use descriptive comments instead of asking questions.
- Curb the desire to give too much help; encourage the child's problem-solving.
- Reward quiet playtimes with parental attention.
- Laugh and have fun.

### Typical Questions and Concerns About Play with Children

Questions from parents fall into different categories. Typically, some parents will question the importance of playing with their children, either out of defensiveness or genuine curiosity. Others will grant the importance of playing with their children, but will raise questions about our recommended approach—either questioning the approach based on its divergence from their assumptions about parent-child play or asking for further direction based on having tried the approach and encountered problems. Some will raise objections reflecting a fear of exacerbating the child's behavior problems. And therapists must always expect to hear some objections reflecting hostility or resistance. We offer the following as a representative sample.

#### *Shouldn't we be talking about discipline?*

I don't get it! I came here for help with my child's behavior problems and we're talking about play. What does this have to do with helping my child improve his behavior? Besides, my child has been so impossible that, to tell you the truth, I don't feel like playing with him. Not only that, he doesn't seem to want to play with me either!

When we talk about play we are also, in a roundabout way, discussing a discipline approach. For discipline is defined as "training that develops self-control and efficacy." Play is a highly effective and positive way to foster children's competence, independence, and feelings of self-confidence. The approach to play that we have discussed provides children with opportunities for legitimate control and power in their social interactions.

By giving attention to children's appropriate play, parents are reinforcing their positive social behaviors.

The basic principle behind the development of many common behavior problems is that children will work for attention from others, especially parents, whether it is positive attention (praise and reward) or negative attention (criticism and punishment). If children fail to get positive attention for appropriate behavior, then they will work to gain negative attention by misbehaving. If parents actively participate in play, thereby giving their children positive attention, children will have less need to resort to negative behavior to force parents to respond to them. In fact, many parents have told us that when they tried giving their child a regular half-hour dose of play each day, their children were better behaved and the parents found more personal time for themselves.

As for the issue of not wanting to play with a difficult child, or the child not wanting to play with his/her parent: True, it is hard for parents to take the time to play positively with their children if they are angry at them for breaking a window or depressed about how they are making family life miserable. Children will detect these feelings and accordingly may not want to play with their parents. This is a negative stalemate situation. Yet it is a mistake for the parent to wait for the child to break the negative cycle. Someone has to end the negative interactions, and it is not likely to be the child. Therefore, the parent needs to watch for moments of positive interaction and capitalize on these by engaging the child in some play. As these playtimes become frequent and more positive, children will look forward to them—as will parents.

### *But playing with my child is a waste of time*

Let's get real. Sure, my child behaves better if I play with him, but I can't be expected to just sit around and play all day! I've got a lot of other things to do! Isn't play with friends just as good?

Parents—especially parents of oppositional and highly aggressive children—may find it difficult to see the value in taking precious time out of their busy and stressful lives for something as seemingly frivolous as play. As their therapists, we need to be realistic in our expectations. At our clinic, we generally ask parents to do a minimum of 10 minutes of playtime with their child each day. We encourage them to see this time as an investment in their child's future, not unlike regularly putting a deposit in the bank. If they build up their child's psychological "bank account" through regular playtime, they will experience behavioral "pay-offs": in other words, as their child becomes secure in the knowledge that he will have

regular time with his parents and that time with him is valued, he will have less need to devise inappropriate ways of getting their attention. Parents may be persuaded to invest that time if it is pointed out to them some extra attention now may buy some additional personal time later.

As for the issue of peer play versus parent play, both types of interactions are important for children's social development. Young children engage in parallel play with each other where each child is playing independently. As they grow older, normal children become both more cooperative and more competitive with each other during playtimes. Resolving these conflicts and learning to help, to share, and to enjoy each other's successes are important aspects of play with peers. However, conduct-problem children have more difficulties with peer play. They are more impulsive, more aggressive, less cooperative, and generally not much fun—thus, they are more likely to experience peer rejection. For this reason, parent play with conduct-problem children is particularly important, for the benefits of peer play are quite different from the benefits of play with parents. During playtimes parents are focusing on their children; they can help them learn to solve problems, to wait and take turns, to share and cooperate, to explore their imaginations, and to communicate their feelings. Moreover, when a parent gives positive attention to his/her child's play, that child's sense of self-worth is increased. These benefits are unlikely to occur in peer play for normal children, and certainly not for conduct-problem children.

### *But play with children is boring!*

Play with my child is so boring—she keeps doing the same things over and over again. Should I structure her play to make it more stimulating?

When young children are playing, they tend to repeat the same activity over and over again. How often have you seen a toddler repeatedly fill and empty a box? How often have you groaned inwardly when asked to read the same story yet again? Certainly, repetitive play soon bores most parents. It is tempting for parents to quicken the pace by introducing some new idea or a more sophisticated way of using a toy.

Therapists should caution parents that this temptation arises from the parent's need, not the child's. It is the parent who feels a need for more stimulation. Children need to rehearse and practice an activity over and over in order to master it and to feel confident about their abilities. If they are shortchanged in this repetition, if they are pushed into a new activity, they may feel frustrated and give up playing with their parents because they feel incompetent at their former activity and/or the new activity. They

feel unable to meet their parents' expectations or the challenge of the task. The end result is decreased self-esteem and a lack of confidence.

Parents need to be sure they pace the play according to their child's tempo. Encourage parents to allow plenty of time for their children to practice an activity and to use their imagination. Caution parents not to push a child simply because they are bored. They should wait to change the play until the child decides to do something different. Remind them that children move much more slowly from one idea to another than adults. Pacing slowly will help encourage the child to concentrate on one activity for an extended period of time—an especially important skill to learn for the impulsive child with a poor attention span.

### *But don't children need structure in their play?*

I always thought that you should use playtimes to teach your children things like colors, shapes, rules, and so forth. How will children learn if you don't structure their play and correct their mistakes?

Some parents believe it is important to structure their child's play by turning it into a lesson: how to build the castle the right way, how to make the perfect valentine, how to complete a puzzle correctly. Possibly they believe that in this way they are effective teachers and are making play a worthwhile activity. But this emphasis on the "right" or "best" way to do something produces a string of commands, instructions, and corrections from the parent that usually make the experience unrewarding for both the child and the adult.

Consider, for instance, what happens when Lisa and her mother settle down to play with Lisa's new doll house. Mom says, "First let's put the fridge and stove in the kitchen." Lisa suggests a place for the kitchen, and her mother responds, "Okay, and now all these other kitchen things must go over there too." She then goes on to say, "And the living-room furniture must go here." As Lisa begins to put some of the furniture in the living room, her mother shows her where to put the bathroom items. Soon Lisa will either start refusing to comply to all these arbitrary rules out of a need to establish her own individuality or she will stop playing, sit back, and watch her mother organize everything in the correct rooms. By now, Lisa's mother is doing all the playing. She has given Lisa little opportunity for thinking about how to organize the furnishings, whether conventionally or creatively. Further, she has missed the opportunity to learn about her daughter—to discover what Lisa might have wanted to do with the doll house. Had she waited, she might have found that Lisa's play was highly

imaginative, with beds placed outside for "camping" or living-room furniture in every room.

The first step to effective play with children is for parents to recognize the importance of following the child's lead—letting children explore their own ideas and imagination, rather than parents imposing their own structure by giving commands, rules, or instructions. We suggest to parents that they do not try to teach their children anything in play. Instead, they should try to imitate their children's actions and do what the child requests. It can be especially hard for the parent of a conduct-disordered child to let go of control during play, for fear that the child will become disruptive. We explain to parents that by accepting and going along with their children's rules and ideas, they are actually modeling compliance for their children—that is, in fact teaching their children how to be more compliant. Parents will soon discover that when they sit back and give their children a chance to exercise their imagination, their children become more involved and interested in playing, as well as more creative and cooperative. This approach not only fosters the development of the child's ability to play and think independently, but also to be more compliant outside the play situation.

### *What if children want parents to structure their play?*

Usually he insists on my leading the play or else he doesn't seem to know what to do. What can I do?

When children's play with their parents has typically involved the parents structuring their children's play, telling them what to do and how to do it, it may be difficult and somewhat frustrating for the children when the parents begin to take a less directive approach. The child is used to playing according to his/her parents' rules; suddenly s/he is expected to come up with his/her own ideas for play. This new-found freedom may leave a child feeling insecure, unsure what to do, and anxious about making mistakes. Most likely, the child will try to get the parent to respond as usual by asking, "Dad, you show me how" or "Mom, I can't do it—I need your help to do it" or "Mom, I don't know what to do." If this is the case, the parent may want initially to comply and offer the child some assistance, but gradually withdraw the level of parent control while reinforcing the child's independent activities and creativity. With time and with parents' support and reinforcement, the child will become confident of his/her decisions and ability to play independently.



### *Should parents play anything the child wants?*

All my child plays with is Ninja Turtles. I hate Ninja Turtles!

In following the child's lead, there are times when the parent will be asked to play something that s/he objects to. A good rule of thumb is that if the child's suggested play activity makes the parent uncomfortable then it is probably a good idea to play something else, for the child will pick up easily on the parents' discomfort or inability to enjoy the playtime. In the Ninja Turtle example above the parent might say matter-of-factly, "I would like to play something other than Ninja Turtles—do you have some ideas?" If the child cannot think of anything else, the parent might suggest several things that the child usually likes to do, such as "How about that Lego model you were working on?" or "How about that new puzzle you got for your birthday?" It would be important in this instance not to engage in a power struggle or argument with the child about Ninja Turtles; rather the parent should try to divert and distract the child to something else. It may even be necessary if the child is persistent for the parent to start independently playing with something else as if it was a very enjoyable activity. Soon the child will want to get involved and the parent can gradually be less directive.

### *What if children want to engage in aggressive play—should parents follow their lead?*

My child only wants to wrestle with me or run around shooting guns. Will this make him more aggressive?

Certainly aggressive toys bring out children's aggressive behaviors—but even if parents do not allow their children to have guns or Ninja toys, frequently children will act them out in their fantasy play. Whether parents actively promote aggressive behaviors by giving children aggressive toys or merely play along with an aggressive fantasy, they are reinforcing aggressive play. Instead parents should minimize the amount of attention and reinforcement that children get for aggressive behavior through their use of differential attention. If the child tends to be highly aggressive in play, the parent will want to praise nonaggressive play behaviors such as talking quietly, being gentle, helping, and walking slowly. Then when the child begins to yell or shoot or be aggressive with a toy, the parent can withdraw her attention (ignore the behavior) but give back her attention as soon as the child stops the aggressive behavior.

Wrestling is another matter. Many fathers especially enjoy wrestling with their children—particularly sons. This is usually a good time for both the children and parents and does not need to be omitted out of fear of encouraging aggression. However, parents of conduct-problem children need to exercise caution, for their children may become so "wired" with wrestling that they risk hurting themselves or others. Parents will need to monitor this and de-escalate wrestling play before it gets out of control.

### *Isn't descriptive commenting just psychological jargon?*

Descriptive commenting seems pretty weird to me, it feels artificial and phoney. Even my child asks me to stop talking so funny. I don't really understand why I should do this. When I ask my child questions, I feel I know what he has learned. I don't see how descriptive commenting is more helpful than question-asking in helping my child learn.

Descriptive commenting, a running commentary on children's activities, often sounds like a sports announcer's play-by-play description of a game. Because for most people it is a novel way of communicating, parents often feel uncomfortable and artificial when they first try interacting with their child in this way. But this is merely the awkwardness we feel whenever we attempt something unfamiliar. Remember learning to drive a car or play the piano? The discomfort will diminish as parents practice in a variety of situations. And if parents are persistent in learning to do descriptive commenting, they will find that their children come to love this kind of attention.

Many children will notice that their parents are talking to them differently. Some who have difficulty accepting change may ask their parents to "stop talking so weird." Parents should not be deterred by this negative response—it is to be expected! Whenever any family member behaves differently, the rest of the family will initially resist the change in an effort to revert back to what is familiar and safe. However, with time this form of communication will not only become the status quo in parent-child interactions but will be imitated by the children in their communication with siblings and friends.

Descriptive commenting is also more effective than question-asking in teaching children vocabulary and actively encouraging their language development. For instance, a parent might say, "You're putting the car in the garage. Now it's getting gas," and so forth. Soon parents will find that their children are spontaneously imitating their parents' commenting. Parents can then praise their learning efforts and they will feel excited about their accomplishments. Occasionally parents have a tendency to ask

a string of questions while playing: "What animal is that?" "How many spots does it have?" "What shape is that?" "Where does it go?" Through such questions, parents usually intend to help their children learn. But all too often it has the reverse effect, causing them to become defensive, to retreat into silence, and to be reluctant to talk freely.

In fact, question-asking, especially when parents know the answer, is really a type of command since it requires children to perform. Queries that ask children to define what they are doing or making are in a special category: they often occur before the child has even thought about the final product or had a chance to explore his/her ideas. Through the question, the parent puts the emphasis on the product rather than the process of play. Descriptive commenting, on the other hand, is a nonthreatening way of communicating with children without demanding performance.

### *Don't children need to learn how to lose?*

I get into such battles with him when we play board games—don't I need to teach him how to lose? I really feel I need to teach my child how to follow the rules so that he doesn't run into problems thinking he can change the rules whenever he wants with others.

Most parents occasionally find themselves in a power struggle with their children over who won a game, what the rules are, etc. To some extent this is inevitable, but many parents unwittingly set up a competitive relationship with their children. When playing board games, for instance, they may feel it is necessary to teach their children to play by the rules and to be good losers. Or they may simply do their part of an activity or game so well that their children cannot help feeling incompetent. Consider a mother and son who are playing with building blocks. For a few minutes Billy is happily absorbed in getting the first wall of his house to stay up. When it finally does, he looks to Mom for approval only to find that she has a whole house finished. Besides feeling less competent, Billy also feels he is somehow involved in a competition with his mother—one, moreover, that he is not equipped to win. At this point, Billy may give up playing or may resort to other ways of getting control of the situation, such as having a tantrum or knocking down the house his mother built.

Young children do not really understand the rules and sequences of board and card games. Not until they are seven or eight do they begin to show signs of true cooperative interaction, and even then, their understanding of rules may be somewhat vague. Nonetheless, they can enjoy playing at a game with adults as long as excessive competition and a

concern with rules are avoided. If children come up with different rules for a game that allow them to win, this should be permitted. Parents need not worry about their children not learning to lose; many other aspects of their lives will teach them that. If parents, when playing with their children, cooperate with their rules and model acceptance, then children are more likely to go along with parents' rules in other situations. Finally, we suggest to parents of conduct-problem children that they initially avoid competitive games with their children, and instead play unstructured activities. When their playtimes are going well they might want to try some board games, as long as they can avoid power struggles—for the key point is for the parents and children to be having fun together.

### *How should I end the play session?*

My child doesn't want to stop the play! Every time we end, it's a real hassle with screams and protests—so much so that I don't even want to start the play for fear of the ending.

Understandably, sometimes parents are reluctant to play with their children because they fear that there will be a big fuss when they want to stop. The solution is for parents to prepare a child for the end of a play session. Five minutes before the end of a play period a parent could say, "In a few minutes it will be time for me to stop playing with you." It is important for parents to ignore any protests or arguments, and to do their best to distract their child by focusing on something else. When five minutes have passed the parent may simply state, "Now it's time for me to stop playing. I enjoyed this time with you." The parent should walk away and ignore any pleading.

Once children learn that they cannot manipulate parents into playing longer, the protests will subside. And when they realize that there is a regular play period with a parent every day, they will have less need to protest, knowing that there will be another opportunity to play with a parent the next day. Remember, a child who protests following the end of playtime is also saying that s/he had such fun that s/he does not want to stop!

### *Isn't this unfair to my other children?*

I'm a single parent with several children. I try to play with one child, and my other children act up for attention.

some parents that they consider make-believe to be a sign of emotional disturbance. This is far from the truth. When children engage in make-believe play, they are learning to manipulate representations of things rather than the concrete objects themselves. Most healthy youngsters are doing this by the age of three, and some as early as 18 months. Imaginary companions are common among four-year-olds. Play that involves fantasy steadily increases into middle childhood (about age eight) and then begins to disappear.

It is important for parents to encourage this kind of play because it helps children to develop a variety of cognitive, emotional, and social skills. Parents should be encouraged to allow boxes and chairs to become houses and palaces, and doll figures to turn into relatives, friends, or favorite cartoon characters. Fantasy helps children to think symbolically and gives them a better idea of what is real and what is not. Role-play helps them to experience the feelings of someone else, which helps them to understand and be sensitive to the emotions of others.

## TEACHING PARENTS ABOUT PRAISE

Parents of conduct-problem children often find it hard to praise their children. Perhaps believing that children should behave appropriately without adult intervention or that praise should be reserved for exceptionally good behavior or outstanding performance, many parents would never think of praising their children for playing quietly or for doing their chores without complaining. While some parents believe they should not have to praise their children for everyday behaviors, many others simply do not know how or when to give praise and encouragement. Perhaps they themselves received little praise from their own parents when they were young; unaccustomed to hearing praise, the words may seem awkward and artificial. Or perhaps they are so stressed that they cannot see praiseworthy child behaviors when they do occur.

Consequently, we teach parents to look for positive behaviors and to praise them. Here are the major points we emphasize:

- Make praise contingent on behavior.
- Praise immediately.
- Give labeled and specific praise.
- Give positive praise, without qualifiers or sarcasm.

Children in a family watch to see who is getting attention for what. If children notice that one sibling is getting special daily playtimes with a parent, it is inevitable that they will want the same treatment. If at all feasible, the parent should have separate playtimes with each child. This fosters children's sense of uniqueness and individuality in their relationships with their parents. If this is not feasible due to the number of children and lack of a partner to help, it is still possible to use these play strategies while playing with several children at once. During the play sessions the parent must go back and forth between the children, giving attention and praise to each child individually.

### *Couldn't a lack of parental control and structure in play contribute to increased child misbehavior?*

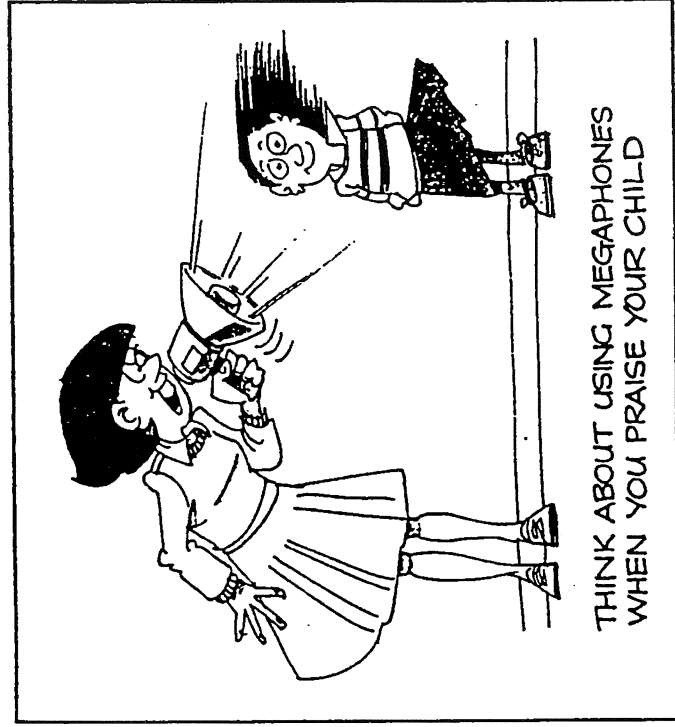
I'm afraid that if I let my child take the lead in play I will be reinforcing his obnoxious, bossy behavior. He'll say, 'Don't put that there!' or he'll grab something out of my hand and say, 'Give me that!' He's always told me what to do so I don't see how this will help him be more compliant—quite the opposite!

Some parents are worried that if they follow their children's lead in play, they will be encouraging them to be bossy and manipulative. The truth is that children are not made bossy by such an approach. In fact, the opposite is true: Parents who decrease their own bossiness in play interactions, going along with their children's ideas, are modeling compliance and acceptance of others' requests and ideas. This parental support for children's ideas not only increases children's self-esteem and confidence but is likely to be imitated by children—that is, the children whose parents demonstrate a sharing and respectful attitude are more likely to be compliant and accepting of their parents' requests in other situations, as well as with their peers.

### *Couldn't imaginative play result in crazy behavior?*

I see my child talking to make-believe friends and making up all kinds of things that aren't true. Isn't that a sign of emotional disturbance? Isn't it a form of lying?

Some adults are reluctant to engage in imaginative play: to crawl on the floor making train noises or to act out fairy tales. They feel silly and embarrassed. Fathers in particular seem to feel uncomfortable playing house or dress up games with their children. We have been told by



Sometimes parents will say that their child is so deviant that they can find nothing to praise. Many times these are depressed parents who cannot see the prosocial behaviors in their child. If this is the case the parent can watch videotapes of parent-child interactions and be helped to identify the positive behaviors to be reinforced. Regardless of whether the reinforcer is attention, a hug, a smile, or verbal praise, the task of teaching a child a new behavior is long and difficult, and often very slow. It involves trying to reinforce the positive behavior every time it occurs. If there are two adults in the family, they should discuss which behavior they want to improve and how they will try to reinforce that behavior. With both participating, things should go more quickly. In addition, adults can double the impact of praise by praising children in front of other adults and by modeling self-praise.

Many parents who do not praise their children do not praise themselves, either. If they listened to their internal self-talk, they would find that they are rarely or never saying things like, "You're doing a good job of disciplining Johnny," or "You handled that conflict calmly and rationally," or "You've been very patient in this situation." Instead, they are quick to criticize themselves for every flaw or mistake. They must learn to speak to themselves in positive statements and to create positive experiences for themselves as incentives or rewards. They will then be more likely to do the same for their children.

- Praise with smiles, eye contact, and enthusiasm as well as with words.
- Give pats, hugs, and kisses along with verbal praise.
- Catch the child whenever s/he is being good—don't save praise for perfect behavior.
- Use praise consistently whenever you see the positive behavior you want to encourage.
- Praise in front of other people.
- Don't worry about spoiling children with praise.
- Increase praise for difficult children.
- Model self-praise.

### Typical Questions and Concerns About Praise

#### *Don't children know how to behave?*

My child should know how to behave. Surely I don't need to praise her for everyday things like doing chores or sharing toys.

Rules or statements about expected behavior are not sufficient for motivating behavior. The only way a child learns to engage in a particular behavior is by having that behavior reinforced. If it is acknowledged and reinforced by the parent, it is more likely to occur again. If it is ignored, it is less likely to be repeated. A rule or statement of expectations without reinforcement when those expectations are met will be without long-term effect. Consequently, expecting a child to behave well without rewards or praise is unrealistic. No good behavior should be taken for granted or it will soon disappear.

### *Doesn't praise spoil children?*

Isn't there a danger of spoiling my child with praise? Won't she learn to cooperate only for the sake of some external reward or adult approval?

If there are any examples of children who have developed behavior problems as a result of receiving too much praise, we have not heard of them. Children are not spoiled by praise, nor does praise train them to work only for external approval or rewards. In fact, the opposite is true: children who are motivated only for external approval and attention tend to be those who have received little praise or reinforcement from adults. As a result, their self-esteem is so low that they are always seeking others' approval, or they demand a reward before complying with requests. On the other hand, children who are frequently praised by their parents develop increased self-esteem. This positive self-esteem eventually makes them less dependent on approval from adults and external rewards; they are more able to provide themselves with positive reinforcement.

Children who receive positive messages about themselves from their parents are also more likely to praise others. This can have far-reaching effects. The principle that operates here is "you get what you give." Research indicates that children who give many positive statements to others are popular in school and receive many positive statements from others in return, which in turn bolsters their self-esteem. So remember: children imitate what they see and hear. If they receive frequent positive messages from their parents, they are more likely to internalize this form of thinking and use it in positive "self-talk" to motivate themselves and in positive communication with the people around them. Of course, the opposite is also true. If parents are negative and critical, their children will imitate this behavior as well in their "self-talk" and in their communication with others.

### *Isn't there a difference between encouragement and praise?*

I make a point of encouraging my child. Isn't that enough?

Some parents believe that they should encourage their children but not praise them. Often these are the same parents who worry about spoiling or ending up with children who work only for external rewards. They make supportive comments, but try to avoid any statements that sound like praise. Out of concern that their encouragement might really be praise, they continually edit what they say. This creates an unnecessary

complication, since children are not likely to notice the difference. Parents should not worry about the form of their positive statements but simply give encouragement/praise whenever they notice a positive behavior.

### *Shouldn't praise be saved for really outstanding achievements?*

I prefer to save my praise for something that's really worth praising—an A in math, a perfectly made bed, or a really good drawing. Doesn't this help a child reach for the top?

The problem with this attitude is that no one—child or adult—achieves perfection without much imperfection. A goal is attained by completing many steps along the way, and the process involves attempts and failures as well as achievements. A parent's focus should be on the process of drawing, trying to make the bed or attempting the math problems. Otherwise, the opportunity to praise may never come! Children of parents who reserve their praise for perfection usually give up trying before they have attained it. If parents can focus on the fact that their child is trying to make the bed or do the dishes, they will be gradually shaping her/his behavior in the desired direction. In other words, praise should reward the effort to achieve, not just the achievement.

In addition to praising children's attempts at doing something positive, parents should also praise their children's everyday mundane positive behaviors such as: talking with a quiet voice, going to bed when asked, complying to a request, saying "please," sharing a toy with a friend, and so forth. Parents should not hoard praises or save them for outstanding achievements, lest these positive everyday behaviors will disappear. No positive behavior should be taken for granted!

### *Avoid combining praise with commands, criticisms, or put-downs*

I tease my kids quite a bit when they do something well—is there a problem with this?

Some people give praise and, without realizing it, undermine it by being sarcastic or combining it with a punisher. This is one of the most disruptive things a parent can do in the reinforcement process. Sometimes parents mix praise with teasing. More commonly, seeing children do something they have not done before seems to tempt parents to give a sarcastic or

critical remark about the new behavior. For example, a father may say to his children, "Tony and Angie, you both came to the table the first time I asked you. That's great. But next time how about washing your face and hands first?" Or a mother may say, "Lee, I'm glad you're trying to make your bed, but you are doing it all wrong. Look how bumpy it is—start with the sheets first, then straighten them, then put the pillow on. . . ."

In these examples, the parents may feel they have praised their children's efforts but they have undermined their praise by adding commands and criticisms. Perhaps they think that giving praise allows them to "slip in" some criticism or instructions. In any event, the children will tend to hear the parents' comments as criticisms, not praise—that is, they will hear that they failed to do a good enough job. They may react with discouragement and stop trying in the future. It is important that when parents give a child praise, it should be clear and unequivocal, without reminders of prior failures or observations about a less-than-perfect performance or commands regarding future performance.

### *Can praise be used with children who consistently misbehave?*

My child has been consistently naughty. She is nothing but trouble. I can't start to praise her until she changes her ways.

When parents feel this way about their children, we have a stalemate situation. For example, Sam is constantly irritated by the fact that his eight-year-old son Steve is defiant and uses smart talk whenever he asks him to do something. Moreover, his teachers have reported their concern about Steve's inattentiveness, aggressive behaviors with his peer group, and poor reading skills. As a result, Sam is never in a mood to notice that Steve regularly sets the table and completes his chores. If this were pointed out to him, Sam would likely say "So what?" because he has become totally focused on Steve as a disobedient and "difficult" child. With attitudes like these, a parent is unlikely to praise or reward the child, and it is unlikely that the child is going to be able to initiate a behavior change. To end the stalemate, someone has to stop the negative interactions, and it is up to the parents. Praise is the best tool at their disposal.

Even a child who misbehaves 90% of the time is doing some things right. That 10% of his/her behavior which is positive or appropriate provides an opportunity for using praise to build the child's self-esteem and to break the negative cycle. Parents have to learn to spot the positive things their children are doing and to praise them for their efforts. Then children will likely repeat and expand these positive behaviors.

In other words, parents need to realize that only if adults take the responsibility for changing first—for ending the stalemate—is there the likelihood of positive changes in the relationship. This same principle is true of any relationship—with spouses, older children, or working colleagues. If one becomes obstinate and refuses to make a positive change in one's own behavior, the status quo is maintained and the relationship is unlikely to improve.

### *What if praise feels unnatural and phoney?*

It's not that I have any real objection to praising my child, it just isn't something that comes naturally to me and so I don't do it.

If I make a conscious effort to praise him, I just end up feeling phoney.

Praise may seem phoney when it is first used—any new behavior feels awkward in the beginning. This is a natural reaction and is to be expected. But the more parents use praise, the more natural it will feel.

Very often parents who find praise unnatural are people who were never praised as children and who never praise themselves. Far from praising themselves, they are often very self-critical about their mistakes, conflicts, and difficulties. Although they may tell their children about problems they have, they rarely mention their successes, aspects of themselves they feel good about, or things they feel good about having done. These parents do not model self-praise. Yet it is important for children to see their parents modeling self-praise statements. A mother might say aloud to herself, "I did a good job on my assignment at work," or "That was a tough situation but I think we handled it well," or "That casserole I made tonight tasted good." By modeling self-praise for our children, we teach them how to internalize positive self-talk.

### *Isn't praise manipulative?*

Isn't it rather manipulative to use praise to bring about a particular behavior in my child?

The word manipulative implies that a parent is contriving secretly to bring about some desired behavior against the child's wishes. In fact, the purpose of praise is to enhance and increase positive behavior with the child's knowledge. Praise (and rewards) which is clearly described brings out the best behavior in children because they know what is expected of them.

### *What if a parent forgets to praise?*

Sometimes I forget to praise and do it later—is there a problem with this?

Sometimes praise is given hours or even days after the positive behavior has occurred. For instance, a mother may mention that she appreciated her daughter cleaning up the kitchen or putting out the garbage a week after it happened. Unfortunately, praise loses its reinforcing value over time. Furthermore, when it comes long after the behavior, it tends to sound more artificial.

While delayed praise is better than no praise at all, the most effective praise is that which is given within five seconds of the positive behavior. This means that if a parent is trying to encourage a new behavior, she should watch for every occasion when the child attempts the behavior. Parents should praise children as soon as they begin to perform the desired behavior, rather than waiting for the clothes to be put on perfectly or the toys to all be put away before praising. The praise should be frequent and consistent in the beginning, and then gradually it can be replaced by more intermittent praise.

### *What about when the praise seems to disrupt the play?*

When I go in and tell him he is playing well with his sister, they stop playing. I feel I should have just left them alone—they were doing so well.

While we recommend that parents play daily with their children and use praise during those play sessions, there are other times when children are playing by themselves that parents may want to praise as well. However, going into a room to praise children for their quiet, cooperative play may have the unwanted consequence of disrupting the play. Sometimes the children will stop playing and ask the parent to stay and play. When parents first start going in to praise their children, they can expect this reaction. The parents' behavior may be new for the child, and parents' positive enthusiasm can make children want to spend more time playing with their parents. Nonetheless, as children get used to parents peeking in their rooms to notice how they are playing, it will become less disruptive and the children will know their parents feel good about their cooperative play. You might ask, "Why praise children when they are playing quietly? If observing them and commenting is disruptive, why not leave them alone?" However, if children's independent and cooperative play goes unnoticed by parents, it will gradually decrease and be replaced by arguments and fights—which will be guaranteed to receive parent's attention!

### *What about when a child rejects praise?*

Whenever I try to praise my child, he throws it back in my face. He never seems to believe what I say. It's almost as if he doesn't want me to praise him.

Temperamentally difficult and aggressive children can be hard to praise. Their behavior often makes parents angry and undermines their desire to be positive. To make matters more difficult, these children may reject praise when it is given to them. It seems that such children internalize a negative self-concept because of the constant criticisms they have experienced from parents and teachers as well as the rejection and ridicule from their peer group. When parents present them with an alternative, positive view of themselves, the children find this image difficult to accept, preferring to cling to their familiar negative self-image.

While "difficult" children are hard to praise and reward, they need it even more than other children. Their parents must constantly look for positive behaviors that they can reinforce until the children begin to internalize some positive self-concepts. At that point they will no longer have a need to reject praise in order to maintain their poor self-image. However, this is easier said than done. It can be incredibly difficult for parents to continue to be positive with a difficult child who rejects their praise and their efforts to break a stalemate. The therapist will need to support such parents while they go through this difficult phase.

### **TANGIBLE REWARD PROGRAMS**

We have found that for some oppositional and conduct-disordered children, parental praise is initially not enough reinforcement to turn around a difficult problem behavior. However, a tangible reward can be used by parents to provide the added incentive necessary for a child to achieve a particular goal. A tangible reward is something concrete: a special treat, additional privileges, a toy, or a favorite activity. Tangible rewards can be used to encourage such positive behaviors in children as toilet training, playing cooperatively with siblings, learning how to get up the playground, and so on. When using tangible rewards to motivate children to learn something new, the therapist needs to stress the importance of parents continuing to provide social rewards (i.e., attention and praise) as well. The impact is much greater when both types of rewards are combined; each serves a different purpose. Social rewards should be used to reinforce the small efforts children make to master a new skill or



behavior. Tangible rewards are usually used to reinforce the achievement of a specific goal. Once children learn a new behavior, tangible rewards can eventually be phased out and parental praise will maintain the existing behavior.

In general, there are two ways of using tangible rewards. The first is for the parent to surprise the child with a reward whenever s/he behaves in some desired way, such as sharing or sitting still in the car. This approach works if the child already exhibits the appropriate behavior fairly regularly and the parent wishes to increase the frequency with which it occurs. The second approach is for the parent to plan in advance with the child (or explain to the child in advance) the reward which will follow from a certain behavior—as in a contract. This type of program is recommended when parents wish to increase an infrequent behavior. For example, a parent might set up a sticker chart for two children who fight frequently. She could start by telling both children that they will receive a sticker for every half hour in which they are sharing and playing quietly. Then she could discuss with them some special thing they would like to work for, such as having a friend overnight, reading an extra story at bedtime, going to the park with Dad, choosing their favorite cereal at the grocery store, going to a movie, picking something from a surprise grab bag, and so forth. It is a good idea to make the treat list fairly long with small, inexpensive items as well as bigger items. This list can be altered as children come up with new suggestions. Preschool children between the ages of three and four may be rewarded by the special sticker or token itself without needing a back-up reinforcer. Youngsters aged four to six should be able to trade in stickers for something each day if they like. Children of seven and eight can wait a few days before getting a reward.

It is important for parents to remember that tangible reward programs will be effective only if parents:

- Define the desired behavior clearly.
- Choose effective rewards (i.e., rewards that the child will find sufficiently reinforcing).
- Set consistent limits concerning which behaviors will receive rewards.
- Make the program simple and fun.
- Make the steps small.
- Monitor the charts carefully.

- Follow through with the rewards immediately.
- Avoid mixing rewards with punishment.
- Gradually replace rewards with social approval.
- Revise the program as the behaviors and rewards change.

While reward programs may seem simple, there are, in fact, many pitfalls to be avoided if they are to be effective. The therapist will need to spend time reviewing charts and trouble-shooting issues that arise as parents begin these programs.

### Typical Questions and Concerns About Tangible Rewards

#### *Aren't you bribing children?*

When you give stickers or points or prizes, aren't you bribing children?

What is the difference between a bribe and a reward? A bribe is an attempt to produce the desired behavior; a reward is reinforcement for the desired behavior. Consider a father in a bank who says to his screaming child, "Eliza, you can have this chocolate bar, but stop screaming." Or a father whose child has been getting out of bed at night who says, "Sunjay, I'll give you this snack if you go back to bed afterwards." In these examples, the chocolate bar and the snack are bribes because they are given before the desired behavior has occurred. They are not contingent on the behavior, regardless of what the parent intended. In fact, bribes reinforce inappropriate behavior, since the "reward" (that is, the bribe) followed the inappropriate behavior. Ironically, parents are teaching their children that if they behave badly, they will be rewarded.

Rewards are given for positive behaviors after they have occurred. It is helpful for parents to remember the "first—then" principle. That is, *first* the child must behave appropriately or comply, *then* s/he gets the reward. In the bank example, Eliza's father could have said before going to the bank, "Eliza, if you stay by my side quietly in the bank, I will give you a chocolate bar when we are finished." Sunjay's father could have said, "If you stay in your bed all night without getting up, you can earn a special treat tomorrow after school." The parent gives the reward only after seeing the desired behavior.



### *Won't children become dependent on tangible rewards?*

I worry that my children may become dependent on such rewards to motivate them—and life doesn't always reward work with success in work. What happens when I want to get them off the reward system?

Parents often worry about using tangible rewards—or too many tangible rewards. They are concerned that instead of developing internal controls, their children will learn to behave correctly only for a “pay-off.” This is a legitimate concern and it could possibly happen in two kinds of situations. The first involves the parent who is “sticker dependent,” giving stickers or points for desirable behavior, but never providing social approval (attention and praise). In essence, this parent is teaching the child to perform for pay-offs rather than for the pleasure both parent and child feel about the accomplishments. The use of tangible rewards should be seen as a temporary measure to help children learn new behaviors. They must be accompanied by social rewards.

The second situation arises when the parent does not plan to phase out the tangible rewards and maintain the behaviors with social approval. In other words, the children are not given the message that the parent expects them to eventually be able to behave on their own without tangible rewards. For example, a parent might say to a child who has been earning stickers for making his bed in the morning, “You have been earning stickers every day for making your bed and that's great—now let's make the program even more fun. In order to get a sticker you have to make your bed and get your own breakfast each morning.” Once parents have taught the new behaviors, they can gradually phase out the tangible rewards and maintain them with social reinforcers. For instance, a parent might say, “Now that you are going pee in the toilet almost all the time, and earning lots of stickers, let's make the game more fun. Now you have to have dry pants for two days before earning a sticker.” Once the child is successful on a regular basis for two days, the interval can be extended to four days, and so forth, until stickers are no longer necessary. At that point, her mother may want to use stickers to help her with a different behavior. She could say, “You remember how well you did learning to go pee with the sticker game we played? Well, let's help you learn to get dressed in the mornings using stickers.” Thus, reward programs can be phased out and begun again for different behaviors.

An important aspect of a reward program is the message that accompanies the reward. Parents must communicate clearly that not only do they approve of their child's success, they also recognize that the child's effort—not the pay-off, *per se*—is responsible for the success. In this way, parents help strengthen the child's internal motivation and sense of competence.

### *Rewards which bankrupt parents or are earned too easily*

I can't afford these programs, I don't have the money to buy rewards.

Believe it or not, we have seen reward programs that almost bankrupted their planners. All children will want to include expensive items such as a bicycle or a trip to Disneyland on their reward menu. Some parents may give in and place such items on the list, either because they think their children will never earn enough points to get them or because they feel guilty and would like to be able to give them these things. Still others include expensive items because they have trouble setting limits with their children.

Even if parental motives are good, inclusion of unrealistic rewards is destructive to the program. All too often children do earn the required number of stickers or points. Parents then find themselves in the awkward position of either being unable to afford the reward, or of giving their children the reward but resenting it. In this case, children receive a mixed message about their parents' pleasure in the achievement of the goal. This defeats the purpose of a reward program and undermines the parents' credibility for future efforts to promote positive behaviors. Even when families can afford more expensive rewards, exclusive use of these teaches children to learn to expect big rewards for their successes. The emphasis is placed on the magnitude of the reward, rather than on the satisfaction and pride felt by both parent and child at the child's success.

Generally it is a good idea to set a limit on the expense of any one item on a list, such as two dollars or less, depending on what the family can afford. Children can be told this at the beginning. Although they will ask for expensive items and test the rules around this, in general inexpensive (or nonmaterial) things are more powerful reinforcers. Young children often like to earn time with parents, such as extra story time, or a trip to the park. Small food items such as raisins or candy, or the right to choose their favorite cereal or dessert can also be appealing. Older children like to earn money and special privileges such as extra television, having a friend overnight, using the telephone, and so forth.

### *Tangible reward programs don't work with my child*

My child is uninterested in tangible reward programs—I've made up charts for her before and she acts uninterested in the program. Aren't some children just not motivated by such things?

It is a rare child who is uninterested in rewards. Chances are that it is some other aspect of the program that is not working—most likely the behavioral expectations. Programs sometimes fail because too many negative behaviors are tackled at once; too many behavioral goals have been set. We have seen highly motivated parents start reward programs that included compliance to parental requests, not teasing siblings and peers, going to bed without an argument, and getting dressed on time in the mornings. Such programs are too complex. The pressure to succeed in many different areas of life may be so overwhelming that children give up before starting. Rather than “not motivated,” the child may be too discouraged.

Another drawback in specifying a number of behaviors is that it requires constant monitoring by the parents. To take just the first goal in our example, compliance to parental requests, for a parent to monitor compliance and noncompliance throughout a day will require a tremendous amount of effort, since these situations occur so frequently. Remember, if parents cannot realistically monitor their child's behavior and follow through with consequences, the best-designed program is bound to fail.

There are three main things to consider when deciding how many behaviors to help children learn at one time: the frequency with which each behavior occurs; the child's developmental stage; and the parent's ability to carry out the program. With regard to frequency, remember that behaviors such as noncompliance, whining, teasing, or arguing may occur often and therefore will require much parental supervision. Realistically, parents will not be able to focus on more than one such behavior at a time. On the other hand, behaviors such as dressing, brushing teeth, or wearing a seat belt in the car occur relatively infrequently and three or four of these could be included on a chart at the same time.

The second important point to consider is the developmental stage of the child. Young children require easily understandable programs that focus on one or two simple behaviors at a time. Learning to be compliant to parental requests or staying in bed at night are major developmental tasks for a young child. Each will require many repeated learning trials over time and much patience on the part of the parents. However, for older children (school-age and adolescent), tangible reward programs can become more complex because they can understand and remember them better. In addition, the problem behaviors at this stage usually occur less frequently and are easier to monitor. For a school-age child, therefore, it would not be unrealistic to establish a program that included points for completing various chores by a well-defined time, finishing homework without a reminder, and being dressed and ready for school in the mornings.

Evaluation of how much monitoring parents can realistically expect of themselves is the third factor in deciding which child behaviors to focus on. Even if a parent has no outside job, that parent is unlikely to be able to monitor child compliance throughout the day if she has more than one child at home. Therefore, she may want to choose a period of the day when she can focus on problem behaviors. For instance, she might decide to monitor a child's behavior for two hours when the baby naps, or in the morning when the older child is in school. On the other hand, a mother who is rushed to get ready for work in the morning and exhausted by evening may only have the energy to monitor problem behaviors every morning for half an hour. The therapist must make every effort to be sure that parents are setting up programs that are realistic for them—so that there is every chance for parents to be successful in their first efforts at behavior change.

Another possible reason that programs fail is that they focus exclusively on negative behaviors. Parents may clearly identify a negative behavior they want to eliminate, such as fighting. Their program outlines the rewards that their children will receive for going an hour without fighting. So far, so good; but the program has not gone far enough. While it tells children clearly what they should not do, it neither describes nor rewards the appropriate replacement behavior. Thus, in this example, inappropriate behavior is receiving more parental attention than appropriate behavior, and consequently behavior is likely to worsen.

It is important to help parents identify the positive behaviors that they want to replace the negative behaviors and to include them in the tangible reward program. Children should be rewarded for sharing and playing quietly together, as well as for going 60 minutes without getting into an argument with brothers and sisters. It is critical that the positive behaviors be spelled out at least as clearly as the behaviors that are to be eliminated.

### *Unrealistic goals*

I offered my child a new bike if he got an A in math, but that was totally unsuccessful.

One reason many reward programs fail is that parents set their behavioral expectations so high, with correspondingly difficult conditions for earning the reward, that their children feel that earning a reward is impossible and give up trying—or do not even try in the first place. A good reward program incorporates the small steps involved in achieving the goal. First, ask parents to observe how often the misbehaviors occur over several days. This baseline will be the key to establishing the right steps for their child.

For example, for the parent who is trying to motivate her child who has difficulty in math, it will be necessary to provide praise and reinforcement for each small step toward the desired goal of an "A". That means giving the child points for doing daily homework exercises correctly or for a good score on the week's math test, or even for individual problems done correctly. With this approach, the child has a good chance of becoming more confident of his/her math ability and eventually being successful. Remember, the idea is to make progress by small steps towards the desired goal.

### *Saving tangible rewards for special achievements*

I save big rewards for something really special—like getting all his math questions right. The problem is he hasn't earned anything yet.

Some parents save tangible rewards for their children's special achievements such as getting As on a report card, cleaning up the entire house, or being quiet during a two-day car trip. These are instances of setting too high a goal or making the steps too big. Not only do the parents wait too long to give the rewards, but they reserve rewards for perfection. As mentioned above, if parents expect perfection in order to reward their child, it is unlikely that s/he will ever earn a reward. This gives their children the message that everyday behaviors and everyday efforts do not really count.

Help parents think about giving small, frequent rewards. For example, parents who want a quieter car trip might prepare a surprise bag (crayons, books, puzzles, games) to be opened every 80 to 100 miles if their children have been quiet and there have been no fights. Such rewards can help satisfy the children's need for stimulation during a long car ride. Certainly parents can plan rewards for special achievements, but they should also use them for smaller steps along the way, such as doing math homework, putting away toys, sharing, sleeping all night, and going to the bathroom. Only by rewarding the smaller steps can the larger goals of good grades, consistent compliance, or good relationships with friends be accomplished.

### *Rewards seem to cause more misbehavior*

This reward system has caused a lot more problems in my house—now he demands rewards to do something or comes to me arguing to me that he has earned a sticker. And when his sister earned a prize for her sticker chart, he ripped his chart off the wall and threw a giant fit.

It is not unusual for parents of conduct-disordered children to develop power struggles with their children around their sticker charts because of their difficulties with limit setting. If rewards are resulting in more misbehavior, the parent has lost control of their reward program. Something is undermining the reinforcing effect of the reward.

There are several ways parents can lose control of their reward program. The first is by rewarding "almost" performance—that is, giving rewards to children when they have not actually done the required behavior or earned the required number of points. This usually happens because children argue for them, claiming that they have done everything required. Unfortunately, it undermines the rules of the contract as well as parents' authority. It is also likely to result in the children escalating their begging and debating with parents over the attainment of points. Instead of a behavior problem being solved, a new one—excessive arguing—is created. A second difficulty occurs if parents leave the stickers and/or rewards around the house so the children have access to them. Why work for the reward if you can get your hands on it directly? Lack of follow-through can be a third problem. This happens when the children have followed the program but parents fail to notice the positive behaviors or forget to give them the stickers. When rewards do not follow promptly on the heels of the behavior, their reinforcing value is minimal. (The same is true when parents are inconsistent about rewarding desired behavior.)

Tangible reward programs require a lot of work on the part of parents in order to be effective! Parents must consistently monitor their children's behavior in order to determine whether they have earned stickers or points. Parents should give stickers to children who *claim* they performed a specified behavior (such as sharing) only if the parents have observed the behavior or know with certainty that it was done. If parents and children are working on high-frequency problems such as noncompliance to requests, no teasing, or whining for 15 minutes, then a great deal of vigilance will be required. Rewards are most effective if they are given immediately after the desired behavior is performed. Also, in order for these programs to work, parents must hold firm on their expectations. All children will test the limits and try to see if they can get rewards for less work. That is natural, but it means that parents must be prepared for this testing, stay committed to the plan or "contract" and ignore any arguments or pleading when their children have not earned enough points. Finally, parents need to control access to the rewards. Prizes and stickers should be hidden and the awarding of points and stickers determined by parents, not their children.

### *Handling disappointment*

Some days my child hasn't been able to earn anything and he gets very upset, so sometimes I just give him a point so he will feel better. Is that a problem?

What happens when parents put a lot of effort into setting up a reward program but their children fail to earn points? The parent may be tempted to respond to the child with criticism or lectures on trying harder. Unfortunately, not only does this give children a discouraging message about their ability (which could become a self-fulfilling prophecy), but the negative attention and ensuing power struggle could inadvertently reinforce misbehavior or noncompliance with the program. In other words, the child would get more pay-off for not doing the program than for doing it.

If a child fails to earn points or stickers, it is best for the parent to say calmly, "You didn't get one this time, but I'm sure you'll earn some next time." Parents can predict their positive expectations for the future. However, if the child continues to have difficulties earning points, parents should make sure that they have not made the steps too big or unrealistic.

### *Using loss of rewards as a punishment for children*

If my child is bad I take away his points—the only problem is now he has minus points.

Well, I give green tokens for good behaviors and red tokens for bad behaviors.

Some parents create tangible reward programs and then mix in punishment. For instance, a child may receive stickers for sharing and have them taken away for fighting. The stickers then take on negative rather than positive associations. This approach can be even more problematic if the child is left with a negative balance. If the most that a child can hope for from good behavior is to get out of "debt," all positive incentive for good behavior is gone. The natural outcome is for the child to become discouraged and abandon all efforts to change.

It is important for parents to keep their reward program separate from their discipline program. They should not remove earned points or rewards as punishment, because this will defeat the purpose of the program, which is to give attention to appropriate behaviors. The parent who gives green tokens for good behavior and red for bad is giving attention and reinforcement to both good and bad behaviors. Instead, the idea is for the positive behaviors to have a positive response and the negative behaviors to be

ignored or disciplined with logical consequences. If parents want to use privilege removal as a discipline technique, they should keep off the reward menu any privileges they foresee withdrawing (e.g., TV time, use of bicycle).

### **LIMIT-SETTING**

Once we have taught parents of conduct-problem children the importance of using play, praise, and rewards for promoting more appropriate behaviors in their children, then the therapist can help parents learn how to decrease inappropriate behavior through effective limit-setting. Indeed, research indicates that families who have few clearly communicated standards or rules are more likely to have children who misbehave.

However, while clear limit-setting is essential in helping children behave more appropriately, it is also important to remember that all children will test their parents' rules and standards. Research shows that normal children fail to comply with their parents' requests about one-third of the time. Young children will argue, scream, or throw temper tantrums when a toy is taken away or a desired activity prohibited. School-age children, too, will argue or protest when barred from something they want. This is normal behavior, and a healthy expression of a child's need for independence and autonomy. What makes the oppositional defiant or conduct-disordered child different from the normal child is that s/he is refusing to comply with a parent's requests about two-thirds of the time—that is, the parent is engaged in a power struggle with his/her child over getting him/her to do something the majority of the time. This high rate of noncompliance makes it very difficult for parents to socialize their children adequately.

### **Why Do Children Resist Parents' Requests?**

As we have said, children test parents' rules not only in order to express their individuality, but also to see whether their parents are going to be consistent. It is only by breaking a rule that children can determine whether it is actually a rule or just a one-time command. Only consistent consequences for misbehavior on the part of parents will teach children that good behavior is expected. If parents' rules have been inconsistent in the past, if they have not enforced their rules or have enforced them inconsistently, then children's protests and noncompliance will escalate.

Such children have learned from experience that if they protest long enough and hard enough, they can get their parents to back down.

The therapist needs to help parents expect and be prepared for this testing. When such protests happen, parents should be helped to understand that these are not personal attacks, but learning experiences, ways that their children can explore the limits of their environment and learn which behaviors are appropriate and which are inappropriate. Therapists can help parents recognize the importance of consistency by explaining that consistent limit-setting and predictable responses from parents help give children a sense of stability and security. They can be assured that children who feel a sense of security regarding the limits of their environment have less need constantly to test it. Of course, the therapist needs to be sensitive to the fact that negative life stressors, such as marital discord, single parenting, poverty, unemployment, depression, and lack of support may make it difficult for parents to be consistent. However, strengthening parents' sense of competence regarding the way they limit-set and respond to children's protests can help buffer the disruptive effects of these stressors on parenting skills. The following are the major points we highlight:

- Make commands short and to the point.
- Give one command at a time.
- Use commands that clearly specify the desired behavior.
- Be realistic in your expectations and use age-appropriate commands.
- Don't use "stop" commands.
- Use "do" commands.
- Make commands polite.
- Don't give unnecessary commands.
- Don't threaten children.
- Use "when-then" commands.
- Give children options whenever possible.
- Give children ample opportunity to comply.

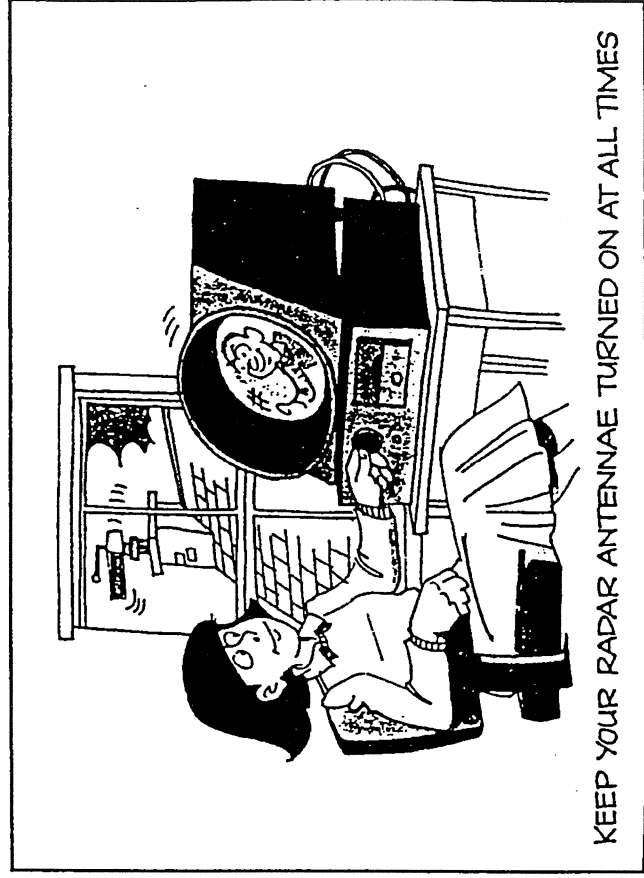
- Praise compliance or provide consequences for noncompliance.
- Give warnings and helpful reminders.
- Support your partner's commands.
- Strike a balance between parental and child control.
- Encourage problem-solving with children.

### Typical Questions and Concerns About Limit-setting

#### *Should the parent always be in charge?*

Isn't it better for children to be free to do their own problem-solving and learn from their mistakes rather than to impose a lot of rules and limits on children? Won't this approach help children to develop their own internal controls—and won't adult-imposed limits create children who rely on adults to come up with the limits?

Sometimes parents perceive limit-setting as an interference with children's right to self-determination or their need to learn to work out problems for



KEEP YOUR RADAR ANTENNAE TURNED ON AT ALL TIMES

do—all day long. My problem is not in failing to limit-set—could I be doing too much limit-setting?

Few parents are aware of the actual number of commands they give their children. Would it surprise you to hear that the average parent gives 17 commands in half an hour? And in families where children have conduct problems, the number rises to an average of 40 commands in half an hour! Moreover, research has shown that the children of parents who give an excessive number of commands develop more behavior problems. Frequent commands, then, do not improve a child's behavior. For one thing, if parents are giving 20 to 40 commands in half an hour, it is impossible for them to follow through with each command. The result is that confusing messages are given to children about the importance of commands: sometimes the commands are important and need to be followed, and other times they are dropped by the parents. How is the child to know which are the important commands to follow? Another reason frequent commands are not helpful is that usually the rapid commands are being given at the time when the child is being oppositional and noncompliant. This parental attention (in the form of repeated commands) actually reinforces the child's noncompliance. Therefore, it is essential for parents to evaluate both the number and type of commands they give their children and to reduce them until they are giving only necessary commands, commands they are willing to follow through on with consequences for noncompliance.

Some parents tend to give a command when the child is already engaged in the action or to repeat a command even when the child has begun complying. For example, the parent tells the child to get her shoes on when she is already in the process of putting on her shoes. This tends to sound like criticism to the child; it implies that she is not complying when in fact she is complying. Thus it undermines her efforts to be compliant. Other parents give commands about issues that are not actually important to them. They might say, "Color that frog green," "Wear your blue shirt," or "Finish your dessert." Does the parent really care about these issues? If the issue is not an important one, then children should be allowed to decide such matters for themselves rather than become involved in a battle of wills with their parents. The key idea here is that parents should reserve their commands for the important issues.

Before giving a command, parents should think about whether the issue is really an important one, and whether they are willing to follow through with the consequences if their child does not comply. One exercise that can be helpful is to write down the important rules for their family. Parents will probably find that they have between five and ten that are "unbreakable." These should be posted on the fridge or in some other place where

themselves. But to take a concrete example, if two children are fighting over a book and the parent does not step in to set limits on the fighting, the arguing will probably continue and result in continued arguing and the more aggressive child getting the book. Therefore the aggressive child will be reinforced for his inappropriate behavior—after all, he got what he wanted—and the other child will be reinforced for giving in because the fighting ceased when he backed down. In situations like this one, the parental role is to set clear limits, to protect children from hurting each other and from being hurt. Especially in the case of seat belts, hitting, not taking bicycles out onto the street, for instance, it should be obvious that parents need to exert firm control over their children. But also in areas such as television watching, parents need to be in charge. Limits should be stated as absolutes and in a positive, polite, and firm manner.

There are other situations, of course, where parents can give control entirely over to their children. Why not allow children to have control over decisions such as what clothes to wear, whether or not to eat all the food on their plates, what stories to read before bed? Allowing children to be "in charge" of these decisions helps them develop a sense of autonomy and allows them to learn from experiencing the consequences of their own choices. Under yet other circumstances, parents can share control with their children by involving them in problem-solving. Here the parents' role is to help children understand different perspectives and to encourage them to come up with alternative solutions. While this problem-solving approach will be a slow process, and becomes effective only when they are older, introducing negotiation and discussion with children as young as four or five can provide excellent early training. For instance, there are times when parents can involve their children in the decision regarding a rule. Consider two preschool children who are fighting because they both want to play with the bubbles and there is only one bubble blower. Their father might respond by giving a command: "First, Doug, you will use it. Then, Susie, it will be your turn." But an alternative approach—one that involves sharing control—would be for the father to involve both children in deciding how to handle the problem. He might say, "There is only one bubble blower and two of you. What should we do? Do you have any ideas?" If Doug and Susie come up with some solutions, then Dad can reinforce their problem-solving ability. By avoiding the authoritarian approach, he can encourage his children to find their own solutions to a problem and help them learn to think through different solutions.

### *Can a parent do too much limit-setting?*

I feel that I am limit-setting—or rather yelling and telling the kids what not to

all the family can see them. In this way, everyone, including babysitters, will know what the rules are. Such a list might include:

- Seat belts must be worn in the car at all times.
- Hitting is not allowed.
- Throwing is not allowed indoors.
- TV must be off until 7 o'clock.
- Food must stay in the kitchen.

Once the therapist has helped parents clarify the important rules, parents will find not only that they become more precise when stating the rules and the commands that enforce the rules, but also that they are able to reduce the number of other, unnecessary commands. Thus with fewer and more precise commands, they will find it easier to follow through with consequences for the child. The result is that their children will learn that parental commands are important and that compliance is expected.

### *Isn't it better to "disguise" or "soften" commands?*

My child is more compliant when I disguise my commands. If I give an order, he rears back. So I say, "Oh my goodness, your coat is on the floor." Sometimes I get him to do what I want by demanding the opposite, for example, "You're not going to put away the toys."

While some parents of conduct-problem children are authoritarian and have too many rules and commands, others avoid establishing any rules at all. They feel guilty when they tell their children to do something that their children might object to. Parental guilt can occur for many reasons: guilt because of divorce or a distressed marriage, guilt because the parent works full time and has precious little time with the child, guilt because the child has a chronic disease or developmental delay, guilt because the child was adopted or had a parent that died and so forth. In these cases, guilt over the particular family problem can make the parent somewhat overprotective and wanting to prevent the child from experiencing any further pain or distress. So in order to ease their guilt, these parents disguise their commands with vague and indirect language. Some typical

examples of vague or nonspecific commands are, "Watch out," "Be careful," "Be nice," "Be good," "Knock it off," and "Just a minute." These statements can be confusing to a child, because they do not specify the expected behavior. Indirect commands are phrased in such ways as, "Don't you think you should . . ." or "It would be nice if you . . ." or "Why don't we . . . ?" or "How about . . . ?" This form of command can confuse a child because it is unclear whether the behavior is optional or expected.

Another type of "disguised" command is the one that a parent states as a descriptive comment. For instance, Delia says to her daughter, "Oh Denise, you're spilling your milk." Or Derek's father looks out the window and says, "Derek, your bike is still in the yard!" In addition to lacking clarity, these statements contain an implied criticism. Not only is it difficult to get a child to comply with statements, as opposed to direct commands ("Hold the glass with both hands" "Put your bike away"), but the critical aspect of such statements is likely to breed resentment.

Still another type of "softened" command is the "Let's" command: "Let's wash the toy dishes," "Let's get ready for bed." This kind of command can be confusing for young children if their parents have no intention of becoming involved. For instance, a mother who has been playing with her two sons in the kitchen now wants them to put away the toys. She says, "Let's put the toys away." Unless she is willing to help them, they probably will not cooperate and she will become cross with them; but the fault lies with her command, which does not clearly convey her expectations. It is important for parents to be specific about the behavior they want from their child when they give a command. If Kim asks her mother to play with her, instead of the mother saying "Just a minute," she might say, "Wait five minutes, then I'll play with you." Instead of telling Robbie to "Be careful" when he is spilling juice, the parent might say, "Use both hands to pour the juice into your glass." Instead of "Let's put the toys away," the parent should say, "It's time for you to put the toys away."

Paradoxical commands such as, "Don't eat those peas" (when the parent in fact wants the child to eat the peas), may work in the short run because they provide some humor and cajoling. However, such mixed message commands have the potential of backfiring. Since in this instance, children are actually noncomplying to the parents' stated request, the parent is actually teaching the child to noncomply and to do what the parent is asking them not to do. There may be situations in the future where the parent truly *does not* want the child to do something and the child does not believe him/her. (This is the parental version of the "Boy Who Cried Wolf" situation.)



### *“Chain” commands and “repeat” commands*

I have to ask my child at least 10 times to get him to go to bed or to get dressed in the mornings. I feel like such a nag but he doesn't seem to hear me when I make requests.

Sometimes parents string commands together in a chain, without giving their child time to comply with the first command before going on to the next. For young children, this can result in information overload. For example, Eva tells her four-year-old, “It's time for bed. I want you to put your markers away, pick up your papers, go upstairs and get your pajamas, on, and then brush your teeth.” A series of commands such as this is difficult for children to remember, especially active children with a short attention span. Most can retain only one or two things at a time. Another problem with rapid commands is that the parent is not able to praise the child for complying with any of the individual commands, so that the child is not reinforced. Eventually, this results in more noncompliant behavior, partly because the child simply cannot comply with everything, partly because there is no reinforcement for compliance.

A related type of communication problem involves the parent repeating the same command over and over again as if the child has not heard it. Many parents repeat the same order four or five times, and their children quickly learn that there is no real need to comply until the fifth time. Moreover, chain commands reinforce noncompliant behavior by the amount of attention conveyed by the constant repetition. Instead of repeating commands as if they expect their child to ignore them, parents should state the command once, pronouncing it slowly and then waiting to see whether the child will comply. If it helps parents to wait, they might want to count silently as they watch to see how their child will respond. This will help parents resist the impulse to nag—or curb their habit of nagging. Then, if the child complies, they can praise the response and if not, they can enforce a consequence.

### *Aren't angry commands and threats useful at times?*

It's not until I get really angry or threaten to take away something that my child will finally do what I want.

If parents are angry when they give a command, they often inject criticism, a putdown, or other negative comment. Sometimes these are included with a command as a way of venting frustration because the child has not done something that the parent has asked him to do many times before. Billy's

Dad might say, “Billy, why won't you sit still for once in your life!” Or he might tell Billy to sit still in a sarcastic tone of voice, “Can't you do any better than that? What a baby!” Or, “I'm sick of this mess—you're a slob—clean this up.”

Parents need to avoid criticizing their children when they give a command. Negative commands cause children to feel incompetent and discounted. They react by becoming defensive and less inclined to comply. Children's feeling about themselves as worthwhile people should be considered at least as important as obedience. Commands should be stated positively, politely, and with respect. Otherwise, the child may choose not to comply as a way of retaliating for a parent's criticism and as a way of defending their own self-worth.

### *“Stop” commands and prohibitions versus positive commands and permissions*

Why should commands always be stated positively? Isn't it better to give a clear message about the misbehavior?

Another type of negative command is a “stop” command. A stop command is a type of negative statement that tells a child what not to do. “Stop shouting,” “Don't do that,” “Quit it,” “Shut up,” “Cut it out,” and “Enough of that” are all stop commands. Not only are these critical of the child, but they focus on the misbehavior instead of telling the child how to behave correctly.

Sports psychologists have found that if the coach tells the pitcher, “Don't throw a fast ball,” a fast ball is just what the pitcher is likeliest to throw—not out of orneriness, but simply because that is what the coach's words have made him visualize. It is worth making every effort, therefore, for parents to give positive commands that specify the behavior they want from their child. Instead of saying, “Stop yelling,” or “Stop splashing,” the parent should say, “Please speak quietly,” or “Keep the water inside the tub.” Whenever a child does something the parent does not like, the parent should try to think of what alternative behavior *s/he* wants and then phrase the command to focus on that positive behavior.

A related issue is that of prohibitions versus permission. Many times parents' commands prohibit their children from doing something they want to do, such as playing with friends or watching more television. In such instances parents tell their children what they cannot do, but forget to tell them what they can do instead. When children feel rigidly restricted and prohibited from fun activities, they may react with protests and non-compliance. Commands that prohibit a child from doing something



should include permission or suggestions for alternative activities. A parent might say, "You may not watch TV now, but you can play with this puzzle with me," or "You can't play with Daddy's tools, but you can build a fort in the basement." Giving an alternative to the prohibited behavior can help reduce power struggles because, instead of staying with the issue under dispute, the parent is turning the child's attention towards another activity, one which the child is free to engage in.

### *Decreasing resistance through warnings*

My child hates being interrupted when she is working on something—how can I deal with her resistance to limit-setting?

Sometimes children react adversely to parental commands when they are given abruptly, without any warning. Picture this scene: Jenny is totally absorbed in building a castle with her blocks. Suddenly her father walks into the room and tells her to go to bed. What happens next? Probably much protest and resistance from an unhappy Jenny.

Whenever feasible, it is helpful to give a reminder or warning prior to a command, in order to prepare for the transition. If Jenny's Dad had noticed that she was engrossed in playing with her blocks and said, "In two more minutes, it will be time to put your blocks away," Jenny would probably not have made a fuss. There are many ways to give warnings. For young children who do not understand the concept of time, a timer can be helpful. Then parents can say, "When the timer goes off, it will be time to put these blocks away." For older children, parents can refer to a clock.

Children's requests and preferences should be considered, as well. For instance, if an eight-year-old is busy reading a book, the parent might ask, "How many more pages are there before the end of your chapter?" If the child replies, "One more page," the parent could say, "Okay, when you finish that page, I want you to set the table." When parents are responsive to their children's wishes and give them some lead time, they are more likely to obtain compliance.

### *How important is consistency?*

How important is it to be consistent with limit-setting? I mean, if you say bedtime is 8 p.m., how harmful is it to then let a child stay up until 9 p.m. one night?

Effective limit-setting does not require parents to be authoritarian or to enforce the rules rigidly regardless of circumstances. Rather, the emphasis

is on parents thinking carefully before giving a command to be sure that it is necessary and that they are prepared to follow through with the consequences. When thinking about commands, it is important to strike a balance between a child's choices and adult rules. Once a parent has decided a command or household rule is important, then s/he should be consistent in following through with its enforcement. If parents are consistent with their commands, then children will learn to accept them and their initial protests will subside. On the other hand, if parents are inconsistent about the importance of their rules and fail to follow through with commands, children will learn to protest and test them more and more often.

Consistency is a virtue, but not when it becomes an inflexible policy. For instance, if the parent's household rule is an 8 p.m. bedtime, and one night the parent's usually reserved child finally opens up five minutes before bedtime, a competent parent will realize this is a good time to make an exception to the rule and let the child stay up later to talk. Inconsistency, in this case, is justified by the parent's sensitivity to the unique needs of the child at that moment. On the other hand, if the parent found that delaying bedtime with conversations was becoming a pattern every night, then the parent would need to reenforce the rule regarding bedtime. Because of the initial inconsistency about the importance of an 8 p.m. bedtime hour, the child would undoubtedly protest loudly the first few nights—but with a consistent response would eventually settle down to the routine. However, if parents are aware that they are being inconsistent or making an exception to the usual rule, it can help to explain this to the children so that they are prepared ahead of time for things to resume to normal on subsequent days. Such an approach can help minimize some of the costs of inconsistency.

## TEACHING PARENTS ABOUT IGNORE SKILLS

Oppositional and conduct-disordered children use high rates of irritating behaviors such as whining, teasing, arguing, swearing, and tantrums. These inappropriate behaviors are usually not dangerous to the children or other people but usually lead to peer rejection and isolation, which further decrease the self-esteem of these children. If parents are able to ignore these misbehaviors systematically, they can often be eliminated.

The therapist will find that ignoring is one of the most difficult approaches for parents to use. Many parents will argue that ignoring is not discipline. Thus, the therapist needs to help parents understand why this approach works and what the principle is behind its effectiveness. The

rationale for ignoring is straightforward. Children's behavior is maintained by the attention it receives. Even negative parental attention such as nagging, yelling, and scolding can be rewarding to children. Parents who ignore their children when they behave inappropriately give no payoff for continuing misbehavior. If the ignoring is consistently maintained, children will eventually stop what they are doing, and as they receive approval and attention for appropriate behaviors, they will learn that it is more beneficial to behave appropriately than inappropriately.

While ignoring is highly effective with this class of behaviors, it is also probably the hardest technique for parents to carry out. The following are the key points we emphasize:

- Avoid eye contact and discussion while ignoring.
- Physically move away from the child but stay in the room if possible.
- Be subtle when ignoring.
- Be consistent.
- Combine distractions for the child with ignoring.
- Return attention to the child as soon as misbehavior stops.
- Limit the number of behaviors to ignore.
- Give attention to the child's positive behaviors.

### Typical Questions and Concerns About Using the Ignore Approach

#### *Isn't ignoring children's misbehavior unrealistic and irresponsible?*

I just can't see ignoring a child when he or she is smart-talking—being defiant and disrespectful. Why let a child verbally abuse you? These behaviors need discipline!

Frequently parents of behavior-problem children do not feel that ignoring is sufficient discipline. However, ignoring is an effective discipline approach because it maintains a positive parent-child relationship based on respect rather than fear. Ignoring teaches children that there is no

payoff (such as parental attention in the form of gaze reactions or interactions, including power struggles) for inappropriate behaviors. When parents do not visibly react to these misbehaviors, their children lose their motive for continuing to use them. And when children come to realize that swearing and talking back do not get a reaction from their parents, whereas asking nicely does consistently result in approval and positive attention, they will begin to substitute positive behaviors for their negative ones. Moreover, when a parent ignores swearing or screaming instead of yelling at or criticizing the child, the parent is showing the child that s/he can maintain self-control in the face of conflict and anger—an effective model.

#### *How long should you ignore?*

I can do the ignoring approach for only so long—then I explode and yell at him.

Sometimes well-intentioned parents start to ignore misbehavior such as tantrums or arguments without being prepared for their child's response. For most children, when ignored, will initially react with an increase in negative behaviors. They are attempting to see if they can get their parents to back down. For instance, five-year-old Megan wants to go outside. She argues with her mother about this for several minutes. Finally her mother tells her she may not go outside and proceeds to ignore any protests. Megan escalates her demands to see if she can get what she wants. This goes on for 10 more minutes until her mother, exasperated and worn down by the arguments, says, "All right, go outside!" By giving in for the short-term benefit of making life more peaceful, the mother has created a long-term problem: Megan has learned that if she argues long and hard enough, she will get what she wants. Thus, her inappropriate behavior has been reinforced.

Remember to warn parents that when they first start ignoring a misbehavior, it will usually get worse. If they are going to use this approach, which is powerfully effective, they must be prepared to wait out this period if the behavior is to improve. If they give in, their children will learn that persisting in the misbehavior is an effective way to get what they want.

Choosing to ignore misbehavior does not mean that there is nothing positive a parent can do to improve the situation. In fact, failure to provide distractions or suggestions for alternative, more appropriate behavior can lock parents and children into a power struggle and cause the children to prolong the misbehaviors. Consider this scenario: Tony asks his father to buy him a toy while they are out shopping. His father refuses and Tony starts yelling and screaming. His father effectively ignores this

by walking away, and in a couple of minutes the screaming subsides. At this point, Tony's father might try to distract him with a new activity or something else to think about. Instead, he just waits for Tony to come and join him. Tony, feeling ignored, begins to scream again in an attempt to gain his father's attention.

Sometimes parents can use distraction to reduce their children's negative reaction to being ignored. Distractions are particularly useful with two- and three-year-olds, but they also work with older children. Once Tony stopped screaming, his father could have told him that when he saved up enough money from his allowance, he could buy the toy he wanted. The principle is to ignore the child's misbehavior in response to being told he cannot have something, and then distract him as soon as he starts behaving more appropriately. Of course, if the child misbehaves again in response to the distraction, the parent will need to resume ignoring.

### *What if you can't ignore the misbehavior?*

I can't ignore foul language. He verbally abuses me, and I don't think it's right to let him do that to me. It fills me with such rage that after ignoring it a couple of times I just lose it and yell at him.

Sometimes parents try to ignore a misbehavior that really bothers them. Then as the misbehavior escalates, they suddenly feel they cannot stand another minute of it and they explode with anger. There are several problems here. First, these parents wait until they are boiling with anger and about to lose control. Second, they give the child no warning. Third, this approach does not teach children anything except an explosive response to frustration.

Parents may not even be aware of the mounting anger that certain of their children's inappropriate behaviors trigger in them until they explode. The therapist can help parents learn to monitor their reactions to particular misbehaviors. Then, if parents find that swearing or whining (or any other behavior) triggers a strong emotional response, they may decide that it is not possible to ignore this behavior for very long. If this is the case, then the therapist should suggest the "Three Strikes and You're Out" Rule: parents tell their children that interrupting (or swearing) three times will result in a Time Out. The first time a child interrupts, the parent might say, "That was your first interruption." Then "That was the second interruption," and finally "That was your third interruption. Go to Time Out." This approach warns the child that the behavior is inappropriate and alerts the parent to his/her mounting annoyance level. With this approach, the

parent is clear about exactly what type of behavior will result in Time Out and models an effective, calm, and rational approach to a problem behavior.

### *What if I am ignoring my child but others are not?*

I tried ignoring his tantrums, but all the other children in the classroom laugh at him and at home my husband refuses to ignore such misbehavior—so what good does it do for me to ignore?

This is an important point. If the child's misbehavior is being reinforced or given attention by other children or adults in the room, then the parent's ignoring is probably going to be ineffective. In such a case, the parent needs to remove the child to another place where the child can be ignored effectively (as in a Time Out). Otherwise, another strategy should be used, such as telling the child s/he will lose a privilege or have to do a chore. Meanwhile, the parent should be sure to minimize the amount of attention the child is getting. Parents may also want to consider informing relatives, babysitters, neighbors, teachers, etc. ahead of time of the strategy and the targeted misbehaviors. If parents can get the cooperation of relatives and teachers to ignore some of these annoying behaviors, while reinforcing those positive behaviors that are opposite to the ones they are ignoring, then they will be likely to get quicker results.

### *How can you ignore a child who clings onto you?*

I find that when I ignore his tantrums and yelling, he gets worse and starts to pull on my body and follow me around screaming. Sometimes he even ends up breaking something. It drives me crazy and I explode.

Sometimes it is reasonable for parents to ignore their child's misbehavior by walking out of the room. This can be an effective technique if the child is clinging and physically demanding attention from the parent. However, the difficulty with leaving the room is that the parent will not be able to pay attention to and reinforce appropriate child behavior when it occurs. When ignoring a clinging child, it may help for the parent physically to move away—to stand up and walk to another part of the room. This way the parent can monitor their child's behavior and reinforce her/him as soon as s/he stops misbehaving. If the child follows the parent, holding to his/her legs or arms, it may then be necessary to leave the room. One advantage to leaving the room for a few minutes is that it gives the parent

time to calm down, to take a deep breath, and to regain perspective and focus on what is essential. However, the parent should return as soon as possible, in order to be able to reinforce appropriate behaviors when they occur.

### *Threatening the ultimate ignore?*

Okay, well, if ignoring works then I decided to use the ultimate ignore. He wouldn't get dressed and I asked him a hundred times so I finally said, "If you don't get your shoes on I will leave without you." Well, he wasn't ready so I got in the car and drove down the street. When I came back he was dressed and standing crying on the street—so it worked.

Parents who take ignoring to an extreme and threaten to leave their children—or, as in this case, actually do leave—believe that the fear caused by their leaving will mobilize the children into being more compliant. While such threats may get Ryan out through the door, they have several long-term disadvantages. In order to continue to be effective, all threats need to be backed up with the threatened consequence. Once a child realizes the parent is only pretending to leave, s/he will respond with similar threats: "Go ahead and leave me. See if I care!" The parent is then left in a powerless position because the child has called his/her bluff. Not to leave is to fail to follow through. Yet leaving is really no option, since a young child is not safe alone at home. The emotional hazard is also great, as threats to abandon children make them feel insecure and lead to poor self-esteem. Furthermore, parents are providing a powerful model, namely, avoiding conflict by running away from it. The child may begin threatening to run away or may leave home to test the power of this tactic for getting what s/he wants.

Parents should be cautioned never to threaten to leave or abandon their children, no matter how great the temptation. There are more effective strategies for inducing compliance. If parents can muster the self-control to ignore the behavior that makes them feel so angry, their child will begin to behave more appropriately, and the parent's frustration will decrease. If parents cannot use ignoring, they may need to try another discipline technique such as Time Out, chores, or loss of privileges. While these strategies will take more of parents' time in the short run, unlike leaving they teach children that the parent-child relationship is secure, regardless of conflict. These strategies are far preferable because they are based on respect, rather than on fear of abandonment.

## TEACHING PARENTS ABOUT EFFECTIVE "TIME OUT" SKILLS

In the initial weeks of intervention, the therapists' main focus is to teach the parents the importance of providing the problem child with ongoing and regular communication and expression of parental love, support, and understanding. This provides the foundation for the child's ongoing emotional and social development. Next, the therapists teach parents how to provide clear limits and consequences for their children's misbehavior. Many parents have tried spanking, lecturing, criticism, and expressions of disapproval when their children are aggressive and noncompliant. However, research has shown that these are ineffective methods of discipline and usually parents of aggressive children find themselves spiraling into more and more spanking and yelling in order to get their children to respond. In fact, nagging, criticizing, hitting, shouting, or even reasoning with children while they misbehave are forms of parental attention and therefore actually reinforce the particular misbehavior; they result in children learning to nag, criticize, hit, shout, or argue in response to their parents.

We teach parents to use Time Out for high-intensity problems, such as fighting, defiance, hitting, and destructive behavior. The therapist can explain to parents that Time Out is actually an extreme form of parental ignoring in which children are removed for a brief period from all sources of positive reinforcement, especially adult attention. Here are the key points we emphasize:

- Monitor anger in order to avoid exploding suddenly; give warnings.
- Don't threaten Time Out unless prepared to follow through.
- Give five-minutes Time Out with two-minutes silence at the end.
- Ignore child while in Time Out.
- Be prepared for testing.
- Hold children responsible for messes in Time Out.
- Support a partner's use of Time Out.
- Carefully limit the number of behaviors for which Time Out is used.

- Don't rely exclusively on Time Out—combine with other techniques, such as ignoring, logical consequences, and problem-solving.
- Expect repeated learning trials.
- Use nonviolent approaches such as loss of privileges as back-up to Time Out.
- Use personal Time Out to relax and refuel energy.
- Be polite.
- Build up “bank account” with praise, love, and support.

Parents are often quite resistant to using this method, principally because Time Out has several short-term disadvantages. First, it is inconvenient: it requires advance planning and a special place to conduct the Time Out. Second, it is time-consuming and requires that parents keep themselves under control for a long period of time. Third, it is frustrating for parents because the child's misbehaviors may get worse before they get better, since children typically scream, bang on the walls, or break something during Time Out. Some parents resist Time Out because they do not think it results in enough remorse and pain from children, which they think are necessary for punishment to work effectively (some children even indicate they like Time Out!). Still other parents resist Time Out because they feel it represents rejection of the child. Conversely, many prefer spanking as the ultimate punishment because it is efficient and immediate, and most likely will stop the inappropriate behavior in the short term. The therapist's job will be to help parents understand how Time Out has more long-term advantages and is worth the extra effort in the short run.

### Typical Questions and Concerns About Time Out

#### *Isn't spanking preferable to Time Out?*

I think spanking is better than Time Out because it works to get my child to obey; it's quick and lets the child know I am in control. After all, I was spanked as a child and I turned out okay.

Spanking is commonly used by parents because it is quick and usually

stops the misbehavior in the short term. The problem with spanking is that it has long-term disadvantages. The first is that when a parent spans a child, s/he models an aggressive response to misbehavior; children who are spanked frequently learn to resort to aggressive responses when they are frustrated. Even worse, when parents spank, they are often out of control or feel out of control. Besides being a frightening experience for their children, this loss of control creates feelings of guilt in the parents once they calm down. They may then respond by overcompensating with gifts (sometimes causing a child to endure spankings for the sake of the rewards) or by avoiding any use of discipline in the future. Another difficulty with spanking is that it tends to “wipe the slate clean” for children, leaving them with no ongoing sense of remorse for misbehavior. Frequently, the result is children who are compliant and conforming in the parents' presence but who are likely to behave inappropriately elsewhere. Yet another result of spanking is that children learn to hide or lie about problems in order to avoid being hit: In fact, the more hurtful the discipline—whether it be degrading criticisms or physical punishment—the more devious and resistant children become.

The task for the therapist is to teach parents an ethical approach to discipline that simultaneously lets children know which behaviors are inappropriate, gives children the positive expectation that they will be able to do better next time, and conveys that they are deeply loved. Methods such as ignoring, logical consequences, loss of privileges, problem-solving, and Time Out are effective discipline approaches that meet these criteria. Besides its ethical advantages, Time Out offers several practical advantages over spanking. It models a nonviolent response to conflict, stops the conflict and frustration, provides a cooling-off period for both children and parents and maintains a respectful, trusting relationship in which children feel they can be honest with their parents about their problems and mistakes. Unlike spanking, Time Out also forces children to reflect and fosters the development of an internal sense of responsibility or conscience.

One of the ways we deal with parents' resistance is by means of a values clarification exercise. We have the parent group list the short-term advantages of spanking versus Time Out. Next we list and discuss the long-term advantages of spanking versus Time Out. Through this process parents come to realize that spanking has short-term advantages for the parent (not the child) and long-term disadvantages for both. On the other hand, Time Out has short-term disadvantages for the parent and long-term advantages for both. Parents' understanding that they are working towards a long-term solution rather than a short-term “quick fix” helps create a willingness to try alternative approaches.

### *Isn't Time Out psychologically harmful?*

I disagree with Time Out—it is harmful to children because parents are withdrawing their love, which is devastating for children.

Some parents avoid using Time Out because they want their relationships with their children, including discipline, to be democratic and equal. They believe that parents should never impose their authority or exercise their power over their children, and that reasoning with youngsters about their problems is preferable to putting them in Time Out. They may feel that Time Out is disrespectful to children and even a form of rejection, because it represents withdrawal of love.

First of all, it is important not to equate Time Out with a general style of child-rearing. Some parents are autocratic and expect complete obedience from their children. Such people may use Time Out to crush children's independence, creativity, problem-solving, and questioning of values. For example, they may use Time Out frequently throughout the day and for minor offenses. Such parents might say in a critical tone of voice, "What is wrong with you? You never remember to pick up your things—You are driving me crazy! Go to Time Out." This approach does not help children to believe in themselves and inspires hostility from the child. Other parents are democratic; they solicit children's input and explain why certain behaviors are appropriate or inappropriate. These parents may use Time Out, not as punishment, but to teach children that there are consequences for misbehaving and that it is necessary to calm down before handling a conflict situation. For example, such a parent would say to the child who has just hit his brother, "I can see you are angry about your brother using your toy, but hitting is not okay in our family; you need to use your words. Please go to Time Out for five minutes." Remind parents that democratic child-rearing does not mean unlimited freedom with no rules, but rather freedom within limits. These limits have to be set and imposed, and within most families they usually include not hurting people or destroying things and cooperating in a respectful way with each other.

Secondly, Time Out should not be perceived as a substitute for reasoning with children and teaching them. It is only one tool to be used briefly when a child's anger or frustration level is high. Later, when things calm down and the child is behaving appropriately, parents can model, teach, and talk about other more appropriate problem-solving behaviors. Time Out is only one type of discipline strategy, and discipline strategies (including Time Out, logical consequences, loss of privileges, and ignoring) are only one aspect of managing behavior. Parents must capitalize on the many opportunities to teach their children appropriate

behaviors—praising, encouraging, and building self-esteem whenever their children do something positive. Moreover, the parents' ability to model effective communication, conflict resolution, problem-solving, positive self-talk, playfulness, and empathy for another's feelings is integral to children's social and moral development. In a sense, what parents do is build up their family "bank account" with deposits of love, support, and understanding. Every now and again it will be necessary for a parent to temporarily make a "withdrawal" from the bank account and use Time Out. Therefore, it is important to keep the account constantly growing.

### *Isn't Time Out ineffective for some types of children?*

I've tried this Time Out stuff and it doesn't work—he just gets angrier and more destructive and misbehavior occurs again the next day. When he's in Time Out he has broken shelves and thrown things against the walls, which leaves holes in the wall. I don't think this is right.

Be sure to prepare parents for the possibility that when they first start using Time Out, the inappropriate behavior may get worse before it gets better. In fact, when some children are put in a Time Out room, they react violently by throwing things, breaking things, even hammering holes in the door. Some parents react by opening the door and spanking the child. Others refuse to use Time Out again for fear of getting the same response.

The therapist should explain that it is not uncommon for children to react strongly to Time Out, especially in the beginning. After all, if they can yell long and hard enough they may be able to get what they want—and if this has worked in the past to get a parent to back down, they will try long and hard enough until they are convinced that no matter what they do, such misbehavior results in no pay-off. On the other hand, they will discover that calming down quietly gets them out of Time Out sooner.

The therapist can help parents plan for possible difficulties with Time Out. If the child damages things in a room during a Time Out, parents can respond in several ways. First, the original command (if this is a Time Out for noncompliance) must be repeated. For example, if the child was in Time Out for not putting his bike away, then s/he will first have to put it away. Afterwards, s/he should be asked to clean up the Time Out room. If s/he has broken something, then s/he should be held responsible for paying for it out of his/her allowance or have some privilege removed for that day. If messes in Time Out are a frequent problem, then the parent may need to find a bare room (as bare as possible) or hallway which will be less interesting or reinforcing because it will provide a minimum of opportunities for making messes or breaking things.

### *Isn't Time Out too noisy to be used?*

I don't see how I could do Time Out: I live in an apartment with thin walls and if I put my son in Time Out he would scream violently so much that my neighbors would complain—they might even refer me to Child Protective Services. Already they complained to the landlord about the noise my son makes while he is playing.

A child yelling, screaming, swearing, and banging on the door during Time Out can be an exhausting experience for parents. It is difficult to listen to children misbehaving without feeling anxious, depressed, or angry, and wondering "Will she ever stop this?" or "What did I do wrong?" or "It can't be good for him to get so upset." It is also disconcerting for neighbors to listen to a child screaming in an apartment when they do not know what the parent is doing to evoke such a reaction. Their criticism of parents is often based on their own fear that something abusive might be happening to the child. Thus not only the child's reactions but also the fear of complaints from neighbors can make it hard for parents to continue Time Out for the full five minutes. After a noisy Time Out, parents may suffer a "hangover" from trying to use Time Out and may decide not to use it in the future. If this happens, the child has "won": s/he has been successful in getting the parents to back down.

It is important to explain to parents that Time Out will be difficult at times because all children will test the limits of discipline. This means that if parents use Time Out for hitting, their children will hit again several times in order to determine whether Time Out will follow predictably and consistently. If they do not experience a consistent response from their parents, children will continue to use hitting as a method of handling conflict. The therapist needs to help the parent problem-solve how to remain consistent, how to cope with the stress of enforcing a noisy Time Out, and how to handle complaints from others who witness or overhear the Time Out. Some possible strategies for the parents to cope with Time Out reactions are to try distractions such as calling a supportive friend, turning up the volume of the TV, listening to some calming music on headphones, or doing some deep-breathing exercises. Parents can be urged to try to plan their first attempts at Time Out during times when neighbors are at work, so that they will not be overheard. Parents can also explain the program to their neighbors so that neighbors understand what the parent is doing and why this approach is being used. Neighbors can be told that within several weeks there will be less and less use of Time Out and that the overall noise level will be considerably reduced if initially the child is forced to stay in Time Out until s/he is able to be quiet.

### *Where can I do Time Out?*

I don't see how I can do Time Out because I have no space. I live in a small trailer which has one bedroom, a bathroom, and a living room. It's packed with things. There is no place to do Time Out.

The therapist needs to help parents carefully consider where they will have Time Out for their children. Preferably it should be in a dull, boring room that has been made safe for a child to be alone in. Some families who have little space will need to use a bedroom for Time Out. This works for some children, but may not for others. The problem with the bedroom is that it usually contains items the child finds interesting. (The same can be true of any room.) Thus the lack of the parents' attention will be partially compensated for by the interesting features of the room—and the Time Out will lose its effect.

There is also the issue of safety—both of the child and of property. Some children cannot be safely left alone in the bathroom. For the highly aggressive child, any breakable items will need to be removed. If this is impossible (i.e., if the child is liable to damage a door or furniture) some other place must be found, such as a hallway. For some young children between the ages of four and eight, a Time Out chair can be used. The chair should be placed in an empty corner of a room or hall, away from all family activities and the television. However, if parents use a chair, they will also need to have a room as a back-up in case their child refuses to stay on the chair.

### *How long should I do Time Out?*

He deliberately threw a rock and broke a neighbor's window. I was so mad I sent him to his room for a day-long Time Out. I don't think five minutes is long enough for something as bad as breaking a window—that misbehavior needs a more serious consequence.

A general rule of thumb is three minutes for three-year-olds, four minutes for four-year-olds and five minutes for children aged five and older. Time Outs longer than five minutes are not more effective. However, children should not be let out of Time Out until there has been two minutes of quiet, signaling that they have calmed down. This means that when you first use Time Out it may last longer (30 to 40 minutes) if children continue to scream. Once they learn that screaming does not get them out and that being quiet does, the Time Out will usually be short (five minutes or so



The main idea is to make it as brief as possible and then immediately to give them an opportunity to try again and be successful.

It is easy for parents to believe that Time Out is more effective if they make it longer—especially if their children have done something really bad like breaking a window or stealing. Some parents add time on whenever their children yell or misbehave in the Time Out room. This is especially problematic if parents are also yelling through the door, “That is one more minute for that scream,” since this attention will actually increase the misbehavior. Overly long Time Outs tend to breed resentment in children, and the isolation keeps them from making new efforts to behave appropriately, thereby learning and experiencing success.

Some parents have just the opposite problem. They use Time Out for a minute and then let their children out when they bang on the door, cry, or promise to behave. Unfortunately, letting children out when they are still misbehaving reinforces that particular inappropriate behavior. The message communicated is, “If you kick (or cry or promise) hard enough, I’ll let you out.”

The most effective Time Out need only be five minutes, provided there has been two minutes of quiet at the end. Adding time on for misbehaving does not make it more effective or eliminate the problems and, in fact, may do just the opposite. Remember, with children, there is no need for the punishment to fit the crime. Time Out is not meant to be like a jail sentence for adults. Its purpose is to provide a cooling-off period and a clear, unrewarding consequence for misbehavior. The objective is for parents to get their children out of Time Out either in five minutes or as soon as they are quiet, so as to give them another chance to be successful.

### *What should you say to the child while he is in Time Out?*

When a child misbehaves, what should you tell the child about Time Out? I usually remind him several times while he is in Time Out that he needs to be quiet before he can come out—sometimes this makes him scream longer, but I’m not sure he remembers what he needs to do.

Some parents inadvertently give attention to their children while they are in Time Out. For instance, Timmy yells in the Time Out room, and Timmy’s Dad responds to each yell with “You must be quiet before you can come out.” Other parents respond to their children each time they ask, “How many more minutes?” Still others go in and out of the Time Out room, either to check on their children or to return them when they come

out. All these actions defeat the purpose of Time Out and are very reinforcing for children.

There should be no communication with children when they are in Time Out. No matter how many times a parent explains to a child that s/he must be quiet to get out of Time Out, the child will not really understand the rules of Time Out until s/he has experienced them. For example, once children have experienced no response from their parents for yelling profanities, but have experienced that their quiet behavior gets them out of Time Out, they will begin to really understand the concept. If a parent is likely to feel compelled to enter a Time Out room for fear that his daughter will break something, any items she could break should be removed from the room or a new location found. If a child keeps coming out of the room, it may be necessary to put a lock on the door for a short while until she learns that she cannot come out until she is quiet. If the parent uses a Time Out chair and the child manages to attract the attention of the dog, siblings, or other adults, it may be necessary to move the chair to a duller location, away from the rest of the family.

### *Once Time Out is over, shouldn't you remind him of why he was put there?*

I always discuss the problem with him again after Time Out is over—I want to be sure he understands why he went into Time Out in the first place. I don’t want him to be making the same mistake again.

Sometimes parents feel they have to remind their children why they have to go to Time Out—“You were put in Time Out because you hit. Remember not to hit. It makes me really angry.” This is rubbing the child’s nose in the mistake and reviving the image of the child misbehaving. The reminder of past misbehavior becomes, for the child, a prediction of future misbehaviors. It is better to say, “Now let’s try again. I know you can do it.” Once Time Out is over, the parents should view this as a clean slate or a new learning trial—a chance to try again and be successful. They should predict success, not remind children or “lecture them on what they did wrong.”

### *What should you do if your child runs away?*

My child runs away when I ask him to go to Time Out—I end up chasing him and dragging him to Time Out. Sometimes I have to spank him to get him to go to Time Out. Then when I finally get him in Time Out, he won’t stay there and keeps coming out.



of discipline it must result in a child expressing pain or remorse over the misbehavior. If this doesn't happen, they mistakenly think it is not working and stop using it. They may consider spanking more effective because it is more likely to result in tears and expressions of remorse. However, as we have seen, physical punishment, even when it eliminates undesirable behavior in the short run, tends to cause more problems because it teaches a violent approach to conflict and does not help children to learn how to problem-solve or cool down so that they can cope with a problem. Tears may satisfy a parent's need for "just deserts," but do not necessarily reflect effective discipline.

Time Out does not need to result in tantrums, crying, or expressions of guilt in order to be effective. In the beginning, young children may react violently when Time Out is used, but if it is used consistently and frequently, most will eventually take it without much anger. We have even found that some children put themselves in Time Out when they feel they are losing control. Thus, Time Out helps children learn self-control.

Parents should be warned that some children will tell them that Time Out does not bother them, but they should not be fooled by this approach. Their children may be only bluffing. Besides, Time Out can achieve its purpose even if the child is not bothered by it. Remember, the purpose of Time Out is not to get revenge or make children experience pain, but rather to stop the conflict and withdraw the reinforcing effects of negative attention for a misbehavior. It gives children a cooling off period and a chance to think about what they have done.

### *What about the child who refuses to come out of Time Out?*

I put my child in Time Out for refusing to do her homework and she just stayed there—she wouldn't come out and eventually she fell asleep. What should I have done?

Time Out can result in at least two types of stand-offs instigated by children or by parents. The first involves those children who refuse to come out of Time Out once it is over. Some parents respond by letting their children stay in the Time Out room as long as they wish. This is inappropriate in the instance where Time Out is used as a consequence for noncompliance to a command. In such cases, parents are not following through with the original command; their children learn that they can get out of doing something by staying in the Time Out room.

If a child refuses to come out of Time Out to take out the garbage, the parent should close the door and add two minutes to the Time Out. This

When parents resort to spanking or physical restraint to get their children to go to or stay in Time Out, they may justify their use of these violent techniques by saying that they were used as a last resort after all else failed, or they may believe that since the spanking or restraint resulted in Time Out, their use was justified. The problem with this "the-end-justifies-the-means" analysis is that violent forms of discipline defeat the purposes of Time Out and focus only on the short-term goals of getting children to comply and maintaining control. Unfortunately, the short-term benefits are outweighed by the long-term disadvantages, as discussed above: increasing children's aggression and providing a model for violent approaches to conflict situations. Such situations are much better handled by combining Time Out with a loss of privileges. This technique models a nonviolent approach that maintains good relationships with children.

The therapist can suggest alternative strategies. First, if young children will not stay in the Time Out room, the parent may have to install a temporary lock. In most instances the parent will only need to use it once or twice before the child learns that s/he must stay in the room until s/he is quiet. If the children are five or six years old and they come out of Time Out, parents can try a different approach. After one warning ("If you don't go back into Time Out now, you'll have your bike locked up for 24 hours," "There'll be no bedtime story tonight," or "No soccer game after dinner"), if the child still refuses to go into Time Out, then the parent must enforce the loss of the privilege and the Time Out is dropped. Loss of privileges are not as effective with young preschool children because they cognitively have a difficult time seeing the connection between the misbehavior and the consequence enforced at a later time.

If the children are old enough to understand the concept of time and they refuse to go into Time Out in the first place, add an extra minute to Time Out—but only up to 10 minutes. At that point the parent should give one warning about a loss of a privilege: "If you don't go to Time Out now, you will not be allowed to watch television tonight." For younger children who refuse to go to Time Out, the parent can calmly but firmly take their hand and bring them to Time Out.

### *Time Out won't work if it's not painful to the child*

My child just goes to Time Out and doesn't cry or anything. He used to scream and yell when I sent him there, but now he shows no remorse or guilt or pain. So I don't think Time Out is working anymore because he doesn't show any discomfort.

Some parents believe that in order for Time Out to be an effective form

can be continued for up to 10 minutes and then a privilege can be withdrawn. If the child is in Time Out for hitting, the door can be opened and the parent can say, "Your time is up. You can come out now." It is all right in this instance if the child refuses to come out, because there is nothing that the parent has asked her to do. The parent can simply respond, "Come out whenever you are ready," and ignore any refusal.

Another type of stand-off happens when a parent refuses to talk to a child for an hour or even a whole day and, in a sense, carries out an extended Time Out. As mentioned earlier, this does not teach children how to deal with conflict in an appropriate fashion; rather, it teaches them to withdraw from conflict. Refusing to speak to children for long periods after misbehavior only escalates tension and anger. This refusal of attention is in effect an extended Time Out; as discussed above, overly long Time Outs breed resentment and, in this case, defeat communication. In this situation, the parent should think about what is bothering him or her, what behavior is expected and then state it clearly. For instance, "I'm angry that you broke my vase. You will have to clean up the mess now and pay for it out of your allowance. I'll help you pick up the pieces."

### *How do you do Time Out in public?*

The reason I like spanking is because it is portable. I can use that strategy at the grocery store or park when he misbehaves. I don't see how you could use Time Out in situations like that.

When children misbehave in public places such as restaurants, movie theaters, and grocery stores, parents are often reluctant to use their usual forms of discipline. Some worry about how other people will react if they use Time Out with their children in public. Others are afraid their children will escalate their misbehavior into a full-blown tantrum, so they avoid discipline. Still others do not see how Time Out can be used anywhere but at home, and resort instead to threats and spankings. As a result, many children have learned that grocery stores and restaurants are places they can get their own way because their parents will give in to avoid a scene.

Once parents have established Time Out as a consistent consequence for certain misbehaviors at home, it is important to impose the same consequence when these misbehaviors occur in public places as well. This may mean leaving the grocery store to do a modified five-minute Time Out in the car or next to a tree in a park. If there is no place for a Time Out, the parent can say, "If you don't stop yelling (or whining or whatever), then you'll have a Time Out when we get home." Once parents have followed through once or twice, their children will learn that the rules

apply regardless of where they are, and they will stop testing and learn to behave more appropriately.

### *Can you use Time Out too much?*

It seems like I have him in Time Out most of the time he is home. Sometimes he is in there 20 times a day. Is there a problem with this?

Time Out is frequently used for all kinds of things, from whining, yelling, and screaming to throwing, hitting, and lying. Some parents report using it 20 to 30 times a day! This overuse deprives misbehaving children of opportunities to learn or demonstrate good behavior. It does not teach them any new and more appropriate ways to behave. While it keeps them out of parents' hair in the short run, in the long run it can cause bitterness and make children feel that they can do nothing right.

If any parents have become "Time Out junkies," the therapist needs to help them to focus on one or two misbehaviors that will result in Time Out. After three or four weeks, when these behaviors are eliminated, another one can be identified. More importantly, the therapist must help the parents ensure that they are spending more time supporting, teaching, and encouraging appropriate behaviors than focusing on negative ones. Sometimes parents are clear with their children about the consequences for misbehaving but do not provide attention and encouragement for appropriate behaviors. In other words, much emphasis is placed on what children should not do, and there is considerably less emphasis on what to do instead. Time Out will only work when parental attention and positive consequences for appropriate behaviors are frequent.

### *Won't Time Out turn my child in a compliant "little robot"?*

I don't want my child to be compliant all the time. I want her to be assertive, to question authority, and not to be a little robot. Isn't timing out for non-compliance going to make my child into a little marine recruit? For instance, I certainly want her to say "no" to strangers.

This question is related to the preceding question because it refers to the misuse or abuse of Time Out. Just as it is possible to use Time Out too much, it is also possible to abuse it by using it as the sole discipline technique. Rather, the therapist should help the parents determine which misbehaviors (e.g., hitting, destructive acts) would be appropriate for a

*What do you do when you know you are so angry you won't be able to do a Time Out?*

Sometimes I feel so angry I just don't have the patience to do Time Out—I just want to hit him and make him suffer.

Parents overreact to their children's misbehaviors because they are exhausted, angry, or depressed about some other events in their life. A father who gets angry at his daughter may really be angry at his wife for ignoring his efforts with the children. Or a mother who has had an exhausting day at work and had a conflict with her secretarial staff may become cross with her children for making noise and not letting her relax. Depending on the mood and the energy level of the parent, the same behavior from a child can seem cute one day and obnoxious the next.

Even the kindest, best-intentioned parents get frustrated and angry with their children. No one is perfect. But the important task is for parents to recognize the "filters" they bring to their perceptions of their children at any particular time, and to learn to cope with their anger or frustration. Sometimes it is the parent who needs a Time Out. If a parent is depressed because of work problems, it may be a good idea to take a Time Out away from the children in order to relax and gain perspective. If a parent is angry with his/her spouse, s/he may need Time Out to problem-solve. In helping children become less aggressive and more able to problem-solve and handle conflict constructively, it is vital that parents use personal Time Out when they feel anger building, and to model ways to resolve conflict and ways to support one another.

Some parents claim that Time Out does not work for them. The reason may be any of those we have discussed, or it may simply be that they have tried it a few times and then given up. It is a mistake, however, to try Time Out four or five times and expect the problem behavior to be eliminated.

Time Out is not magic. Children need repeated learning trials. They need many opportunities to make mistakes and misbehave, and then to learn from the consequences of their misbehaviors. Just as it takes hundreds of trials for a baby to learn to walk, so it takes children hundreds of trials to learn appropriate social behaviors. The therapist's job is to remind parents that even when Time Out is used effectively, behavior changes slowly. Parents need support from therapists to be patient. Remind parents that it takes children at least 18 years to learn all the mature adult behaviors their parents would like to see them

## TEACHING PARENTS ABOUT NATURAL AND LOGICAL CONSEQUENCES

One of the most important and difficult tasks for parents of oppositional and conduct-problem children is to help their children become more independent and responsible. The therapist can help parents learn to foster their children's decision-making, sense of responsibility, and ability to learn from mistakes through the use of natural and logical consequences. A natural consequence is whatever would result from a child's action or inaction in the absence of adult intervention. For instance, if Ryan slept in or refused to go to the school bus, the natural consequence would be that he would have to walk to school. If Caitlin did not want to wear her coat, then she would get cold. In these examples, the children learn from

Time Out consequence, which misbehaviors will be handled through problem-solving, logical consequences, loss of privileges, and praising alternative positive responses.

However, this parent may be raising a larger question than the use of Time Out *per se*—that is, how much to discipline children's misbehavior or enforce compliance. As we discussed in the Limit-Setting section, the first task for parents is to decide what their important household rules are and to limit their rules and commands to the important issues which they are prepared to follow through on. Thus the parent allows the child to make his/her own choices when possible, fosters independence and self-assertion, but sets clear and consistent limits when children are breaking important rules or hurting others.

The other issue raised by this parent is one of whether forcing children to be compliant could lead them into potentially dangerous situations because they do not know how to say "no" to strangers or to people who ask them to do inappropriate things. The key point here seems to be for parents to teach their children how to respond to adults (or children) who are asking them to do something that is unsafe or dangerous—in this case, the child needs to learn how to be assertive.

### *Time Out doesn't work*

I've tried Time Out and it doesn't work for my child.

experiencing the direct consequences of their own decisions—thus they are not protected from the possibility of an undesirable outcome of their behavior by their parents' commands. A logical consequence, on the other hand, is designed by the parent. It is conceived of as "punishment to fit the crime." A logical consequence for a youngster who broke a neighbor's window would be to do chores in order to make up the cost of the replacement. A logical consequence for stealing would be to take the object back to the store, apologize to the store owner, and do an extra chore or lose a privilege. In other words, when parents use this technique, they hold children accountable for their mistakes—by helping them make up the error in some way.

In conflict to ignoring and Time Out, natural and logical consequences teach children to be more responsible. These strategies are most effective for recurring problems where parents are able to decide ahead of time how they will follow through in the event that the misbehavior recurs. For example, the parent who says, "If you aren't dressed for school by 8 a.m., you will have to go in your pajamas" or "If you spend all your allowance on candy, you'll have no money for that movie you want to rent" is informing the child ahead of time what will be the consequence if s/he continues the behavior. Then the child has a choice and is in effect responsible for the outcome. On the other hand, the parent who does not let the child know ahead of time is not necessarily helping the child see the connection between the behavior and the negative outcome.

These are the main points we emphasize concerning natural and logical consequences:

- Make consequences immediate.
- Make consequences age-appropriate.
- Make consequences nonpunitive.
- Use consequences that are short and to the point.
- Involve the child whenever possible.
- Be friendly and positive.
- Give the child a choice of consequences ahead of time.
- Be sure parents can live with the consequences they have set up.
- Quickly offer new learning opportunities to be successful.

## Typical Questions and Concerns About Natural and Logical Consequences

*What kinds of misbehaviors would I use a natural or logical consequence for?*

I get confused about when I should ignore a misbehavior or use Time Out or use logical consequences. How do I decide which approach is correct?

Natural and logical consequences are most effective for recurring problems where the parents can decide ahead of time with the child what will happen if the child continues the behavior. For example, a parent might warn a child, "If you can't keep the gum in your mouth, it will be taken away" or "If you don't eat at meals, there will be no food until the next meal" and so forth. This approach can help children to learn to make decisions, be responsible for their own behavior, and learn from their mistakes. Time Out is best reserved for more serious problems when the child is hurting someone or breaking something. For these aggressive acts it is not appropriate to give the child a warning; a warning only conveys a message that they have another chance to be aggressive. Ignoring, on the other hand, can be used for minor annoying behaviors that are not hurting anyone, such as whining, messy eating, tantrums, and protests.

*What kinds of consequences are developmentally appropriate for children?*

I tried making my three 3-year-old child clean up his poop pants as a way of discouraging him from messing in his pants—but that just made an incredible mess in the bathroom and I ended up yelling at him.

When I found my teenager smoking, I told her that if she got an asthma attack (which she gets) then she would have to earn the money to pay for her asthma medicine—was that logical?

I let my four-year-old child go to school in bare feet in the middle of winter as a way of teaching him to get his shoes on in the morning—isn't that a natural consequence?

When thinking through the use of logical and natural consequences as means of reducing children's inappropriate behaviors, it is important to insure that parents' expectations are appropriate for the child's age and abilities. Because of the cognitive skills involved, natural consequences w

work better for school-age children than for preschoolers. For example, young children will not often see the connection between not eating dinner and being hungry two hours later. Consequences that young children do understand are “if-then” statements that have an immediate consequence, for instance, “If you don’t keep your gum in your mouth, I will have to take it away.” Or for a child who points scissors at someone, “If you can’t use the scissors carefully, then I will remove them.” In these examples, the logical consequence of not using something appropriately and/or safely is having it removed right away.

Most natural and logical consequences work best for children five years of age and older. They can be used with younger children, but parents must first evaluate carefully whether the children understand the relationship between the consequences and the behavior. For instance, if Alexandra is not ready to be toilet-trained but she is made to clean her underpants or change her bed, she is being unjustly punished; the consequence is inappropriate for her abilities. However, to deny dessert or snacks to a child who has refused to eat dinner is an appropriate consequence since the child learns that not eating dinner causes hunger. Whether it is appropriate to expect a teenager to pay for her asthma medicine when she chooses to smoke depends upon the cost of the medicine and her ability to earn that amount of money. Of course, natural consequences should not be used if children may be physically hurt by them. For example, a preschooler should not be allowed to experience the natural consequences of sticking a finger into an electrical outlet, touching the stove, running in the road, or going barefoot in freezing weather.

### *What about consequences that are neither natural nor logical?*

When he swore at me, I washed his dirty mouth out with soap. He doesn’t swear at me anymore! Wasn’t that logical?

Occasionally parents come up with consequences that are not naturally or logically related to an activity. Consider the mother who washed her son’s mouth out with soap because he swore at her. While she might argue that it is logical to clean out the mouth of a youngster who has been swearing, the “logic” is based only on a figure of speech (swearing = “dirty” talk). Her action is likely to make her son feel degraded and angry. Other parents create consequences that are too punitive: “Since you wet your bed last night, you can’t have anything to drink after noon today” or “Because you didn’t eat your dinner, you will have to eat it for breakfast” or “Since you hit me, I’m going to bite you.” Children will feel resentful and may even

retaliate against such consequences. They will be more likely to focus on the cruelty of their parents than on the consequences of their own behavior.

A calm, matter-of-fact, friendly attitude on the part of parents is essential for deciding upon and carrying out consequences. The natural consequence of not wearing a coat when it is cold outside is to become chilled. The logical consequence of not doing homework might be to miss a favorite television program. The natural consequence of not putting clothes in the hamper is that the clothes do not get washed. These consequences are not degrading, nor do they cause physical pain. Instead, they help children to learn to make choices and to be more responsible.

### *Are some consequences too remote to be effective?*

I let him watch TV instead of doing his homework so that he could experience poor grades on his spelling test. Indeed, he came home with many corrections—but he just seemed more helpless and I’m not sure the natural consequences approach worked.

The natural and logical consequences approach does not work when the consequences of misbehaviors are too remote in time. The natural consequences of not brushing teeth would be to have cavities and to have to submit to dental work. But this would never be effective as a motivator—the cavities would not show up for five to ten years! Similarly, overeating may have long-term consequences that are too distant to affect children’s behavior in the short term. Permitting youngsters not to do homework and to watch television every night until the end-of-the-year report card shows they have failed is another consequence that is too delayed to have any influence on their daily study habits. Such long-term punishers may instead lead children to feel hopeless about their abilities.

For preschool and school-age children it is important that the consequences closely follow the inappropriate behavior. If Dan damages another child’s toy, then the toy should be replaced as quickly as possible and he should have to help pay for it through chores or from his allowance. If Lisa does not put her clothes in the laundry hamper, they will not be clean when she wants to wear them. In this way, Lisa and Dan will learn from their inappropriate behavior and will probably behave more appropriately the next time. Of course, the preschool child may not be bothered by whether he has bowel movement in his pants or is wearing dirty clothes or goes outside without a coat. In these cases, the parent will need to decide whether the issue is important enough to limit-set or can be left up to the child.

### *Can some consequences be too punitive?*

I find that sometimes I feel really nasty when I use logical or natural consequences. For example, the other day I sent my children to school without breakfast because they weren't ready on time—I felt terrible sending a child to school without breakfast.

When attempting to carry out natural and logical consequences, some parents find it difficult to allow their children to experience the outcomes of their actions. They are so empathetic towards their children, or they feel so guilty for not coming to their aid, that they intervene before the consequence occurs. For instance, Carol tells her daughter Angie that the natural consequence of dawdling in the morning and not being ready for daycare on time will be to go in her pajamas. When the time comes to enforce this, she cannot bring herself to let Angie go in her pajamas and dresses her instead. Such overprotectiveness can handicap children by not allowing them to develop their own coping strategies, rendering them incapable of handling problems or mistakes.

When using consequences it is important for parents to think about the pros and cons of applying this technique to particular misbehaviors. Advise parents that they must be certain that they can live with the consequences and are not giving idle threats. In the example above, Carol should have first considered whether or not she would be willing to follow through and take Angie to daycare in her pajamas if she continued to dawdle. Failing to follow through with an agreed-upon consequence will dilute parents' authority and deprive their children of opportunities to learn from their mistakes.

### *Can some logical consequences be too long?*

My child kept forgetting to put his bike away and left it in the driveway, so I locked it up for a month. Do you think this was too long?

Sometimes parents come up with a consequence that lasts too long and constitutes undue punishment. Say that seven-year-old Ben rides his bicycle in the road after being told to stay on the driveway. The logical consequence would be for the parents to lock it up. Locking it up for a month, however, would be excessive; it would certainly make Ben feel resentful at the injustice. Moreover, he would be deprived of any new opportunities to handle his bicycle more responsibly. Although some people believe that the stronger (and longer) the punishment, the more

effective it will be, the opposite is true—because a shorter punishment allows an earlier opportunity for behaving appropriately.

A more subtle consequence in Ben's case would have been to lock up his bike for 24 hours and then allow him the chance to ride it according to the rules. If four-year-old Kathy is using crayons and starts coloring on the kitchen table, a logical consequence to present her with might be, "If you can't keep the crayons on the paper, then I will have to take them away." If she continues to color on the table, then the crayons would have to be removed. However, they should be returned within half an hour to give her another opportunity to use them appropriately. The principle is to make the consequences immediate, short, to the point, and then quickly to offer the child another chance to try again and be successful.

Reminding parents that the consequences approach, like any other parenting technique, takes time, planning, patience, and repetition. Most of all, it requires a calm, respectful attitude.

## TEACHING PARENTS TO TEACH THEIR CHILDREN TO PROBLEM-SOLVE

How do young conduct-problem children typically react to their problems? By crying, hitting, swearing, running away, refusing, or tattling to their parents. These responses to problems usually do not lead to solutions; in fact, they create new problems. Of course, all children will exhibit these responses to conflict, but research has indicated that when presented with interpersonal problem situations, conduct-problem and rejected children find it difficult to consider alternative courses of action. They search for fewer clues or facts and generate fewer appropriate solutions to conflict situations. They produce a high percentage of aggressive and incompetent solutions than do cooperative children and have a more difficult time anticipating the consequences of their solutions. They act aggressively and impulsively without stopping to think of nonaggressive solutions. On the other hand, there is evidence from research that young children who employ a wide range of alternative and competent strategies on problem-solving tasks tend to play more constructively, are better liked, and are less aggressive. Therefore the purpose of this component of the program is for the therapist to teach parents how they can teach their children appropriate problem-solving skills.

The therapist should emphasize the importance of parental modeling as a way to teach children problem-solving skills. It is a rich learning experience for children to watch parents discussing problems with other adults, negotiating and resolving conflict, and evaluating the outcomes of

their actions. While parents may not want their children to observe all their discussions, many daily interactions provide good opportunities for children to learn. For instance, children learn much of their behavior by observing how parents react to life's daily hassles. They learn from noticing how their parents say "no" to a friend's request. They watch with interest how Dad receives Mom's suggestion to wear something different. Is Mom sarcastic, angry, or matter-of-fact in her request? Does Dad pout, get angry, cooperate, or ask for more information? Watching parents decide which movie to see on Saturday night can teach much about compromise and negotiation. Parents can help further by thinking out loud their positive problem-solving strategies. For example, a parent might say, "How can I solve this? I need to stop and think first. What plan can I come up with to make this successful?" If parents themselves do not routinely problem-solve, then the therapist will need to teach them these skills first before teaching them how to help their children learn to problem-solve.

In addition to parents teaching their children problem-solving skills indirectly through modeling, the therapist also teaches parents the specific skills to teach their children when problem-solving. These steps include: helping the child to define the problem, acknowledging the child's feelings, helping the child generate solutions and think about the consequences of the possible solutions, deciding which solution to try, and reinforcing the process. We suggest that the parents begin to teach their children these skills by role playing or acting them out with puppets or books. We recommend that these discussions occur at neutral times, not in the heat of battle. Once parents have taught children the steps and the language to talk about problems, they can then begin to help them learn how to use the skills in the midst of real conflict.

Here are the main points we emphasize:

- Help children define the problem.
- Talk about feelings.
- Involve children in brainstorming possible solutions.
- Be positive and imaginative.
- Model creative solutions.
- Encourage children to think through the possible consequences of different solutions.

- Remember that it is the process of learning how to think about conflict that is critical, rather than getting "correct" answers.

### Typical Questions and Concerns About Problem-Solving

#### *Shouldn't you tell children the correct solutions?*

I feel I need to tell my children how to solve the problem because they don't come up with the right answer on their own—in fact, some of their own solutions are really bad!

Many parents believe that telling their children how to solve a problem helps them learn to problem-solve. For example, two children may have trouble sharing a bicycle. The parent responds to the child who has grabbed the bicycle from the other child (who has refused to share the bike) by saying, "You should either play together or take turns. Grabbing is not nice. You can't go around grabbing things. Would you like that if he did it to you?" The problem with this approach is that the parents are telling the children what to do before they have found out what the problem is from their viewpoint. It is possible, after all, that the parent has misdiagnosed the problem. For example, in this case it was not entirely the fault of the child who grabbed the bicycle because the other child had used the bike for a long time and had refused to share it even when asked nicely. As the child continued to refuse to share, the other child escalated to grabbing. Moreover, the parent's approach in this example does not help the children to think about their problem and how to solve it. Rather than being encouraged to learn how to think, they are told what to think and the solution is imposed upon them.

It is more effective for parents to guide their children into thinking about what may have caused the problem in the first place, rather than to tell them the solution. Parents can invite their children to come up with possible solutions. If parents want to help them develop a habit of solving their own problems, children need to be asked to think for themselves. They should be urged to express their feelings about the situation, talk about ideas for solving the problem, and talk about what might happen if they carried out various solutions. The only time parents need to offer solutions is if their children need a few ideas to get them started.

#### *Is there such a thing as too little guidance?*

Well, I just tell my children to work it out on their own. I think that's the only way children will learn to problem-solve. Don't you agree?



The opposite problem occurs when parents think they are helping their children resolve conflict by telling them to work it out for themselves. This might work if the children already have good problem-solving skills, but for most young children, this approach will not work. In a case where Max and Tyler are fighting over a book, nonintervention will probably result in continued arguing and Tyler, the more aggressive child, getting the book. Therefore, Tyler is reinforced for his inappropriate behavior, because he got what he wanted, and Max is reinforced for giving in, because the fighting ceased when he backed down.

The parents' role is to teach their children to work it out on their own by guiding them. Parents can encourage their children to talk aloud as they think and then can praise their ideas and attempts at solutions. In this way, the parents are reinforcing the development of a style of thinking that will help them to deal with all kinds of problems throughout their lives. Parents need to encourage their children first to come up with many possible solutions. Then they can help them to shift their focus to the possible consequences of each solution. The final step in problem-solving is to help children evaluate their possible solutions. For children aged three to eight, the second step—generating solutions—is the key skill to learn. While older children are more easily involved in anticipating consequences and evaluating them, youngsters need to be helped to generate possible solutions and to understand that some solutions are better than others.

*Feelings don't have much to do with problem-solving, do they?*

I don't talk much about feelings with my children. What value is there in this?

When some parents problem-solve, they avoid discussing feelings. They focus exclusively on the thinking style, the nature of the problem, the solution, and the consequences. They forget to ask their children how they feel about the problem or how the other person in the situation may have felt. Yet these are aspects of defining the problem. It is also important for parents to be aware of their own feelings. Hearing a daughter report that she has been sent home from Julie's house for hitting may provoke feelings in the parent such as anger, frustration, or even depression. A parent would need to gain control of these emotions before trying to help her child with her feelings about the situation.

Parents need to encourage their children to think about their own feelings in a problem situation or in response to a possible solution, and parents can help their children consider the other person's point of view in the situation. For instance, a parent might ask, "How do you think Julie

felt when you did that? How did you feel when she did that?" Parents need to raise the question about how a child might discover what someone else feels or thinks. "How can you find out if she likes your idea? How can you tell if she is sad or happy?" This will help parents encourage their children to be more empathetic and, because they try to understand other people's feelings and viewpoints, will result in more willingness to problem-solve, compromise, and cooperate. When parents discuss children's feelings, it also helps children to realize that their feelings are important and that their parents empathize with them.

## BROADENING THE FOCUS OF INTERVENTION

As we noted in Chapter 1, researchers have convincingly demonstrated that parental personal and interpersonal factors (depression, marital discord, etc.) and contextual factors (lack of support, increased environmental stressors, etc.) disrupt parenting behavior and contribute to parent training treatment relapses (e.g., Webster-Stratton, 1990a,b). As a result, more broadly based expansions of parent training have been developed to address more of these personal and interpersonal issues that affect family functioning. In our own work with families at the Parenting Clinic we have expanded the focus of the content of our interventions to include: *Personal Self-Control* strategies such as how to cope with anger, depression, and stress; *Effective Communication Skills* such as active listening, expressive speaking, and avoidance of destructive styles of communicating (e.g., blaming, mind-reading, criticizing, stonewalling, patronizing, commanding); *Problem-Solving Skills* such as using a structured format for handling interpersonal conflict with spouses, employers, extended family members, or children; and *Ways to Strengthen Social Support and Self-Care*. It is beyond the scope of this book to discuss the content details of each of these components; more information on these topics may be found in the parent trouble-shooting guide (Webster-Stratton, 1992a) and from our ADVANCE therapists' manual (Webster-Stratton, 1992c). In a recent study we reported that families who received this broader program of training in personal and interpersonal skills showed significant additional improvements in parents' communication skills, problem-solving skills, and consumer satisfaction, as well as children's increased knowledge of prosocial solutions (Webster-Stratton, in press). These data suggest that interventions such as these may strengthen the family's "protective factors," thereby mediating the effects of other, more intractable risk factors such as socioeconomic disadvantage and negative life stressors.



## REFERENCES

- Barkley, R.A. (1987). *Defiant children: A clinician's manual for parent training*. New York: Guilford.
- Forehand, R.L. & McMahon, R.J. (1981). *Helping the noncompliant child: A clinician's guide to parent training*. New York: Guilford.
- Herbert, M. (1987). *Behavioural treatment of children with problems: A practice manual*. London: Academic Press.
- Patterson, G.R., Reid, J.B., Jones, R.R. & Conger, R.W. (1975). *A social learning approach to family intervention*. Eugene, OR: Castalia.
- Webster-Stratton, C. (1990a). Long-term follow-up of families with young conduct problem children: From preschool to grade school. *Journal of Clinical Child Psychology*, 19(2), 144-149.
- Webster-Stratton, C. (1990b). Predictors of treatment outcome in parent training for families with conduct problem children. *Behavior Therapy*, 21, 319-337.
- Webster-Stratton, C. (1992a). *The incredible years: A trouble-shooting guide for parents of children aged 3-8*. Toronto, Canada: Umbrella Press.
- Webster-Stratton, C. (1992b). *The Parents and Children Videotape Series: Programs 1-10*. Seth Enterprises, 1411 8th Avenue West, Seattle, WA 98119, USA.
- Webster-Stratton, C. (1992c). *The Parents and Children Videotape Series: Advance Programs 5-7*. Seth Enterprises, 1411 8th Avenue West, Seattle, WA 98119, USA.
- Webster-Stratton, C. (in press). Advancing videotape parent training: A companion study. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*.