Positive Discipline: Behavioral Management Skills for Parents and Teachers Part 1—Types of Misbehaviors and Keys to Success [1]

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Other Articles in This Series

Part 2: General Approaches to Managing Behavior (http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/fy1459)

Part 3: Fostering the Parent–Child and Teacher–Student Relationship to Build Responsibility (http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/fy1460)

Before I got married I had six theories about bringing up children; now I have six children, and no theories.
—John Wilmot

Effective parenting and teaching can be one of the most rewarding and, yet, one of the most challenging of all human endeavors. Parents and teachers often experience a lot of insecurities about how to raise their children or assist their students, especially with regard to helping their children and students manage and regulate their own behaviors. Not surprisingly, there are many similarities in the kinds of knowledge and skills that both effective parents and effective teachers use to help children manage their own behavior successfully. This series of publications will identify healthy behavioral management practices and offer some guidelines (or suggestions) that both parents and teachers can apply in various settings with children. Building a foundation for healthy and effective parenting and teaching begins with understanding some different types of misbehaviors.

Figure 1. Parents and teachers must understand the major types of misbehaviors.
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Four Types of Misbehaviors

Effective parents and teachers must understand the major types of misbehaviors. Misbehavior is generally linked to perceptions and feelings of insecurity or power and control. Four common types of misbehaviors are discussed below (see CEV Multimedia, 2011; Cline & Fay, 2006; Eyberg, 1992; Eyberg & Robinson, 1982; Harris, Olsen, & Johnson, 2013; Latham 1994, 1999, 2002).

- **Goal-Getting (want a payoff):** Taking things, interrupting, talking back, arguing, and other negative behaviors designed to achieve a goal—such as to gain power and control over a person or a situation, or as a response to a blocked goal.

- **Reaction-Seeking (want a reaction):** Includes most goal-getting behaviors and other behaviors—such as complaining, swearing, and showing off—that are attempts to get attention or a reaction from others in either positive or negative ways.

- **Indolence (reduced effort):** Reducing effort to exert power and control over a person or a situation such as not completing all of the chores or schoolwork, failure to follow instructions, and making excuses by saying things like "I forgot" or "I can't remember."

- **Fears (paired associations):** Includes paired associations with something the child fears such as darkness, bad dreams, monsters, heights, thunder, water, dogs, spiders, snakes, losing friends, public speaking, or being called on to respond in class. Parents and teachers need to be particularly sensitive to these potential paired associations and take care to validate any fears while helping children attempt to manage them successfully. *Forcing* a child to confront these fears, for example, by throwing them into a swimming pool or to speak in public is never a good strategy.

As a parent or teacher, you will want to be aware of each of these four types of misbehaviors when you see them manifest. You can then put together an intentional strategy to help children manage their behaviors and fears successfully.

Practice Activity: Healthy Skills vs. Unhealthy Practices

Table 1. List some healthy practices of parents and teachers below.

PARENTS	TEACHERS

Table 2. List some unhealthy practices of parents and teachers below.

PARENTS	TEACHERS

What Do Healthy Parent–Child and Teacher–Student Relationships Look Like?

Similar to research on healthy marriages (Moore, Jekielek, & Bronte-Tinkew, 2004), there are several key factors that are important across all healthy relationships, especially when building healthy parent–child and teacher–student relationships. Healthy parents and teachers:

- provide physical support for growth and development;
- provide a safe, secure, and nurturing environment;
- provide social and emotional support;
- promote positive communication;
- promote positive conflict resolution (never resort to violence or abuse);
- promote positive and enjoyable time spent together; and
- are mutually committed to each other.

Figure 2. Healthy parents and teachers promote social and emotional support.
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Three Keys to Effective Parenting and Teaching

There are at least three keys to healthy parenting: (1) warmth, (2) connectedness, and (3) monitoring (Roggman, Boyce, & Innocenti, 2008). These keys, or practices, can also be used by teachers to help them be effective both in and out of the classroom (Latham, 2002). Employing these three practices encourages healthy emotional growth for children as well as positive parent–child and teacher–student relationships. In the long run, employing these practices helps children further their cognitive skills, language development, and social/emotional growth (Roggman, Boyce, & Innocenti, 2008).

Warmth and Positivity

Effective parents and teachers who are warm and positive set high expectations and teach children not only how to work, but also how to play (Harris, Johnson, & Olsen, 2013). They are also available to assist, mentor, and nurture children through both the quality and the quantity of time spent together. Successful parents and teachers are empathetic and validate children's thoughts and emotions (Gottman, 1998).

Connectedness

Effective parents and teachers who are connected with their children and students are responsive, encouraging, and engaged in children's educational and extracurricular activities. They are conversational and interact often with children using healthy communication and conflict resolution patterns and practices. They send verbal and non-verbal messages to their children letting them know that the children are both loveable and capable. Successful parents and teachers understand that humiliation and neglect tend to harm children's feelings of lovability while dominance and overprotection may harm their perceptions of capability (Coplen & MacArthur, 1982). As a result of their connectedness, healthy parents and teachers tend to develop resilient children who have high self-concepts, self-esteem, and self-efficacy (Harris, Johnson, & Olsen, 2013).

Monitoring and Behavioral Management

Effective parents and teachers set clear boundaries, offer limits with latitude, and develop accountable and responsible children through being consistent. They monitor children's friends and other potential safe and unsafe environments. They manage child behavior successfully through employing positive solution-focused strategies for when children behave well and when they misbehave (Latham, 1999). Effective parents and teachers also avoid getting caught in power and control traps by sharing control with children, by using empathy as well as natural and logical consequences to help children "own" their personal problems and issues, and by providing opportunities for children to think, make decisions, and learn through their mistakes (Cline & Fay, 2006). Table 3 provides specific examples that parents and teachers can use to practice each of the three keys at home or in the classroom.

Research shows that using these three key practices leads to positive short-term outcomes for children, such as secure attachment, playful exploration, motivation to learn, and effective communication, all of which are essential for growth and development (Roggman, Boyce, & Innocenti, 2008). Long-term outcomes include the development of social/emotional, cognitive, and language skills (Roggman, Boyce, & Innocenti, 2008). By recognizing children's behavior and the appropriate strategy to use in a specific situation, parents and teachers can turn negative experiences into positive opportunities.

Figure 3. Successful parents and teachers are encouraging and engaged in children's educational and extracurricular activities. Credits: Thinkstock.com/iStock

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Table 3. Examples of three keys to effective parenting and teaching

	Characteristics	Parent examples	Teacher examples
Warmth	Empathetic & available	Show affection through love and a feeling of belonging (e.g., hugs and kisses)	Promote mutual respect for the student and opportunities for the student to grow (e.g., appreciating the value of students who share their feedback in and out of class)
Connectedness	Encouraging & conversational	Foster a genuine friendship with the children by encouraging open communication and trust between the parent and child (e.g., ask about his/her day and life outside of the home)	Build a trusting relationship with the student and make sure they know you are available and dependable in times of need (e.g., ask about the students' day or how they are doing in and outside of the classroom)
Monitoring	Consistent & provides positive discipline	Be aware of who the child's friends are, where he/she is going and with whom (e.g., you trust the child to go to a friend's house but you set clear guidelines that he/she has to finish homework first)	Employ the same rules for all students and provide consistent discipline (e.g., students are not allowed to talk out of turn or when you as the teacher are teaching, unless called upon)