

Decreasing Undesirable Behavior*

- Don't fret about "underlying" problems: get a professional opinion on those if suspected
- Bottom Line: If the behavior is socially unacceptable, it's your responsibility as a parent to help your child change it in order to become a functioning member of society
- Many studies now confirm that spanking or other physical punishment: a) doesn't work; b) has negative long-term consequences for emotional health, SO INSTEAD:

Attend to What Your Want to See

- Children crave parental attention, so give the child MORE attention when he/she is NOT doing the behavior;
- Provide something positive your child values on days when the behavior has NOT occurred
- Talk to your child about the behavior when it is NOT happening: Identify common problem situations and make a plan for them (e.g., warnings for transition times; relaxing activity for the "witching hour" right after school); avoid silly questions like "Why did you do that?" (young children are usually not very good at analyzing their own motivations)
- Give the child LESS attention when he/she IS doing the behavior
- Use a short time out (about 1 minute/year of age) to withdraw attention from negative behavior
- If the child won't separate from you for time out, use reverse time out (i.e. close yourself in a separate room, or just stop talking & interacting)
- Do NOT talk to your child about the behavior while it is happening
- Do NOT argue or get emotional: it just escalates undesirable behavior

Plan Consequences Based on Seriousness

- Pick your battles: ignore the small stuff; time out the significant but not serious stuff; only punish the really serious stuff
- If you punish, plan your consequence ahead of time so that you don't do something you regret in the heat of the moment, or create an unenforceable consequence (e.g., grounding for life)
- Some things have non-lethal, natural consequences (e.g., wearing mismatched socks might be embarrassing; if you don't come for dinner right away, your food gets cold), so no need to do anything about these

Be Consistent

- Whatever you do should be consistent day to day, and consistent among all the adults who regularly interact with the child (so communicate regularly about behavior management!)
- If divorced, at least keep the rules consistent within your own household; you may have to accept that they are different at your "Ex's" place
- Consistency is more likely if you keep behavior management simple and repetitive

**Also see "1-2-3 Magic" on Resources page*