

CHANGING BEHAVIOR PATTERNS

What Children Need from Parents:

- **Realistic Expectations** - an understanding of what is their “functional” age
- **Structure, Routine, Consistency** - brains can only be re-trained by repetition
- **Calmness** - overreacting is what the child does, parents must resist the urge
- **Sensitivity** - remember that children are driven by anxiety and fears
- **Reassurance** – children need to feel safe and loved before they can change

The following methods are recommended for helping children change behaviors:

- **Praise** – by far the most effective means of helping a child is to praise them- for little as well as big accomplishments. These children believe that they are worthless, unlovable, failures. Help them to see themselves in a new light.
- **Selective ignoring**-trying to micromanage a child is exhausting-and useless. It makes children more resistant to change. Nagging is also ineffective. Target one behavior at a time. And if it isn't hurting anyone, try to ignore it.
- **Time-In's**- Much more effective than time-outs. Keeping child next to you helps him feel safe and calms him down. The parent then role models the kind of coping skills and problem-solving necessary to make it in this world.
- **Consequences**- at times allowing the child to face the consequences of their actions is the best teacher. However these must be carefully selected and the parent should step back to allow the child to make the decision.
- **Motivators**-everyone needs an incentive. We work harder if we are appreciated. Children are no different. Positive reinforcement –praise, words of encouragement and appreciation, can produce surprising results.
- **Reminders**-Don't assume that children are deliberately procrastinating or ignoring you. They have even shorter attention spans than adults and are easily distracted. Put up written reminders (photos for little ones), develop a code (special word) or other trick that will remind them.
- **Negotiations**-especially for older children it can be helpful to find out what they really want and trade for compliance in other behaviors.
- **Withdrawal of privileges**-reserved for when nothing else works and parent needs some leverage (sometimes needed with Oppositional Defiant children). However these should be appropriate to the offence and time-limited.