

Supporting Positive Behaviors at Home

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This is a stressful and disruptive time for many of us. Finding ways to support your children during this time at home can be critical for mental health and family functioning. One research-based approach that is often used in schools is Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports. This model can be adapted for use in homes. Here are 5 ways to support positive behaviors in the home.

1. Clear Expectations

- a. Set clear 3 to 5 expectations for your child. These expectations should be broad enough that they can be applied across various home routines and activities. Examples like “Be Kind,” “Be Safe” and “Be Responsible” may be good starting points. Be sure the expectations fit with your family values.
- b. Work with your child to specify what these expectations would look like in each setting or routine. For example, what does “Be kind” look like at the dinner table? What does “be responsible” look like during homeschool or educational activities?

2. Catch them being good

- a. To keep behaviors going, we all need reinforcement. This can be as simple as a verbal statement to acknowledge that you see your child meeting an expectation. Consider offering very specific feedback that ties the child’s behavior back to the expectations. For example, “today when it was time to log in to the math website, you went right to the computer and got to work. Thanks so much for being responsible.” This helps the child know exactly what they did well and how that ties back to the home expectations.
- b. Some children may benefit from additional reinforcement, like a backup reward. For example, every time you see the child meeting an expectation, write down a tally mark on a piece of paper. Once they earn 5 tally marks, they can earn a reward like staying up an extra 15 minutes, or extra screen time, or playing a family game.

3. When it doubt, write it out

- a. We are all being told how important routines and schedules are during what can be a very unstructured time in our lives. Yet routines and schedules are pretty abstract concepts, which can be difficult to follow or understand. So, make those routines and schedules more concrete by using visuals. Each visual represents one activity in the schedule. Visuals can also be text, like a written to do list. For young children or children with disabilities, pair the written text with visual images. Images can be drawings, clip art, photographs, or even objects.
- b. Some families may create visual schedule of their entire day. For example, wake up, brush teeth, eat breakfast, play outside, read, etc. Other families may create visual schedules for a specific activity. There is much attention on the importance of handwashing. Families can visually illustrating the steps of handwashing and taping it to the bathroom mirror over the sink can be a useful tool!
- c. Even a two-step visual schedule can be helpful. Language like “first... then...” can be useful here. For example, first read for 20 minutes, then we can go outside.” Make sure the “Then” activity is preferred! That way it serves as a built in reward.

4. Choice

- a. Offer your child choice throughout the day. Children can choose the order in which they complete activities and can even put the visual schedule in the order of their choosing. Or choice can be within a specific activity. It's time to read, but you can choose whether you read in your room, on the couch, or outside.
- 5. Keep moving
 - a. Incorporate periods of physical activity throughout the day. Go outside if you can. If you stay indoors, consider creating obstacle course in the house, have a hoola-hoop contest, or stream an online exercise video. Get the whole family involved!
- 6. Bonus
 - a. Go easy on yourself. This is a difficult time for many of us. There will be days that we feel unsuccessful. Allow yourselves permission to make mistakes and remember, you can always try again tomorrow.