

How can I provide positive behaviour in my program?

Carol Foster

Biography

Carol is a graduate of the Early Childhood Education program that is offered at Fanshawe College in Simcoe, Ontario. Currently she is the co-coordinator for the Launch Pad and the After School Activity Program offered through Norfolk County Community Services at Doverwood Public School in Port Dover, Ontario. At home she has a wonderful eight-year-old daughter, Courtney, who has been her greatest supporter in everything she attempts to do. It is because of her that Carol chose this profession. Carol wanted to give her the best possible upbringing that she could, and knowing how to handle challenging behaviour, when it appears, helps tremendously.

Abstract

In my paper I have defined what challenging behaviour is and how it applied to one of the children who attended the Launch Pad Program where I work. I have also listed some of the strategies that seem to be working for Aaron, his mother Lori and myself when dealing with his challenging behaviour.

Introduction

When Aaron who is 3 1/2 years old came into the program he appeared to be a happy little boy, but then as more children started to arrive, the troubles started. He was playing nicely, but then his body tensed and pieces of the train track started flying through the air, His mother started yelling, "Stop It Now or We Are Going Home!" The room went quiet and all heads turned in the direction of the mother while the tension increased.

This incident concerned me because it was causing an uncomfortable feeling with the other parents as well as his mother and was also causing a safety concern for the other children. With my Launch Pad Program being placed in a school setting I believed this was helping Aaron, who will possibly be attending Junior Kindergarten in January, to learn what type of behaviour will be expected of him when he starts into a regular classroom with other children.

At the beginning of this Action Research Project (this is my first one) we had to come up with a question about something in our program that we strongly believe in. After a disastrous first question, the incident with Aaron happened and my question of "How Can I Promote Positive Behaviour in My Program?" was born.



What is Challenging Behaviour?

Barbara Kaiser and Judy Sklar Rasminsky (1999) define challenging behaviour as any behaviour that interferes with children's learning, development and success at play, is harmful to the child, other children or adults or puts a child at high risk for later social problems or school failure.

Challenging behaviour can be put in two categories: Direct and Indirect. Direct Behaviour is hitting, pushing, biting, pinching, spitting or hair pulling. Indirect Behaviour is actions like bullying, teasing, ignoring rules or instructions, spreading rumors, excluding others, name calling, destroying objects, refusing to share, not paying attention or having temper tantrums. Unfortunately when a child shows challenging behaviour we label them as, difficult, unsociable, a handful, bad, out of control, hard to manage, disruptive, aggressive, mean or the attention-seeker. In the Launch Pad Program we deal with children of various ages at the same time, so I am finding that there is more Direct Behaviour as opposed to Indirect.

What Did I Do

Realizing that I had to do something before it got totally out of hand, I brought the incident up to my supervisor, Donna Jones, to see if she had any suggestions. Shadowing, Looking for Signs, Meeting His Eyes (Quing), "Gotcha Club" and the Positive Techniques were some of the ideas that she brought up to me to try. I also introduced Feelings to my circle time.

Shadowing

Shadowing allows the child to play with the other children, but an adult must be close by to intervene should the child start to show the signs indicating that inappropriate behaviour is about to happen.

Look for the Signs

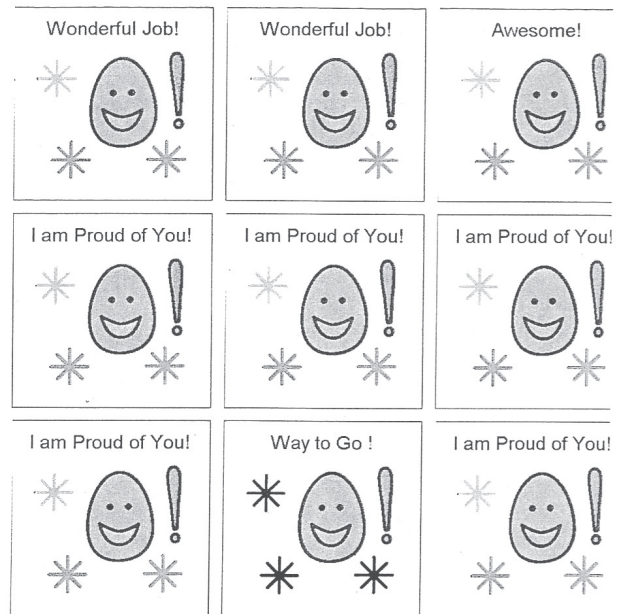
According to WEVAS (Working Effectively with Violent and Aggressive Students) a course written by Manitoba psychologists Neil Butchard and Robert Spencler, in order to prevent challenging behaviour we must start with its very earliest signs, anxiety and agitation. Signs in children vary. The only way that you are going to pick up on these signs is by getting to know them well and watching them closely. While watching Aaron I noticed that just before he lashed out his body would go tense. He would hold his arms down at his side and he would stare. I brought this up with mom and she said that she had noticed it and we now both look for the signs and intervene before it becomes a problem. (Journal entry February 28, 2005)

Meeting His Eyes (Quing)

When I have had to speak to Aaron about his behaviour I make sure that I get down to his level and make him look me in the eye. I do this because then I know that I have his attention. I then ask him in a calm voice what made him do the inappropriate behaviour.

Gotcha Club

The “Gotcha Club” is a club in which the children receive tickets every time they initiate a positive behaviour. In order for this to work, consistency is a big thing. I encourage the parents to continue with the “Gotcha Club” at home as well as at the Launch Pad. To do this I gave each child a brown paper bag and to each parent a zip lock bag with some “Gotcha Tickets” in it. The children could decorate the bag however they wanted. They were told to keep it at home so that they had some place to keep their tickets that they received during Launch Pad as well as those received at home. Parents are encouraged to decide on a reward that is NOT OF MONETARY VALUE. Some rewards can be going out for an ice cream, an extra 5 minutes of television, a movie night or having a say on what will be for supper the last night of the week. Chicken Nuggets every Friday is a small price to pay for positive behaviour. When I introduced that “Gotcha Club” to Lori, Aaron’s mom she seemed eager to initiate it at home. On March 7, 2005 Aaron arrived at Launch Pad all excited to tell me that he got the 10 Gotcha Tickets that mom had set and that they were going to McDonalds for an ice cream. Mom stated to me that Aaron’s father was amazed at how well Aaron played with his cousins over the weekend. Playing nicely that weekend earned Aaron 3 tickets.



8 Positive Techniques

Below are some positive techniques that I have attempted to implement with the children at my Launch Pad. These techniques are taken from the Parent’s Guide to Effective Discipline.

1. Praise Behaviour, Not Personality. “Good Girl” or “Good Boy”. Doesn’t give much direction, nor does it help your child build a positive self-concept. When making specific comments supply the child with feedback on what he is doing right. On March 7, 2005 Aaron asked another child and her father if he could play with them instead of just butting in. I told him that, that was a good job asking if he could play first.
2. Be Very Specific When You Praise. When using praise to teach positive behaviour make sure the child knows what they did that pleased you. On March 9, 2005 a parent that attends the Launch Pad commented about the positive way Aaron played with the children today.
3. Praise Progress. Good behaviour must be learned one step at a time. The first time your child picks up and puts away two toys, that’s a great start and worth a lot of praise. Next time it may be three toys. Each step, you’ll be closer to the goal of having him put away all the toys.

4. Use Appropriate Praise. Some children relish all the attention you can give; others prefer more quietly conveyed approval. If the child beams with pride or shrugs off your comments but repeats the positive behaviour, then your praise is working. Below are some suggested lead-in statements for verbally praising children:

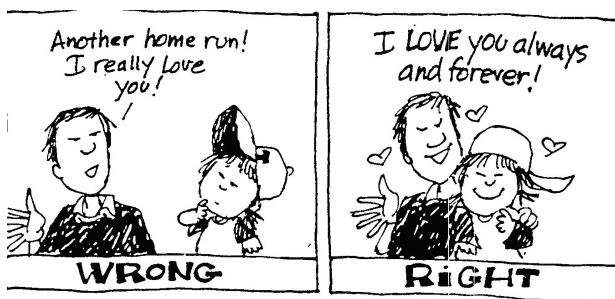
- I like the way you...
- You should feel good about...
- It makes me feel good when...
- I see that you...
- You are really working hard; you have...



- That's better; you are...
- Now you have the hang of it...
- Your persistence is paying off; you...
- You are doing a good job of...
- You're learning fast...
- You're on the right track now...
- You did it yourself today...

5. Praise Immediately. If too much time passes between the deed and the comment, then it is less likely to be effective. I applied this when I gave Aaron his "Gotcha Tickets". I praised his behaviour as soon as I witnessed it. With an active child like Aaron I found it helpful to carry the tickets around in my pocket so that I could give him one as soon as the good behaviour happens instead of wasting time going across the room and then returning, because chances are he has already moved onto another activity forgetting the reason that he is receiving a ticket.

6. In The Beginning, Praise the Behaviour Every time It Occurs. When you begin to teach a good behaviour, you should praise it every time it occurs. Later, fade out your constant praise and recognize the behaviour randomly. During a conversation with Lori (Mom) she mentioned to me that if she slacks on giving Aaron his tickets for his behaviour his behaviour starts to return to some not so positive behaviour. I reminded her that being consistent is the key and that he hasn't been in the club long enough to start to randomly pick which behaviour should receive a ticket and which shouldn't.



7. Don't Worry About Using Too Much Praise. Tie your words to specific deeds, consider the child's personality and vary the kind of praise you use.

8. Give Love Unconditionally. Each child should know that although you recognize his good behaviour, he doesn't need to earn your love he has it unconditionally.

Using Rewards

Rewards are used only to get a new behaviour going. Over time, reward the behaviour less frequently,

spacing out the rewards until the behaviour is well-established and resistant to change. Frequently parents use rewards as bribes, get caught in a cycle of endless payoffs or find that they simply do not work unless the ante is large enough. When I introduced the "Gotcha Club" to my parents at my Launch Pad I mentioned to them that a reward for their child's positive behaviour should not be of monetary value. Aaron was learning new words and was quite excited telling me that he could read words from his book "Little Boy Blue." I used this situation as a perfect reward for him. He loved to read that story so I asked him if he would like to read it for us during circle. It was a great day with no problems.

The Physical Environment

According to Barbara Kaiser and Judy Sklar Rasminsky, (1999), the physical environment can contribute to the behaviour also. Too many people in a space (children, staff, volunteers, parents) can lead to frustration and aggression. I have found this happening when I noticed that Aaron was fine when he first arrived and there was only himself, his mother and myself there, but then as other children started arriving and when there were a lot of children his aggression increased. Too much open space inspires running, chasing and chaos. In my program there isn't a lot of room for active activities, therefore I believe that in this case it was the opposite. Aaron was not finding a lot of space to be by himself. There was always something going on around him. Too much noise or loud music made it hard to concentrate. Too many choices and/or too many toys created confusion. Competitive games, violent toys and playing violent roles (like superheroes) incited aggressive behaviour. Aaron loved playing with the big connector sticks that I have in the program. Sometimes a gentle reminder that we do not make the sticks into weapons is all that was needed, but then there were times that he just had to make that gun and he had to be reminded again by his mother that if he made a weapon then he would be removed from the sticks for awhile.

Use Your Words

When talking to Aaron about his behaviour I encouraged him to use his words instead of his hands. On March 9/05 while playing with the building sticks another child at the Launch Pad program came along and grabbed the stick that Aaron was playing with. I noticed this action but didn't see any of the signs that Aaron was going to lash out so I discreetly moved within a safe distance to intervene if things got out of hand. Aaron then proceeded to tell the other child that that stick was his and that he wanted it back. When the other child refused to give it back Aaron proceeded to shove him. I intervened, told the other child that Aaron was playing with the stick first and that he needed it to finish his creation. The other child went off to his mother and I turned to Aaron and praised him for using his words. I told him that shoving the other child wasn't a good thing to do, but that he should have come to his mother or myself so that we could have done something. After talking to Aaron I went over to the other child and talked to him about the situation. Unfortunately it was too late the mother was already getting the children dressed to leave. It might have made more of an impact if they had been able to stay long enough to reinforce the behaviour.

Feelings

When discussing my question for this paper with a fellow co-worker, Jenn Cook, she told me that she

had some activity papers on feelings that might help me with getting the children to understand how the other person, as well as themselves feel when there is challenging behaviour. During circle time in February, I introduced the concept of feelings to the children. I gave them a situation and asked them to make the face that they thought they would have. For example, I said that I was playing with the sticks and then someone came along and grabbed the stick that I was playing with. I asked what they thought my face would look like. I had a lot of different expressions. There were sad faces and angry faces. I asked them why they would have angry faces and most of them said because I was playing with the sticks first. After going through the feelings colouring book that I made up I gave each child a copy of it. (Appendix 1)

Giving each child a mirror during circle time is another fun way of letting the children know what their faces look like in different situations. I have learned that asking them just to show me what their face would look like when... didn't really work, so I changed it a bit by giving situations instead.

Oops I Had A Bad Day!

I have learned that no child is perfect and there are going to be days when no amount of reasoning with their behaviour is going to work. We have to just keep on trying. But if they have already earned something for their good behaviour should you take it away from them? Lori did state to me that Dad wanted to take away a Gotcha Ticket that Aaron has already earned if he shows bad behaviour. I told her that I didn't think that was fair, but I wanted to know what she thought. She said, "No, because he has already earned it." When this situation was mentioned to another parent they asked why one should not be taken away. I then put this to them. "You have just been given a raise at work. Then 'oops' one day you came in late and the day just goes down hill from there. Do you think it would be fair if your boss came in and said do you remember that raise you just got, well we are going to take it away because you are having a bad day." It really wouldn't be fair to you would it? Well that is the way it would be for Aaron or any other child.

Conclusion

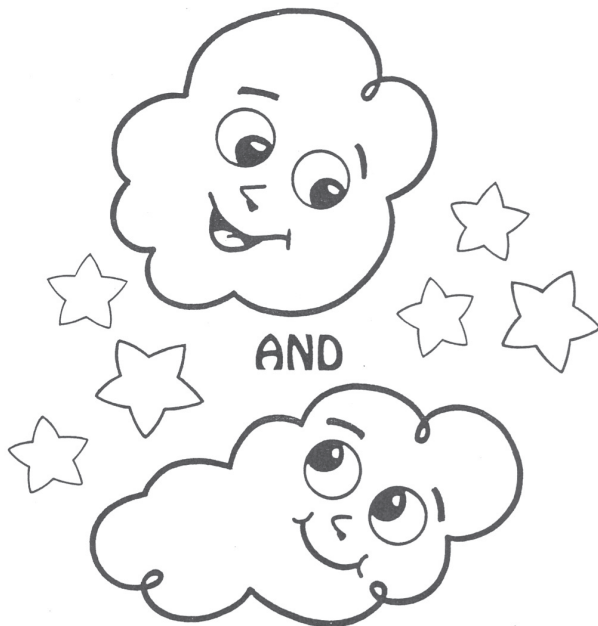
After reading the information to put into this paper, I found myself taking another look at how I dealt with challenging behaviour out of the Launch Pad. As a result of my experiences during the research I have taken the information and applied it to my After School Activity Program as well as with my daughter at home. The author of "Parent's Guide to Effective Discipline" sums up a child's behaviour quite well. "Your child wants your attention more than anything else and will do anything to get it one way or another."

References

Kaiser, B. & Sklar Rasminsky, J. (1999). Meeting the Challenge. Effective Strategies for Challenging Behaviours in Early Childhood Environments. M.O.M Printing, Ottawa, ON.

Donna Jones, Child and Youth Special Events Co-Ordinator

MY FEELINGS ARE
IMPORTANT!



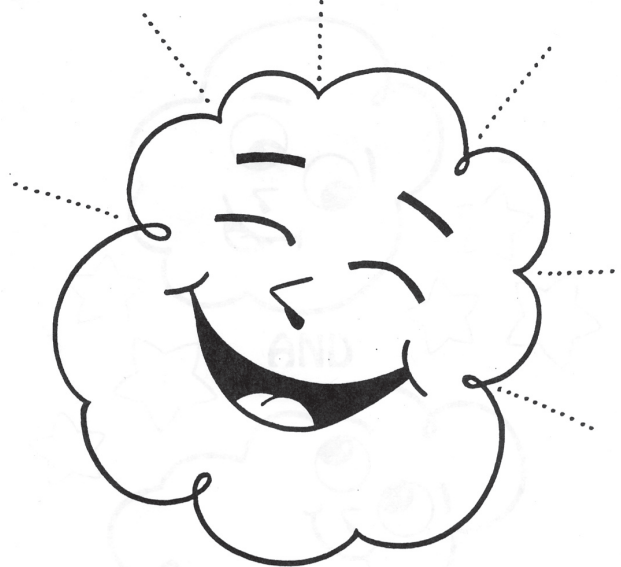
SO ARE YOURS!

SOMETIMES I DON'T KNOW
HOW I FEEL



Does That Ever Happen
To You?

SOMETIMES I FEEL
HAPPY



Do You Ever Feel Happy?