

# CATCH 'EM BEING GOOD

## Guidelines for Encouraging Appropriate Behavior

From time to time, your child will show some problem behaviors (e.g., temper tantrums, aggression, not minding) which you do not like. You may want to eliminate these problem behaviors. However, from your child's point of view, what we are calling problem behaviors are really successful or rewarding behaviors. They are not "bad" or "troublesome" as far as your child is concerned. On the contrary, they work well to get your child what he/she is after. Your child has learned that they pay off.

Now suddenly, the payoff is removed. A behavior that might have been scolding before is ignored; when the child might have been chased before, he/she is now put in time-out. You are beginning a strategy to reduce problem behavior. But your child does not know that! All he/she sees is that those behaviors which used to be successful are now met with a different, non-rewarding consequence. And, as a result, he/she will soon be left to search for new ways to get your attention.

Here is where you can be your child's most effective guide. This is your chance to teach him/her appropriate, non-problem behaviors that will now work to get him/her what he/she wants and make life more pleasant for the entire family.

### *Guidelines for Encouraging Alternative Behavior*

1. *This program involves a two-part strategy:*
  - a. Undesirable Behavior – remove rewards
  - b. Desirable Behavior – give rewards

When your child is engaging in problem behaviors, remove rewards by ignoring or not attending to him/her, by placing him/her in time-out for brief periods of time, etc. But, as soon as your child starts to engage in appropriate behavior, you should be ready immediately with attention and some tangible reward (toys, edibles, activities). Your child now has a choice and he/she will become progressively less likely to misbehave (which brings no payoff) and more likely to be occupied in some other way (which brings a definite payoff).

2. *Your search for desirable behaviors to reward will be much more successful if you can think of ones which are incompatible with problem behavior when both cannot happen at the same time.*

Example: Take, for example, the child who tantrums. Children who engage in tantrums usually scream, kick, and make a lot of fuss. While at first this behavior may have occurred for some practical reason (can't tie shoes), parents often reinforce it with much attention, and it becomes more frequent and often more intense.

To eliminate tantrums, we suggest you ignore them. However, this is only part of the program. Incompatible behaviors should be rewarded. You should be ready with attention and a toy or a preferred activity, etc., when your child is not tantruming perhaps playing quietly or talking.

There are some things you can do to make sure your child will be good. For instance, you can arrange situations for him/her such as games that he/she enjoys doing or other activities (watching TV, listening to music, reading, etc.) that he/she often engages in on his/her own. If you examine these situations closely, you will notice that these are the times when your child is less likely to misbehave. Therefore, these are good times for you to give your child plenty of attention by encouraging these activities and then by sharing in them with your child.

3. *Every program has these two parts: discouraging problem behavior and encouraging alternative behaviors. Decide for your child's problem behavior an alternative, incompatible behavior which you can encourage.*

Problem Behaviors:

Alternative Behaviors:

Rewards:

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