

CHILD-PARENT-RELATIONSHIP (C-P-R) TRAINING

Parent Notes & Homework - Session 6

☞ RULES OF THUMB TO REMEMBER:

1. "Grant in fantasy what you can't grant in reality." In a play session, it is okay to act out feelings and wishes that in reality may require limits. For example, it's okay for the "baby sister" doll to be thrown out a window in playtime.
2. "Big choices for big kids, little choices for little kids." Choices given must be commensurate with child's developmental stage.

Notes (use back for additional notes):

Homework Assignments:

1. Read *Choice-Giving 101: Teaching Responsibility & Decision-Making* and *Advanced Choice-Giving: Providing Choices as Consequences*.
2. Read *Common Problems in Play Sessions* and mark the top two to three issues you have questions about or write in an issue you are challenged by that is not on the worksheet.
3. Practice giving at least one kind of choice ("A" or "B") outside of the play session.
 - A. Provide choices for the sole purpose of empowering your child (two positive choices for child, where either choice is acceptable to you and either choice is desirable to child)

What happened _____

What you said _____

How child responded _____
 - B. Practice giving choices as a method of discipline (where choice-giving is used to provide a consequence for noncompliance of limit, family rule, or policy)

What happened _____

What you said _____

How child responded _____
4. Conduct play session (same time & place)—review *Play Session Do's & Don'ts & Play Session Procedure Checklist*
 - a. Complete *Parent Play Session Notes*.
 - b. Use *Play Session Skills Checklist* to note what you thought you did well, and select one skill you want to work on in your next play session.
 _____ *I will bring my videotape for next week (if videotaping at clinic: my appt. day/time _____).*
5. Additional assignment:

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Choice-Giving 101: Teaching Responsibility & Decision-Making - Session 6

- Providing children with age-appropriate choices empowers children by allowing them a measure of control over their circumstances. Children who feel more empowered and “in control” are more capable of regulating their own behavior, a prerequisite for self-control. Choices require that children tap into their inner resources, rather than relying on parents (external resources) to stop their behavior or solve the problem for them. If parents always intervene, the child learns that “Mom or Dad will stop me if I get out of hand” or “Mom or Dad will figure out a solution if I get in a jam.”
- Presenting children with choices provides opportunities for decision-making and problem-solving. Through practice with choice-making, children learn to accept responsibility for their choices and actions and learn they are competent and capable. Choice-giving facilitates the development of the child’s conscience; as children are allowed to learn from their mistakes, they learn to weigh decisions based on possible consequences.
- Providing children with choices reduces power struggles between parent and child and, importantly, preserves the child-parent relationship. Both parent and child are empowered; parent is responsible for, or in control of, providing parameters for choices, and the child is responsible for, or in control of, his decision (within parent-determined parameters).

Choice-Giving Strategies

- Provide age-appropriate choices that are equally acceptable to the child and to you. Remember that you must be willing to live with the choice the child makes. Do not use choices to try and manipulate the child to do what you want by presenting one choice that you want the child to choose and a second choice that you know the child won’t like.
- Provide little choices to little kids; big choices to big kids. *Example: A 3-year-old can only handle choosing between two shirts or two food items. “Sarah, do you want to wear your red dress or your pink dress to school?” “Sarah, do you want an apple or orange with your lunch?”*

Choice-Giving to Avoid Potential Problem Behavior and Power Struggles

Choices can be used to avoid a potential problem. Similar to the example above, choices given are equally acceptable to parent and child. In this case, choices are planned in advance by the parent to avoid problems that the child has a history of struggling with. In the example above, if Sarah has trouble getting dressed in the morning, provide a choice of what to wear the evening before (to avoid a struggle the next morning); after she has made the choice, take the dress out of the closet, ready for morning. Children who are given the responsibility for making a decision are more likely to abide by the decision.

In selecting choices to prevent problems, it is very important that parents understand the real problem that their child is struggling with. If your child always comes home hungry and wants something sweet, but you want him to have a healthy snack, plan ahead by having on hand at least two choices of healthy snacks that your child likes. Before he heads for the ice cream, say:

“Billy, I bought grapes and cherries for snack; which would you like?”

Or, if you made your child’s favorite cookies, and it is acceptable for your 5-year-old to have one or two cookies, say:

“Billy, I made your favorite cookies today; would you like one cookie or two?”

Hint: This is another place where “structuring for success” can be applied by eliminating the majority of unacceptable snack items and stocking up on healthy snack items! Structuring your home environment to minimize conflict allows both you and your child to feel more “in control.” Remember: **Be a thermostat!**

Suggested Reading for Parents: “Teaching Your Child to Choose,” Parenting, October, 2002.

CHILD-PARENT-RELATIONSHIP (C-P-R) TRAINING

Advance Choice-Giving: Providing Choices as Consequences - Session 6-7

Children need parental guidance and discipline. In many instances, parents must make decisions for children—decisions that children are not mature enough to take responsibility for—such as bedtime, other matters of health and safety, and compliance with household policies and rules. However, parents can provide their children with some measure of control in the situation by providing choices.

Oreo® Cookie Method of Choice-Giving (from "Choices, Cookies, & Kids" video by Dr. Garry Landreth)

Example 1: Three-year-old Sarah is clutching a handful of Oreo® cookies, ready to eat them all (it is right before bedtime, and the parent knows it would not be healthy for Sarah to have all the cookies. But Sarah does not know that—she just knows that she wants cookies!): **"Sarah, you can choose to keep one of the cookies to eat and put the rest back, or you can put all of the cookies back—which do you choose?"** Or, if it is permissible to the parent for Sarah to have two cookies: **"Sarah, you can have one cookie or two—which do you choose?"**

Example 2: Three-year-old Sarah does not want to take her medicine and adamantly tells you so! Taking the medicine is not a choice—that is a given. But the parent can provide the child with some control over the situation by saying, **"Sarah, you can choose to have apple juice or orange juice with your medicine—which do you choose?"**

Example 3: Seven-year-old Billy is tired and cranky and refuses to get in the car to go home from Grandma and Grandpa's house. **"Billy, you can choose to sit in the front seat with Daddy, or you can choose to sit in the back seat with Sarah—which do you choose?"**

Choice-Giving to Enforce Household Policies and Rules

Choice-giving can be used to enforce household policies/rules. Begin by working on one at a time. In general, provide two choices—one is phrased positively (consequence for complying with policy), and the other choice (consequence for not complying with policy) is stated as a consequence that you believe your child would not prefer (such as giving up favorite TV show). Consequence for noncompliance should be relevant and logical rather than punitive, and it must be enforceable.

Example: A household rule has been established that toys in the family room must be picked up off the floor before dinner (children cannot seem to remember without being told repeatedly, and parent is feeling frustrated with constant reminders and power struggles).

"We are about to institute a new and significant policy within the confines of this domicile" (big words get children's attention!). **"When you choose to pick up your toys before dinner, you choose to watch 30 minutes of television after dinner. When you choose not to pick up your toys before dinner, you choose not to watch television after dinner."** *Note: Be sure to let children know when there are 10–15 minutes before dinner, so they can have time to pick up their toys.*

Children may be able to comply the first time you announce this new policy, because you have just informed them. But what is important is that you begin to allow your children to use their internal resources and self-control to remember the new policy without constant reminders. (Remember that the new policy was implemented because you were frustrated and tired of nagging!) So, the second night, parent says, **"Billy and Sarah, dinner will be ready in 10 minutes; it is time to pick up your toys."** Parent walks out. When it is time for dinner, parent goes back into room to announce dinner:

- a) The toys have not been picked up—say nothing at that moment. After dinner, go back into family room and announce to children, **"Looks like you decided to not watch television tonight."** Even if children get busy picking up the toys, they have already chosen not to watch TV for this night. **"Oh, you're thinking that if you pick your toys up now that you can watch TV, but the policy is that toys have to be put away before dinner."** After children plead for another chance, *follow through on the consequence*, calmly and empathically stating: **"I know that you wish you would have chosen to put your toys away before dinner, so you could choose to watch TV now. Tomorrow night, you can choose to put your toys away before dinner and choose to watch TV."** *Some children will choose not to watch TV for several nights in a row!*
- b) The children are busy picking up toys and have put most of them away. Parent says (as she helps with the few remaining toys to demonstrate spirit of cooperation and prevent delay of dinner), **"It's time for dinner—looks like you've chosen to watch TV after dinner tonight."**

Guidelines for Choice-Giving in Relation to Limit Setting and Consequences

- Enforce consequence **without fail** and **without anger.**
- Consequence is for "today" only—each day (or play session) should be a chance for a fresh start; a chance to have learned from the previous decision and resulting consequence; a chance to use internal resources to control "self" and make a different decision.
- **Reflect** child's choice with empathy, but remain firm. Consistency and follow-through are critical!
- Communicate choices in a matter-of-fact voice—power struggles are likely to result if child hears frustration or anger in parent's voice and believes parent is invested in one choice over another. Child must be free to choose consequence for noncompliance.

Caution: *Once your child has reached the stage of "out of control," your child may not be able to hear and process a choice. Take a step back and focus on your child's feelings, reflecting her feelings empathically while limiting unacceptable behavior and holding her, if necessary, to prevent her from hurting herself or you.*

CHILD-PARENT-RELATIONSHIP (C-P-R) TRAINING

Common Problems in Play Sessions - Session 6

- Q:** My child notices that I talk differently in the play sessions and wants me to talk normally. What should I do?
- A:** Say, "I sound different to you. That's my way of letting you know I heard what you said. Remember, I'm going to that special class to learn how to play with you." (The child may be: saying he notices the parent is different; having a surprise reaction to the verbal attention; annoyed by too much reflection of words; or saying he notices the difference in the parent's reflective-type responses. The child may also be saying he doesn't want the parent to change, because that will mean he must then change and adjust to the parent's new way of responding.)
- Q:** My child asks many questions during the play sessions and resents my not answering them. What should I do?
- A:** We always begin by reflecting the child's feelings. "You're angry at me." Sometimes a child feels insecure when a parent changes typical ways of responding and is angry because he doesn't know how to react. Your child may feel insecure and be trying to get your attention the way he has done in the past. Your objective is to encourage your child's self-reliance and self-acceptance. "In our special playtime, the answer can be anything you want it to be." For example, your child might ask, "What should I draw?" You want your child to know he's in charge of his drawing during the special playtime, so you respond, "You've decided to draw, and in this special playtime, you can draw whatever you decide." Our objective is to empower the child, to enable the child to discover his own strengths.
- Q:** My child just plays and has fun. What am I doing wrong?
- A:** Nothing. Your child is supposed to use the time however she wants. The relationship you are building with your child during the special playtimes is more important than whether or not your child is working on a problem. As your relationship with your child is strengthened, your child's problem will diminish. Your child may be working on issues through her play that you are not aware of. Remember the lesson of the Band-Aid. What you are doing in the playtimes is working, even when you don't see any change. Children can change as a result of what they do in play sessions with parents or play therapists, even though we are not aware of what they are working on. Your job during the special playtimes is to follow your child's lead and be nonjudgmental, understanding, and accepting of your child. Your empathic responses will help your child focus on the issues that are important to her.
- Q:** I'm bored. What's the value of this?
- A:** Being bored in a playtime is not an unusual happening because parents have busy schedules, are on the go a lot, and are not used to sitting and interacting quietly for 30 minutes. You can increase your interest level and involvement in your child's play by responding to what you see in your child's face and asking yourself questions such as "What is he feeling?" "What is he trying to say in his play?" "What does he need from me?" or "What is so interesting to him about the toy or the play?" and by making more tracking responses and reflective responses. The most important thing you can do is continue to be patient with the process of the play sessions.
- Q:** My child doesn't respond to my comments. How do I know I'm on target?
- A:** Usually when you are on target, your child will let you know. If she doesn't respond to a reflection, you may want to explore other feelings she might be having or convey that you're trying to understand. For example, if you have reflected "You really are angry!" and your child doesn't respond, you might say, "... Or maybe it's not anger you're feeling, maybe you're just feeling really strong and powerful." If your child still doesn't respond, you might say, "Maybe that's not it either. I wonder what it could be that you're feeling."

Q: When is it okay for me to ask questions, and when is it not okay?

A: Most of the time, questions can be rephrased as statements, for example, "I wonder if that's ever happened to you" instead of "Has that ever happened to you?" The only type of questions that are okay in play sessions are spoken as "stage whispers," as in "What should I say?"

Q: My child hates the play sessions. Should I discontinue them?

A: Communicating understanding is always important. Say, "You don't want to have the special playtime. You would rather do something else. Let's have the special playtime for 10 minutes, then you can decide if you want to have the rest of the special playtime or do something else." This response helps your child to feel understood and to feel in control. A child in that position in a relationship is much more likely to compromise. In most cases, a child will get started playing and will decide to have the rest of the playtime.

Q: My child wants the playtime to be longer. Should I extend the session?

A: Even though your child is having lots of fun, the time limit is adhered to because this promotes consistency, affords you an opportunity to be firm, and provides your child with an opportunity to bring himself under control and end a very desirable playtime. Use A-C-T limit setting, being sure to acknowledge your child's feelings. For example, you can say, "You're really having fun and would like to play a lot longer, but our special playtime is over for today. We will have another special playtime next Tuesday." If your child persists, you could say, "Joey, I wish we had more time, too, but our 30 minutes are up for today. We'll get to have another playtime next Tuesday."

Q: My child wants to play with the toys at other times during the week. Is that OK?

A: Allowing your child to play with these toys only during the 30-minute playtimes helps to convey the message that this is a special time, a time just for the two of you, a fun time. Setting the toys apart makes the playtime unique and more desirable. Another reason is that this time with your child is an emotional relationship time; the toys become a part of that emotional relationship during which your child expresses and explores emotional messages through the toys because of the kinds of empathic responses you make. This same kind of emotional exploration cannot occur during other playtimes because you are not there to communicate understanding of your child's play. Additionally, being allowed to play with these toys only during the special playtimes helps your child learn to delay his need for gratification. If you are having trouble keeping your child from playing with the special toy kit, try storing it out of sight on the top shelf of your closet. If that doesn't work, lock it in the trunk of your car.

Q: My child wants me to shoot at him during the play session. What should I do?

A: Set the limit. If your child says, "I'm the bad guy, shoot me," say, "I know you want me to shoot you, but you're not for shooting; I can pretend you're the bad guy getting away, and I'll catch you, or you can draw a picture of the bad guy getting shot."

Q: _____

CHILD-PARENT-RELATIONSHIP (C-P-R) TRAINING

In-Class Play Session Skills Checklist:

For Review of Videotaped (or Live) Play Session - Session 6

Directions: Indicate ✓ in blank when you observe a play session skill demonstrated in videotaped or live play session

1. ___ Set the Stage/Structured Play Session

2. ___ Conveyed "Be With" Attitudes
Full attention/interested
Toes followed nose

3. ___ Allowed Child to Lead
Avoided giving suggestions
Avoided asking questions
Returned responsibility to child

4. ___ Followed Child's Lead
Physically on child's level
Moved closer when child was involved in play
Joined in play when invited—took imaginary/pretend role when appropriate

5. ___ Reflective Responding Skills:
 - ___ Reflected child's nonverbal play behavior (Tracking)
 - ___ Reflected child's verbalizations (Content)
 - ___ Reflected child's feelings/wants/wishes
 - ___ Voice tone matched child's intensity/affect
 - ___ Responses were brief and interactive
 - ___ Facial expressions matched child's affect

6. ___ Used Encouragement/Self-Esteem-Building Responses

7. ___ Set Limits, As Needed, Using A-C-T

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Parent Play Session Notes - Session 6

Play Session # _____ Date: _____

Significant Happenings:

What I Learned About My Child:

Feelings Expressed:

Play Themes:

What I Learned About Myself:

My feelings during the play session:

What I think I was best at:

What was hardest or most challenging for me:

Questions or Concerns:

Skill I Want to Focus on in the Next Play Session: _____

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Play Session Skills Checklist - Session 6

Play Session # _____ Date: _____

(Note: Indicate ✓ in column if skill was used; — if skill was not used; and + if skill was a strength)

✓ — +	Skill	Notes/Comments
	Set the Stage/Structured Play Session	
	Conveyed "Be With" Attitudes <i>Full attention/interested</i> <i>Toes followed nose</i>	
	Allowed Child to Lead <i>Avoided giving suggestions</i> <i>Avoided asking questions</i> <i>Returned responsibility to child</i>	
	Followed Child's Lead <i>Physically on child's level</i> <i>Moved closer when child was involved in play</i> <i>Joined in play when invited</i>	
	Reflective Responding Skills:	
	Reflected child's nonverbal play (Tracking)	
	Reflected child's verbalizations (Content)	
	Reflected child's feelings/wants/wishes	
	Voice tone matched child's intensity/affect	
	Responses were brief and interactive	
	Facial expressions matched child's affect	
	Use of Encouragement/Self-Esteem-Building Responses	
	Set Limits, As Needed, Using A-C-T	