

Let's Practice

What are some prompts that may work for children in our ministry and/or in your classes?

Reinforcement Strategy

Reinforcement is something that follows a behavior and increase the likelihood that the behavior will occur again in the future.



Aspects of Reinforcement

- Motivation – Each child is different and will be motivated by different things. The key is to find out what motives the individual child and utilize it to encourage positive behavior.
- Satiation – Save some "special" rewards for very specific behaviors and important ones.
- Immediacy – It's important that reinforcement happens immediately after the desired behavior is shown.
- Delay – Once the child learns to follow other visuals, we can delay the delivery of the reinforcement.



Let's Practice

What types of reinforcement have you used or could use in your children's ministry with certain children?

Behavior Strategies

“When little people are overwhelmed by big emotions, it’s our job to share our calm, not join their chaos.” – L.R. Knost

Functions of Behavior

Sensory – a child will engage in a behavior to see or to avoid a particular sensory sensation

Escape – a child engages in a behavior to escape a demand from a teacher

Attention – a child engages in a behavior to grab the attention from others

Tangible - a child engages in a behavior to obtain a particular item

Simple Behavior Improvement Tips

Provide Clear Expectations & Boundaries

Use Positive Reinforcement

Be Consistent

Use “First _____. Then _____” language (example: First we’ll listen to the Bible lesson, then we can play that game)

Use Visual Cues (schedules, token boards, timers, ect.)

Replacement Behaviors

A replacement behavior is a negative behavior that you want to replace with a positive behavior.

Simply trying to eliminate the negative behavior alone may not be possible, but replacing the negative behavior with a positive one may be a successful strategy.

Example: When a child doesn't want to read their Bible, they throw it across the room. A replacement behavior would be teaching the child to ask to sit in the calming corner if they don't want to read their Bible right then instead of throwing it across the room.

Maintaining Predictability

- Structure and Consistency are key for children with oppositional and defiant tendencies.

Elements of Predictability:

- Reviewing a visible schedule of the events for the day/night (keep the order of events the same each day you have class)
- If events need to change on a certain day, spend extra time explaining that at the beginning of the class and the why behind it.

Maintaining Predictability



Use transition cues when possible.



Over celebrate when children transition from one event to the next appropriately.



Remind children they can ask what the schedule is for the day at any time.



Help older children learn to use a self-planner to help then personally keep up with the events of each day.

Let's Talk



How can you help children transition from one event to the next in your classroom?



What are some transition songs you could teach your children to help them transition?



What would a visible schedule of events look like for your classroom?

Increase Choice

- Sometimes giving children the power to choose helps them feel like they have more control in their daily lives.
- You can give children choices that are a win-win. (choices that have a positive outcome either way they choose)
- Example: We're going to color this picture, you can choose the yellow crayon or the purple crayon.

Classroom “Jobs”

A way to increase children’s sense of control is to assign them classroom “jobs”.

Examples:

1. Someone is in charge of passing out papers.
2. Someone is in charge of making sure everyone has a pen or pencil.
3. Someone is the line leader and someone else is the caboose to ensure all children are lined up.
4. Someone is in charge of passing out Bibles and helping the children find the Scripture verse for the day.

Foster Positive Relationships

We need to make sure children know we see them in a positive light. They need positive reinforcement whether they are behaving properly that day or not. We need to remember and remind each child that they are made in the image of God.

“ So, God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.” (Genesis 1:27)

Ways to Foster Positive Relationships

- Greet students by name upon arrival.
- Ask them about their weekend and their family.
- Ask them if there's anything you can be praying about for them.

Praising Children's Positive Behaviors



- Be specific
- Be sincere (children know when you are faking it)
- Make praise individualized for each child
- Don't praise a child and then follow it up with negativity (example: Thank you for opening up to the Scripture passage today. It would have been nice if you did that the first 3 times I asked.)

Positive Worded Requests

- Try putting a positive spin on the requests you give to your children.

Example: “Everyone turn to the Scripture passage today. I love hearing you all read God’s Word!”

“Remember if you need help finding the Scripture, I’m more than happy to help you!”

Let's Practice

- Role play with one person acting as the child and one person acting as the teacher and then switch roles.
- Act out positive reinforcement when the child enters the classroom.
- Act out a child opening to the right Scripture and the teacher giving praise to them.

Teaching Communication Skills



- Sometimes teaching a child to properly communicate their feelings with others may mean not giving them the attention they are seeking from misbehaving for not getting their way.
- Model appropriate ways of communication when a child is throwing a fit for not getting their way.

Examples:

- remain calm
- be stern, but not mean
- empathize with them
- Say things like:

“It looks like you’re getting really frustrated, how about you take a minute and clam down?”

“This seems to be difficult for you. Is there anything I can do to help you?”

“If you need a break, you can always ask me for one.”

Avoid Power Struggles

- Understand when a child is misbehaving, it's not personal!
- A child is misbehaving likely because they have not learned how to properly manage their emotions and/or there is some kind of trauma in their past that is causing them to react a certain way.
- Never get in an argument with a child.
- We're not here to win "battles" with children, but to model to them how to properly respond to situations and grow them into the people God has created them to be.

Avoiding Power Struggles



If you feel yourself getting too angry or that you are about to lose control, give yourself a quick “break” to step away and recollect yourself before properly responding to the child.



Take a minute and pray about how to respond and ask God to give you peace and wisdom.



Use non-threatening body language and avoid sarcasm when responding to the child.

Avoiding Power Struggles



Do not physically intimidate or corner the child.



Give the child a part 2 choice statement (example: "I can call your mom to come get you, or you can sit back down in your chair and enjoy the next activity with your friends.")



Ensure the child that you will be happy to discuss the situation with them after they sit down and calm down.



Praise the child when they choose to respond in a positive way.

Safely De-Escalate Behaviors



If a child is starting to harm themselves or others, we need to de-escalate them as quick as possible.



We are not trying to problem-solve in this situation, but rather calm all children involved so we can begin the process of problem-solving.

De-Escalation Strategies



Remain calm



Use a neutral tone



Use brief, concise language



Try to avoid vague descriptors such as “calm down” or “relax”



Encourage positive body language



Read the situation on if a child is ready to talk or not



Ask for assistance from a pastor or trained staff member

After a “Meltdown”

- Have a child write down their feelings during the “meltdown” and how Jesus would have responded in that moment.
- Ensure them that they are still loved by you and Jesus, but that the behavior they showed was not loving to themselves or their friends. Help them come up with better ways to respond in the future.

Let's Talk

- Have you ever experienced a child having a “meltdown” in your class?
- How did you respond?
- How can using these de-escalations strategies help in the future?

Final Thoughts

- Is there anything you would like more clarification on?
- Any final thoughts that may help others?
- Was this information helpful to your current situations with children?

Resource Used for Data

Most of the research
presented was compiled by
BeltransBehaviorBasics

