**RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PARENTS**

**COPING WITH BEHAVIORAL DISORDERS AT HOME**

**ACTIONS TO TAKE**

* Be confident and firm. Establish clear, simple ground rules and consequences for breaking those rules well in advance. Avoid threats or second chances. Apply consequences ***consistently*** and quickly, to help teach cause and effect.
* Have consequences logically related to the misbehavior as much as possible. For example, failure to pick up clothes and put them in the hamper means no clean clothes.
* Reward good behavior. “Catch” them being good. Remember, it is the behavior that is bad, not the child.
* Set regular household routines and stick with them. Take time to supervise and make sure chores are done correctly. Be sure work is finished before “fun” takes place.
* Be consistent in what you say and do.
* Model desirable behavior. If you engage in a particular behavior, your child may feel justified in doing the same.
* Take time to talk with and to listen to your child. Listen to their feelings and ideas without judgment. Show them that you really care.
* Provide adequate supervision. Do not leave children at home without supervision for long periods of time, and make sure rules are well understood for those times.
* Get to know their friends and their friend’s parents.
* Let them make choices appropriate for their age instead of making all decisions for them. They may make some poor choices (spending allowance on a cheap toy that breaks instead of saving it) which will be learning experiences.
* Maintain a time and place for homework. Provide help when needed, but do not do it for them. If you cannot work with your child without conflict, allow someone else to help him.
* Use charting both for rewards and to monitor behaviors. “Check your chart” is often less likely to provoke an argument than telling a child to do some forgotten chore.
* Keep a written record of rules. From time to time, hold a family meeting to go over these rules and determine whether they may need revamping. Allow input, but make it clear from the outset that parents have the final say.
* Coordinate with your child’s school to reward and consequate school performance and behavior at home. This will reinforce the idea that school is important.
* If you have a question about a situation at school, arrange to visit with the teacher, principal, etc. to work it out. Let your child know after the details have been worked out. Do not undermine your child’s administrators and teachers in front of your child. This promotes the idea that you will always take your child’s side against others and undermines school authority.
* Plan enjoyable family activities. Spend time with them doing something they like to do. Allow input from your children; their ideas of fun may be different from yours..

**PRECAUTIONS**

* Do not give long restrictions you cannot enforce. Especially for young children, consequences should be immediate.
* Do not become discourages if consequences must be repeated over and over. If you back off, you are reinforcing that you will eventually give in. Significant behavior change can take as long as 6-8 weeks.
* Coordinate between spouses so parental authority is not undermined.
* Do not back off if they become angry or upset. Behavior is likely to worsen before it improves.
* Do not constantly nag. Overlook minor transgressions. Never use put-downs, even jokingly.
* Do not forget the power of peer influence. Encourage involvement with friends and groups who are doing well.
* Never “rescue” your child from the undesirable consequences of his or her actions. Allowing them to “take the fall” encourages responsibility.
* Never punish by taking away an activity that is important to their self-esteem and involves them with a positive peer group. Instead, restrict activities that are enjoyable, but less essential.
* Keep them busy. Involve them in scouts, 4-H, organized sports, band, etc. Every kid needs a specialty that helps him or her feel positive and competent before adolescence.
* Allow your child to earn privileges by doing the things he does not want to do. For example, every 15 minutes spent on homework earns 5 minutes of telephone time, etc. Rewards do not have to be costly-they can be as simple as time spent with friends, a “bye” on some disliked chore, a later bedtime, and so on.

**CONSEQUENCES** **REWARDS**

No telephone privileges Dinner at a restaurant

No outside play Movie

Earlier to bed Friend to visit

Extra chore Money, allowance

Removal of a favorite toy “Down” time

Time out “Only” child time

No television Later bedtime

Manual labor Chore choice