

Target Behaviors

All right. Week number two. I hope you tried some positive reinforcement. I hope that you are really trying to capture kids being good and give them something for that. Praise, attention, high five, hugs, compliments. Whatever it is, using that positive reinforcement. We started with positive reinforcement because that is the foundation of everything I wanna teach you. Building up our kiddos. Building up those good behaviors and how we do that is with positive reinforcement.

Today, we're gonna talk about target behaviors. What is a behavior? You're like, "Really? This is what we're doing right now?" Yeah, we're gonna stop and talk about this because if you're not clear on what a behavior is and how to communicate that to your child, they're never gonna be clear on it. So, little bit technical. Little bit scientific. Just to be really, really clear on what is a behavior and what's not, and can we let our kiddos know? Our webinar PowerPoint's a little bit long, so I'm gonna try to not talk too long. Your time is valuable and super precious. You're a busy, busy parent. I get it.

So, what is a behavior and what isn't? We're gonna look at lots of examples of what is or isn't, but really just a behavior is something I can see, and I can observe, and I can measure. When we're talking about target behaviors, when it comes to our kiddos, it's really important that they know what that target behavior is. What are they supposed to be doing right now in this moment so that they can access that positive reinforcement? We hope that they know that. We spend so much time working with them and setting these clear boundaries and expectations in a positive and a loving home, and all these things. But, you know what, if they're happening a problem behavior that expected behavior either isn't getting them the reinforcement they want, or they just don't remember what it is, right?

Then there's other stuff going on. There's other things happening in the environment and they need a gentle nudge, a reminder, of what is that expected behavior? What is that target behavior? What's that expectation right now? And if you tell them something that they don't clearly understand, that they can't define, how are they gonna do it? Use your manners. Okay, so am I supposed to say please or thank you? Am I supposed to use a fork? We're not at a table. Should I cover my mouth when I sneeze? But I didn't sneeze. So, what are my manners right now? Being very, very specific about what that target behavior is and telling your kiddo what that is. What do you want to see them doing and observe them doing?

Be kind. That can mean anything under the sun. So, in that moment, you need to tell them, "Be kind, which looks like letting your friend goes first. Remember, you're the host or the hostess. They came to our house to play. You let them take a turn first." That's what being kind is right then. Or being kind is sharing with your sibling. Or being kind is saying, "Yes,

ma'am," or, "No, sir," to an adult. It could be anything under the sun. What does be kind mean?

Well, hopefully, this is something you work on all the time and you talk about kindness and you model kindness and when someone's kind to you, you say, "I'm so glad they were kind," and I don't know how many times I can use the word kind right now. But what does that mean? We use all these big broad terms and there's nothing wrong with those, as long as our kiddo knows in each moment how to do it. Be responsible. Okay. So, I need to make sure I have my backpack. I need to make sure that I close the door all the way. I need to be sure that I don't leave toys on the floor for other people ... like what does that mean, be responsible right now? That means that you need to ask for permission to get something off the top shelf instead of climbing up unsafely.

What does that mean right now? So, when you're thinking about behavior out there in the world, what does this big broad term behavior mean? What does it mean? What are you looking for with your eyes? What do you want to observe? Can you break it down into some really specific steps? No more than three at a time. Poor kiddos. They don't need a big long lecture. "I need you to do this, this, this, this, this, this." No, let's just get to the point and we'll practice a whole bunch together right now of examples and non-examples. What is and isn't a behavior, and how to make sure we're giving them options.

If your kiddo is having a fit in the middle of the grocery store ... that never happens, does it? That never happens to me. It happens all the time. When Mom's busy and you're in a hurry and you're trying to get stuff done, problems are gonna arise. That's life. So, if you tell your kiddo to be good at the grocery store, well, what does that mean? "Right now, I need you off of the floor and staying next to me. Those are the behaviors of being good right now." Off of the floor. Yeah. That is so gross, when my child feels the need to lay on a filthy grocery store floor in public. Things like this. What does that mean right then?

You're like, "Of course, my kid knows not to lay on the floor in public. I've told them a million times." Of course, they know that, but wouldn't it be nice to have a gentle reminder before they get in trouble for it? What are the expectations right now? I need you to this and this. I know I would prefer a gentle reminder from someone for things I'm working on. I'm a mom. I have two kids. I'm always watching what I eat and trying to get in better shape and be healthier and lose weight and all that. I think that's just a part of my life from this point forward, trying to make time for that, and make it a priority. And so if I were about to go get some fast food because I'm running errands and I'm out and about, do I want to get in trouble for that? Do I want my husband or my sister or my friends, who are holding me accountable and we're working together on these things, to yell at me and be mad at me?

Or do I want them to be like, "Hey, remember? Look at your app for calorie counting. Make a better choice. Why don't you choose the salad at the drive thru or the grilled chicken sandwich or something?" What if they politely give me options instead of coming down hard on me for making a bad choice? They could prevent my bad choice and I would be so appreciative of them for supporting me and helping me out. How is that any different from our kiddos who are engaging in some problems, and we're like, "Hey, let's remember what

the expectations are right now. They're this and this. I need you to do that"? Instead of coming down on hard on them and yelling at them and being mean and upset and turning it into this big thing, just remind them what are the behaviors right now? "What can you do instead of whatever you're doing right? Because whatever you're doing right now, laying on the floor of the grocery store, not cool. That's not okay."

"What can you do instead? Stand up. Stay on your feet and stay close to me," and even better, add in some positive reinforcement. "Do all those things and when we get to the checkout, you can play with my phone for a minute. You can use the credit card machine and help me pay. You can ask for a sticker from the checker," or whatever works as a reinforcement for them. Tell them very clearly and very specifically what the expectations are. We cannot assume that they know what to do. If they did, hopefully, they would be doing it. Do they know? Especially with the older kids, you're like, "They know this. Oh, they know." But I'm a grownup and I know that I shouldn't be eating fast food, but does that mean that that's always what's happening in my mind? That I'm not just like, "I'm in a hurry. Let me just grab something that's delicious and terrible for me"?

No, I need that gentle reminder of, "Hey, here's some better choices. Here's some expectations right now. You can do this or this instead." I would much prefer that. I know better. Our kids know better, but in that moment, that's not what's on their mind. There's so many other competing things going on, so if we can very kindly and directly and specifically tell them, "Here are some behaviors you can do instead of what's happening or what is about to happen or what I know has happened before. Here's what you can do instead. Here's specifically behaviors that you can do that I can see and observe."

So, we're gonna do lots of examples and non-examples and really look at this so that you can be clear and direct with your kiddos and be more effective, and save some of that nagging and save some of that mean mommy and save some of that ugly interactions that we end up having with our kiddos, and build up the good stuff. I think we all want that. We want more of the good stuff, more of the good conversations, and just prevent the bad stuff from happening.

Target behaviors. What is a target behavior? What are we talking about? We've been looking at positive reinforcements. How do I know what to reinforce? How do I know what to teach my child? What can your kiddo do instead? That's something you're gonna hear me say a lot in the next few minutes. So, we're gonna look at the definition of behavior. We're gonna look at some examples and some replacement ideas. First of all, what is a behavior? We say behavior, behavior all the time here at Parenting with ABA, with behavior analysis. So, what does that mean? It's the activity of any living organism. It's anything that we do, that we say. It includes how we move. It includes what we think and we feel.

The technical behavior analytic definition ... I'm gonna read this to you. Stick with me. "The behavior of an organism is that portion of an organism's interaction with its environment that is characterized by a detectable displacement in space through time of some part of the organism and that results in a measurable change in at least one aspect of the environment." You got that? What it means ... it's an interaction with the environment. We

look at how we engage with our world around us, with everything that's going on around us, and something changes. It's either a physical movement or if you speak you've changed the environment because you've added these words to it. You've added things for other people to hear. It's displacement in space is movement and through time means it happened. It takes a few seconds for me to say these words to you. It only takes a second to hit somebody, if we're looking at a problem behavior. It takes a few seconds to share. Whatever the behavior is takes time and includes movement. So, it's something that we can see. Something that we can observe.

We also look at something called the dead's man rule. If a dead man can do it, it's not behavior. That's the whole rule. That's it. That's on the technical part of the slide. If a dead man can do it, it's not behavior. So, let's practice. Is this a behavior? Not talking. As a mom, I can tell you I say this all the time. "Stop talking. Don't talk right now." Words like that. Teachers say it all the time, but is that a behavior? Is that something my child can do? No. A dead man cannot talk. We need to find the active side of that. What is it? Maybe hold your lips closed. That might take some effort. I know it takes some effort for some little ones that I know. So, yeah, that is a behavior. That's something you physically do.

Not hitting. Is that a behavior? No, a dead man cannot hit. Are you finding a pattern here when we have not doing something? Keeping your hands to yourself. Is that a behavior? Yes. It might take some movement, such as putting your hands back down if they're raised to hit. It might take moving your hands into your pockets. Things like this. Keeping your hands to yourself is a behavior. If we find ourselves saying not doing something, stop doing something, don't do that, it's often not a behavior. Behavior is movement is one way to think about it. Something that you can see with your eyeballs is a behavior or hear with your ears. Something you can observe.

Let's really work hard to stop the nagging because that's not fun for any of us. Those of us who are doing the nagging or our children who have to listen to it. Is this you saying, "Stop that. No. Don't do that"? Well, does your kiddo know what they are able to do right then? Maybe. Hopefully, they do to some extent, right? But it's not working for them or they would be doing it. So, what can your child do instead? Instead of the, "No, no, no," let's turn it around. What can they do right then? And tell them. Our steps are we need to identify the problem behavior. We know there's a behavior. We know there's a problem. What is the exact behavior? Something that you can see and you observe that's the issue right now.

And then step number two is how can we replace that? What's an alternative behavior that your kiddo can do instead? Something that they can do or say that involves a movement or a change that they can do in that same situation. Give them choices. What can they do instead of the problem behavior? Tell them and let them pick one. Teach them, model it, be specific. We'll look at more examples on this, but what can they do right then instead of, "Stop, stop, stop, stop"? What can do they instead? Start doing this in this situation.

This is very technical end behavior analysis. So, we're just gonna tell you about it so you're aware of it. There are primary functions to problem behavior and the three that I want you to just be aware of are that problem behaviors often exists to serve a purpose and that

purpose might be to get attention, to escape a situation ... or a demand to get out of something is what escape means ... and the last one is to get access to something. They want something and so they engage in a problem behavior. The replacement or alternative behavior should serve the same function as the problem behavior. If you are working with a behavior analyst, if your child has severe problem behaviors, I hope you're already working with a BCBA. If not find one right now at bachb.com.

But what we do is assessments to determine the function of the problem behavior through data collection, through direct observation, and there's some assessment ... functional behavior assessment methods that we do to figure out exactly why kiddos engage in problem behaviors, what function does it serve? And then the replacement behavior is very specifically tailored to that function. And all the reinforcement systems also tailored to that function of behavior. We as parents, obviously, you don't need to be doing these assessments and this data collection, unless you're working with a BCBA and they ask you to help. I just want you to be aware of them because if your kiddo is acting out to get your attention, hopefully, we can take a step back and realize that modify things so that they can get attention appropriately.

This means that your child needs to get the same thing out of the new behavior you're teaching. If they're engaging in a problem behavior to get attention and then you teach them a new behavior, they need to go be by themselves right then, well, that's not really gonna help them out in the long run. You're probably not gonna be super successful. Let's look at some examples to make all this mumbo-jumbo actually make sense to you. So, stop yelling. Okay. That's super helpful to your kiddo. What are they supposed to do instead? "You can ask me nicely or tap me lightly on the arm to get my attention." You're openly stating that you think the function of the behavior is attention. Are they yelling to get your attention? What are some appropriate ways that they can do that?

"When you're ready to leave, tell me nicely. Do not be rude to our hosts by yelling or arguing." In this situation, you think that your child is engaging in problem behavior to escape. They don't want to be somewhere. So, tell them how to do it nicely. What can they do instead of yelling or arguing or whatever the problem behavior is? "Instead of whining and crying for dessert, you can use nice words and finish all of your dinner." That would be access to something. The kiddo wants some M&M's. They are gonna whine and cry for those M&M's, but you can tell them an appropriate alternative, how they can access that dessert.

We don't actually, as moms and dads, know the function of the behavior, but we can give choices of what to do in that situation. It's good to be aware of the functions and try to make sure your kiddo has a way to communicate those main needs, but we can always give choices of something that's appropriate in that situation. "Please, stop jumping on the furniture. Instead, you may go run around in the backyard or put on some music to dance to." You see that they're jumping around on the furniture, so you could say, "Sit down." Well, does that really fit what's going on right then? There's some reason why they're jumping on the furniture. Give them some choices of things that they can do in that situation of what's going on in the environment right then.

"Do not push your little brother. If he's bothering you, walk away, ask him to go away, or ask me for help." You see what's going on. You think that he probably wants to escape little brother. Tell them how to do that appropriately. Leave, get away from him, escape, ask him to go away, or ask Mom to intervene before it reaches putting your hands on someone else. "Stop interrupting me." How many of us say that? Over and over again. It's not enough to just say that. What are they supposed to do? The kiddo wants to talk to you. "When you want my attention, you say, "Excuse me," and then you need to count to 10 in your head to wait until I'm available." Giving them something to do instead of just stand there. Instead of just, "Wait, I'm busy." Acknowledge that they want your attention, and what are their choices right then other than just stop? Don't do that. No. That doesn't tell them what to do. We're trying to teach and build up some appropriate behaviors.

"Use your manners." Okay, what does that mean? There are other ones. This is the one I'm gonna dive into today, but think about be respectful, obey. These other just kind of broad words. Use your manners. Well, what behavior is that? We talked about behavior being a change of some sort, a movement, something that you see or you do. What observable and measurable behavior does this even mean? There's so many that it can mean. Here's just some of what is your kiddo supposed to be doing. Are they saying please and thank you? Is that something you've been working on? Saying ma'am or sir. Keeping your hands to yourself. Using utensils at the dinner table. Talking with an inside voice. Saying, "Excuse me." Use a tissue. Stay near Mom or Dad. What does use your manners mean?

Being specific with our target behaviors helps us and it helps our kiddos know what an Earth are we talking about? So, tell them. Tell them the target behavior. Be clear, be precise, tell them what you expect. What is the expectation? What are you looking for? You wanna be clear. You wanna be concise. You wanna get to the point. They don't need a lecture all the time. Maybe sometimes. They do not need a lecture. They need to know the expected behaviors. So, don't list out everything under the sun that is use your manners. Prioritize. "We're about to have some friends over for dinner, so using your manners in this situation means one, two, three specific things I'm looking for you to do."

Listing out clear, to the point, and just tell them. Don't assume that your kiddos always know and, even if they do know, don't assume that it's right on top of their heads. They have all kinds of other priorities of their own, so take a second, step, take a beat, and review the expectations. All right. Reinforcement. It's all about reinforcement. You know what behaviors you're looking for because we've just talked about them. So, you're identifying those target behaviors. Your children know what the expectations are. What expected behaviors, specific things, are you looking for?

Catch them being good. Watch for those. You know the specific behaviors and how you need to be alert for them so that you can provide reinforcement. Adding that stimulus immediately following a behavior. Giving them something. Some praise, a high five, a sticker, an extra privilege, acknowledgement, attention. Giving them something for engaging in those specific behaviors that you've reviewed that you've taught them. Okay. This is a reminder. For something to be reinforcing, that behavior happens more often in the future. You've identified the behavior. You're watching to see if it happens. You provide

reinforcement and then you need to keep watching for that behavior to see if it is strengthened, if it increases in the future, if it continues in the future.

Okay. This is all great and wonderful, but what if they act up? Heaven forbid, our children have a problem behavior. They are children, after all. It's gonna happen. Of course, it is. We're trying to focus on the positives here and building up and strengthening good behaviors, but what happens when there is a problem? Our first thing is making sure they don't receive reinforcement for that behavior. If they're interrupting you and you say, "Stop interrupting. Say excuse me and wait nicely," and then they start screaming and throwing things because they didn't get your attention right away, well, maybe don't give them all of your attention for screaming and throwing things. Have some sort of clear, consistent consequences that you use in your family. But really try to not provide reinforcement for the problem.

When things are cool and calm, review the expectations and what they can earn for doing the expected behaviors. "You didn't earn screen time tonight, so you don't get any. What a bummer. Tomorrow, if you remember to ask nicely when you want my attention, you can earn it and we'll start over and we'll try again." What can they get for having the desired behaviors? Practice, model, and reteach those desired behaviors. "Maybe you forgot how to ask me nicely? Let's practice. Let's do it. You be the Mom and I'll be the kid," and interact and practice those things and remind them of what's at stake. What reinforcement can they have?

Whenever there's any problem, the first thing to do is to increase reinforcement for the alternative to that problem. You're competing against whatever has been reinforcing the problem. "We want you to stop interrupting or yelling or whatever it is to get Mom's attention." Saying excuse me and waiting politely. We've gotta reinforce that saying excuse me and waiting politely really strongly to increase that and get the yelling or whatever else to fade away. Any time there's a problem, increase reinforcement to the alternative. Make your reinforcement more immediate. Right away more exciting. Something they really like. Maybe something that you can together. Something that's a bigger deal that you don't do all the time. Make it bigger. Give more of whatever it is. Make it stronger. We really wanna focus on building up that desired behavior.

Target behaviors. A behavior is something that we do. It involves a change in the environment around us. I have changed the environment where I am right now by speaking these words out loud. That is a behavior. You wanna really clearly pinpoint the behavior that's the problem right now. Going to the grocery store is just awful. Okay, what's the behavior? What is happening at the grocery store? Your kiddos are not following directions. So, maybe we need to practice following directions. "When Mom tells you to do something, I'm only going to give you one reminder and then you need to do it, and then you get a reward for that." Maybe they're just being really loud and it's embarrassing to you at the grocery store. So, what's the alternative to that? We use an inside voice. "Let's practice the inside voice and then what reward are you gonna get for doing that?"

Clearly pinpoint what the problem. It can feel like everything is a problem and no one respects you, and that sort of thing. But we've gotta get to the point. What is an actual behavior that your kiddo is doing that we can replace and teach and reinforce. Identify an alternative or two or three. Giving choices works. It's a proven strategy. The more that we can offer choices, the better. Tell your kiddo, tell them the alternative behavior. Be very clear. Be very straight to the point. This is not, "We're gonna talk for 30 minutes about the new behavior," but, "Hey, I need you to ask nicely for things, and this is what that looks like. Let's practice." And that's that. Not, "You know what, this is not polite and this is not a good idea. And yada, yada, yada." No. "This is the desired behavior. This is how to do it."

And then, of course, of course, of course, give reinforcement. "This is the desired behavior. This is how you do it, and this is what I'm gonna offer you when you do it." Give that reinforcement. Watch for it. We have to really be aware. Really, really, really work to catch them being good and increase reinforcement to strengthen that alternative behavior. It's happening every once in a while, but not all the time? Well, make the reinforcement better. Whatever that means for your kiddo, just make it better and watch that behavior grow.