Behaviour Management

ADHD MATTERS
Raising awareness in Northamptonshire

Children want their parent's attention; it's a powerful reward for them but often it does not matter what kind of behaviour has attracted Mum or Dad's attention. Unfortunately whining, nagging, arguing or shouting are powerful means of getting attention from parents even though they are negative.

Because children with ADHD can be very difficult to manage they tend to get more negative attention; but as they are getting the attention they want they continue to behave badly. This cycle of negative behaviour reinforcement has to be broken.

The basic strategy of behaviour management encourages parents to notice when a child is behaving well and to reward them. Praise as a reward must happen each time the ADHD child is caught behaving in a way that is positive. Children benefit from being praised often, enthusiastically and clearly and they need to know exactly why they are being praised. **This is known as positive behaviour** reinforcement.

Parents need to learn how best to handle mis-behavior. Pick your battles. Some minor mis-behaviours may be best ignored. However ignoring a child is obviously not always the right thing to do especially if their behaviour is putting them or others in danger. The first thing for parents to do is to agree between them what behaviours can be ignored and which ones need to be dealt with. They can then devise a behaviour strategy that they both agree on. In fact this strategy should be shared with everyone involved with the care of the ADHD child so that the standards of expected behaviour can be applied consistently whoever is caring for them.

It is important to discuss with your child which behaviours are unacceptable and why, as they may not immediately understand why something is wrong. Then, so that your child does not get confused, be consistent and keep to these rules! It is also very important to let them know when they are getting it right. Do not try and introduce too many rules at once as this is confusing for everyone.

Behaviour management techniques take time to learn and great patience and perseverance on everybody's part. Parents often find they have just as much to learn as their children and need plenty of support. Find a local parent support group or Facebook group. Talking to others in similar situations and finding out how they deal with problems with their children can be a valuable source of information and moral support. Just knowing that others have used strategies and as a result seen an improvement in their child's behaviour, can give you the lift to carry on with your own behaviour strategy.

Once established these techniques have been shown to be very effective and a positive reinforcement cycle can soon gain momentum. Don't be afraid to change elements of your strategy if they are not working. In fact as the problems you tackled first improve rules can be added to deal with different behaviours that are causing you concern.

Children with ADHD like a consistent routine. They like to know what is going to happen and when and whilst it is not easy, putting more structure into their daily life can help them. Have a visual prompt like a chart for everyday activities such as the morning getting up routine which will help them be more organised and should lessen the amount of reminding you have to do. It's also a great help to use things like alarm clocks to break homework into chunks and make a list of regular daily tasks they can tick off each day.

Educational psychologists are often best people to advise parents and teachers on effective programmes for their children. Parents must keep communicating with their child's school and help the teaching staff to understand ADHD and for teachers to use similar behaviour management techniques in the classroom. 123 Magic can be a very effective behaviour management programme in younger children when used properly.

Some basic strategies:

Make eye contact when talking to your child
Use their name to get their attention so they know you are talking to them
Keep instructions simple 1 instruction, 1 sentence
Don't just say "STOP THAT" – they need to know exactly what to stop
Give very specific praise – so they know what they have done well
Keep calm – walk away if you feel you are getting angry
Have an agreed "Quiet Place" they can go to if stressed/angry
Find ways of distracting your child from a tantrum
Provide clear consistent routines – use charts or lists to remind them
Give clear advance warning when something is about to change
Give two choices only and stick to them. Avoid the option of them saying **NO!**
Make time to play with your child 1 to 1
Make time to talk to them individually

Behavioural Strategies

(Extract taken from: ABC of ADHD for Parents DVD. Written by Dr C Yemula & F O'Regan)

Children with ADHD may have very challenging behaviours. Parents often describe these as follows:

- A very demanding child right from the beginning / Attention seeking
- Stubborn / Strong willed / Defiant
- Tantrums if he does not get his own way, lashing out, slamming doors, hitting out, throwing things around in a temper
- Says things are not his fault; blames others
- Cannot control his or her anger / Verbally abusive
- A nightmare..... and more besides

Management Tips

Here are some tips to manage children with challenging behaviours. You may find that you are trying or have tried some of the strategies with some, good or no effect at all. A child with ADHD may display behaviours that are unpredictable and happen out of the blue.

You will need to apply a consistent approach and maintain a firm attitude at all times. Your child is likely to receive conflicting messages if each parent has a different way of dealing with behavioural problems.

Behavioural Strategies

Reward Chart

- Discuss the reward chart with your child: what should be included, what the rewards should be
- Only have 3-4 tasks to complete: too many will be too much of a challenge
- Ensure at least one task is easily achievable – e.g. teeth cleaning. Your child needs to see success
- Do not expect to see each task completed every day: a child without ADHD would find this difficult. Be realistic
- Do not keep going over uncompleted tasks: focus instead on what has been achieved
- Make the chart alongside your child and help give him/her ownership and pride in the task

Clear Rules

- Involve all the family in deciding what family rules should be. Then make a poster and display it where it can be seen clearly
- If your child is not following one of the rules take them to the chart and point out the appropriate rule and read it with your child to remind them

Routines

- Routines are important for children with ADHD: they help kids cope
- Why not help a young child make a visual chart displaying, e.g. morning and bedtime rou tines?

Catch Me Cards

- The technique is used to notice and praise positive behaviour. The idea is that every time you "catch them being good" you issue a card, stating the date and the positive behavior
- Once they have collected 5 cards they receive a small reward – e.g. a packet of stickers or a comic
- Make a list with your child as to how many card equals which reward
- Your child can aim to collect say 30 cards to ensure a bigger reward such as a trip to the cinema

Penny Jar

- If appropriate for your child's age put coins in a jar for the day to the value of say 50p. For each inappropriate behavior remove 1p. Don't forget to tell the child why the money is being removed
- At the end of the day talk to your child about how much they have earned and state that you are sure they can improve by at least 1p tomorrow

Positive Box

- Get a box and help your child decorate it. Put in reminders of nice things to your child such as a sticker from school or a catch me card
- Your child might wish to include a photo or shells or pebbles for example. At the end of the day when your child is ready for bed, open the box and discuss all the positive things in there

Behaviour Contract

- A behaviour contract is good for older children
- You decide what behaviour needs to be improved and you both sign a contract. Again, this is linked with a reward

Time Out

- Give the child three opportunities to rectify their behaviour before placing them in time out
- Establish a place where the child can go – e.g. on the stairs, in a separate room where there are no distractions
- When in time out there should be no talking between yourself and the child. Use a timer so the child can see the time counting down
- When they come out do not revisit the issue that put them there: they have served their time!
- If they refuse to stay in time out say that you will withdraw a privilege such as TV, computer or X-box time. If necessary follow through with this.

Summary

All of these strategies can help re-train your child's behaviour. There are many more so you need to find the ones that suit your child and family. The important thing is keeping the re wards fresh and interesting and being consistent in your use of these methods.

Many parents stop using strategies because they feel they are not working. Re-think what you are using: can it be changed so that it works better?

Keep trying!!

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