

PARENT'S GUIDE

Solutions to Today's Most Common Behavior Problems in the Home

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Printed in the
United States of America.
5/14



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I. Introduction

The *Parent's Guide* is an attempt to provide the most logical and common sense solutions to the behavior problems exhibited by today's children and youth. By surveying parents, the 102 most common behavior problems have been identified. You will notice that, for some problems, there are as many as 50 possible solutions to the particular situation. The reason for this is that we believe there is no one best way to help children and youth be successful. We offer a variety of possible solutions so you will be able to find a solution that will work in your unique situation, based on all variables related to your family and considering the age, gender, maturity, abilities, etc., of your child. The variety is there in order for you to choose the interventions that are best for you and your child.

We chose the most logical and common sense approaches to the behavior problems children and youth exhibit in the home for several reasons. Our first reason to adopt this approach was to develop a guide that would serve as a resource for parent-training groups and parent problem-solving sessions with therapists and counselors. Additionally, we chose strategies with the greatest likelihood of success that can be easily shared by counselors, social workers, child psychologists, pediatricians, etc., with parents individually. At the same time, we chose to produce a collection of strategies parents can practice in the home, without the need for a therapist or counselor to explain how to "implement" those strategies. We also chose to develop a reference guide that parents can keep available in their homes to answer that primary question, "What do you do when your child....?", rather than a text parents read one time and then shelve without further use. And, lastly, we chose the most logical and common sense approaches because they are the ones that work best with children.

There are several reasons the *Parent's Guide* takes the form of identifying the most common behavior problems with a variety of solutions rather than individual chapters which explain principles and approaches, such as positive reinforcement, negative reinforcement, etc. One very obvious reason is that the chapter approach to principles and approaches is the format which has been used over and over again and tends to be the one that gets shelved and not referred to again. We chose a format to which parents can relate and use time after time.

We chose a reference format that will take a few minutes to use and not require reading an entire chapter. There was also the very real recognition that chapters dealing with methodology rely on parents to interpret and apply general principles to specific situations. Under the best circumstances, teachers and therapists find the practice of applying principles difficult, while most parents find it nearly impossible. As a counselor told us recently, when a parent says to him, "What do you do when your kid....?" he has trouble thinking of any one thing/solution to recommend in that instant when those parents want an answer. But, on the way home, he will think of 20 possible solutions he could have suggested to them. He shared this story with us in the context of suggesting that, with the *Parent's Guide*, he will be able to turn to the behavior problem they have identified and say, "Here are forty-six possible solutions to that problem. Which of these do you think would be best for you and your child?"

We wrote the *Parent's Guide* because teachers and parents, who have been using similar materials we have developed for the behavior and learning problems of students at school, have asked that we develop a resource for parents as well. We also wrote the *Parent's Guide* for a little boy who came to live in my home a few years ago. He came with nothing but a trash bag containing a few mismatched pieces of clothing that were too small for him. He also brought all the love a little boy's heart can hold and an optimism and zest for life that would seem to negate his past. He has been my teacher for these past few years and he has taught me far more than I had accumulated in all the years prior to his coming. Some days have not been easy, with problems at school and some educational personnel who have been reluctant to be understanding. But, at night, after his bath, when he's in his pajamas and robe, wearing his slippers and smelling really good, and I put him in bed and pull up the covers and he wraps those little arms around my neck and booms out in that little boy voice, "I love you, Daddy!" I know the answer to all his problems. The answer is, "We will get up tomorrow and do all this again because we are all he has. And he is all we have."

We dedicate the *Parent's Guide* to you, Billy. You made it possible. May God bless you and watch over you always.

S.B.M.

II. Behaviors and Solutions

1 Does not follow directions

1. Establish rules for following directions (e.g., listen to directions, ask questions about directions you do not understand, carry out the directions). These rules should be consistent and followed by everyone in the home. Talk about the rules often.

2. Reward your child for following directions. Possible rewards include verbal praise (e.g., “You did a great job picking up your clothes!” “I like the way you follow directions!” etc.), a kiss on the cheek, a hug, having a friend over to play, staying up late, watching a favorite TV show, and playing a game with a parent.

3. If there are other children or adolescents in the home, reward them for following directions.

4. Carefully consider your child’s age and experience when giving directions to follow.

5. Demonstrate the appropriate way to follow directions (e.g., give your child directions to feed the dog, then you feed the dog with your child).

6. When your child does not follow a direction, explain exactly what he/she did wrong, what should have been done and why.

For example: You tell your child to clean up his/her room before 5:00. At 5:00, you tell your child that he/she has not cleaned up his/her room and that he/she needs to follow the direction to clean the room now, because company is coming at 6:00.

7. Write a contract with your child.

For example: I, William, for three days in a row, will follow directions without having to be told more than once. When I accomplish this, I can watch 30 extra minutes of TV.

The contract should be written within the ability level of your child and should focus on only one behavior at a time.

8. Make certain that your child sees the relationship between his/her behavior and the consequences which may follow (e.g., failing to follow the direction to bring in a bike at night may result in the bike being stolen).

9. Allow natural consequences to occur due to your child’s failing to follow directions (e.g., the child’s bike being stolen, loss of school books, school work not done on time, etc.).

10. Along with a directive, provide an incentive statement (e.g., “When you eat your peas, you may have dessert.” “You may watch TV after you get ready for bed.”).

11. When your child has difficulty following directions in front of others (e.g., at the grocery store, in the mall, playing a game with family members, etc.) remove your child from the situation until he/she can demonstrate self-control and follow directions.

12. To help your child follow directions, reduce distractions (e.g., turn off the TV, give directions in a room away from friends, etc.).

13. Do not give your child directions to follow with more than two or three steps. Directions that involve several steps can be confusing and cause your child to have difficulty following them. An example of a two-step direction is: “Please turn off your light and go to bed.”

14. To determine if your child heard a direction, have your child repeat it.

15. Deliver directions in a supportive rather than a threatening manner (e.g., “Please take out the trash.” rather than, “You had better take out the trash or else!”).

16. Give your child a special responsibility (e.g., answering the door, serving food, cleaning, etc.), to teach your child to follow directions.