

Ten Positive Behavior Support Strategies to Support Families at Home

(These strategies have been adapted to support families during our current situation.)

1. Think about your child's strengths and interests.

- With the current changes, think about the things your child loves to do and how you incorporate those things into your time together. Try to focus on the positive: more time to do some things together.
- Spending time with your child on the things that matter most to your child will help them adjust to not being in school or having their typical social contacts with friends and family.
- You can still use a "first _____, then _____" strategy by pairing non-preferred activity with a preferred one so they are not sitting in front of a screen or video game s all day. Rotate family activities or household chores with screen time, online games or talking to friends.
- Check to see if your school district, community or state has posted links and resources of things to do: learning websites, at home instruction, museum virtual tours.
- Encourage outside time with supervision. (My 5-year-old granddaughter said "Nature isn't closed.") Take walks, ride bikes, walk the dog, get some fresh air.

2. Establish clear expectations at home.

- Revisit your 3-5 "house rules" that apply to all family members. If you haven't done this before, it might be a good idea to sit as a family and discuss.
- If your child has "school rules" or a PBIS acronym you can create a similar set of rules for home. (PAWS, PRIDE, STAR)
- If family members are working from home, it is important to set up guidelines to allow this to happen. Define when the family member can be "interrupted" but also set up times to frequently check in with your children who require less supervision.

3. Create routines for your family and child.

- Children do best when they have predictable routines and know what is going to happen throughout the day. Most have very predictable routines at school. Extended time home may be difficult for some children without a tentative routine.
- Organize the day so your child knows what is happening.
- Utilize a schedule that includes chores, learning time, self-help (showers and teeth) and fun, choice activities. And remember hand washing!!
- Brainstorm activities that the family can do together. Bring out the board games or puzzles. Look at family photographs and tell stories about when they were taken. Paint together, cook together. Write letters to people in nursing homes. Start a journal.
- Use transition warnings to let your child know what is coming next.
- Use a timer or visuals to help with transitions. Your child may need a home visual schedule or a calendar to provide needed structure.

4. Anticipate challenges and plan accordingly.

- Preventing challenging behavior is always easier than addressing it.
- Know what things or triggers seem to set your child up for challenging behavior and try to address through your routines and schedules.

5. Know how you are going to react and be consistent.

- As the adult, we set the tone for the family. The current situation is challenging for everyone.
- Choose your battles wisely but be supportive and understanding.
- Say what you mean and mean what you say. Be sure to follow through.
- Provide as many choices as possible throughout the routines of the day.
- Avoid arguing, threatening and negotiation.

6. Model the behavior you want your child to learn.

- Your child will copy your words and actions. Focus on controlling yourself, not your child.
- Strive to manage his/her behavior with a calm attitude that comes from knowing you understand that self-control is necessary and good for your child.
- When we are tired and stressed, we often reach a point where we just give in. We may need to be the one taking a deep breath, counting to ten and taking a brief time away.

7. Set up for success with positive language of the behavior you want to see.

- Communicate clearly what behavior you want your child to demonstrate. Phrase directions in the positive, telling your child what you want them to do, not what you don't want them to.
- Sometimes the most appropriate response is simply redirecting your child's behavior.
- Setting boundaries reinforce our expectations and sends a clear message we believe they can do what we ask.

8. Provide words (and pictures and signs) for emotions and feelings.

- Children and adults have a lot of feelings and emotions about our current situation. Use empathetic statements to let your child know you understand how he/she feels.
- When you see challenging behavior, it often means your child can't figure out how to express her feelings in an acceptable way or doesn't know how to get her needs met.
- Talk about feelings and use visuals to help your child understand.
- Provide acceptable choices for your child to go with the different feelings.
- Provide opportunities to help your child practice calm down strategies and problem solving when he is calm.

9. Look behind the behavior to what your child is telling you.

- It is our job to try to understand why lies beneath the behavior and what he is trying to tell us.
- We often personalize our children's behavior as something they are doing on purpose.
- Try to remember that however a child is behaving, he is doing the best he can at that moment in time.
- Remember the age and developmental level of your child.

10. "5 to 1" positives and reinforce steps in the right direction.

- Give attention to the behavior you want to see, not the behavior you don't.
- Genuine, specific praise has a powerful effect on your children's behavior. This includes their efforts to work hard at following your directions and small steps in the right direction.
- Use positive reinforcement as often as possible. Focus on activities that support your child's strengths and reinforce feelings of self-esteem, accomplishment and cooperation.
- Do something special with your child so the "reward" also strengthens your relationship.
- If your child needs a more structured reinforcement system, remember the simpler, the easier it is to implement and the most likely you will be consistent.