

# Positive Behavior Tips for Young Children

Conversations with a Child Psychologist  
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Photo credit: Matt Riley



# Parenting



# Impact on Parents & Children

- Children's mental health crisis
- U.S. Surgeon General Advisory
  - Parenting stress is at an all-time high
- Pressure on today's parents

# What does it mean to be a good parent?



- Pressure on today's parents
- So much information about how to parent
  - Social media
  - Advice from friends
  - Parenting books

# Science of psychology

- Use the science of psychology to guide decisions about parenting



# Positive Strategies: Changing the Cycle

- Build a relationship with your child
- Strategic attention and selective ignoring
- Proactive structure
- Clear boundaries
- Clear commands
- Consequences consistently
- Choose battles wisely



# Positive Strategies: Changing the Cycle

- Build a relationship with your child
  - Accept children for who they are
    - I see who you are and I accept you for that
  - Special Time
    - 5 minutes
    - Child-led play
    - Creative, imaginative toys

# Positive Strategies: Changing the Cycle

- Strategic attention and selective ignoring
  - **Pay attention** (positive reinforcement) to appropriate behaviors
  - **Minimize attention** to behaviors you want to occur less
    - Neutral facial expressions, avoid eye contact, avoid commenting on behavior
- 4:1 ratio of positives (or neutral) to negatives

# Positive Strategies: Changing the Cycle

## 3. Proactive structure

- Children are more likely to be successful when there is predictable routine and structure
- “Strategic attention and selective ignoring”
  - Pay attention (positive reinforcement) to appropriate behaviors
  - Ignore and minimize attention to inappropriate behaviors
    - Avoid speaking as much as possible
- Give positive choices
  - Do you want to get in the car by yourself or do you want me to lift you into the car?
- Tell children what TO DO rather than what not to do
  - Rather than focusing on child’s inappropriate behavior, tell them an incompatible (or opposite) appropriate behavior
    - Give simple, brief, direct instructions

# Positive Strategies: Changing the Cycle

- Often, families talk about “Discipline”
  - What’s BETTER than “discipline”: Preventative (or antecedent) strategies to address behavior
- Set the child up for success
  - If a child is not allowed to touch or play with something, put it out of reach or move the item and provide an alternative item
  - Say, “you can play with this toy”
- Predictability & consistency are key
- Make sure child has time, is rested, fed, and has a typical schedule

# Personal title

- Point

This should bring all your Information slides to life – here's how the points I just gave you actually solved the problem I or my patient had.

# Summary

- Fostering desirable behavior

This is the main, high-level points from above. It should bring it all together in just a few words.

- Selective Attention
- Specific Praise
- Reward Systems
- Access to Privileges
- Addressing undesirable behavior
- Strategic ignoring
- Time Out
- Natural consequences

# If you want to learn more

- Good Enough Parenting (*podcast*)
  - <https://youtu.be/IEkXva0w9bc?si=c8CEsfNxufliUYYR>
  - APA Speaking of Psychology
- Improving Child Behavior in 5 minutes per day! (*video*)
  - <https://youtu.be/8fABR3C1pac?si=r0KcV4zqGzlsNZh>
  - ABCT Child and Families SIG: Cheryl McNeil
- The Science of Parenting (*written article*)
  - [https://uvamagazine.org/articles/the\\_science\\_of\\_parenting](https://uvamagazine.org/articles/the_science_of_parenting)

# Next Conversation

- 3/10/26 [Tips for Preventing Self-Harm in Teens](#) with Haley Stephens, PhD, ABPP, Child/Family Clinical Psychologist
- Recordings are posted here:  
<https://med.virginia.edu/pediatrics/about/uva-health-childrens-conversations-with-a-child-psychologist/>



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# Mental Health Emergencies

## EMERGENCIES

- Go to your nearest **Emergency Room** or **call 911**
- National Suicide Prevention Lifeline **call or text 988** or on-line chat <https://chat.988lifeline.org/>
- Trans Lifeline **(877) 565-8860** 11:00 a.m. to 5:00 a.m. EST
- Trevor Project Lifeline **(866) 488-7386** available 24/7



# Mental Health Resources

## FIND A PROVIDER

- Virginia Community Services Boards: mental health, substance use, and mental health emergencies <https://vacsb.org/csb-bha-directory/>
- Psychology Today: psychotherapists, psychiatrists) <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/therapists/>
- American Psychological Association: psychologists <https://locator.apa.org/>
- Comprehensive information about effective child psychotherapies <https://effectivechildtherapy.org/therapies/>



# Mental Health Resources

## EXPLAINERS

- Mental Health America: Mental Health 101 <https://screening.mhanational.org/mental-health-101/>
- Child Mind Institute: Complete Guide to Getting Good Care <https://childmind.org/guide/parents-guide-to-getting-good-care/>
- Child Mind Institute: Topics A-Z <https://childmind.org/topics-a-z/>
- Child Mind Institute: Symptom Checker <https://childmind.org/symptomchecker/>



# Other Resources

## Bridge2ResourcesVA

Resources for (almost) every need across Virginia

<https://bridge2resourcesva.org/> all languages

## Do You Need Food Today?

call 540-248-3663 Monday-Friday 9am - 5pm or go to

[www.BRAFB.org/findfood](http://www.BRAFB.org/findfood) all languages

- Enter your location in the linked map to search for free groceries, fresh produce, and meals near you.
- Once you've picked a nearby food pantry, call them for details.

# *Ask Me Anything*

*Please answer 5 quick questions about today's talk!*

[https://virginia.az1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV\\_6QdLFUInUpeuKmW](https://virginia.az1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_6QdLFUInUpeuKmW)

