



Changing children's behaviour

How to solve everyday problems

It *is* possible to change some of the demanding and difficult behaviours of your child. The approach is similar regardless of what the behaviour is.

Seven steps to reducing problems and difficult behaviour.

Step one: Identify that a problem exists

At times, nearly all children will argue with parents, be rude, tell lies, fight with their siblings etc. The first step however, is for you to recognise that the behaviour is getting out of hand and that you want to do something about it.

Try to be as specific as possible. For example:-

- Fighting over toys with his sister.
- Not eating at mealtimes
- Getting dressed too slowly.
- Being rude.

Step two Identify what you want the child to do instead.

If you think of the opposite behaviour to the problem, this will be what you want the child to do. In the above cases, these would be:-

- Sharing toys with his sister.
- Eating at mealtimes.
- Getting dressed in 15 minutes.
- Being polite.

Step three Think of a way to motivate the child to change.

Although you will obviously praise and notice the child whenever he shows desired behaviour, it may be necessary to think of something else which can also be used in order to increase your child's motivation. There are many types of rewards that you can use:

- A special treat.
- Being allowed to watch a favourite video.
- Getting a star on a chart.
- Earning money to spend late

Remember if your child has a very short attention span, the reward will need to be immediate. For older children or less distractible children, they can earn points or ticks or stars which can be exchanged later for a special treat.

Step four 'Fine tuning' your programme.

Think of any other changes that can help your child to learn the new behaviour. For example:-

- Making up short stories about the new behaviour e.g. a story about a child who learns to share.
- Make use of libraries that have children's books on being polite, controlling tempers, making friends.
- Visual reminders or visual strategies to remind the child of what he should do.
- Verbal reminders e.g. 'Tom will be here soon, remember to share your toys'.
- Using timers to eliminate arguments e.g. set timer for 15 minutes for the child to get dressed, or 20 minutes for how long they can watch television.

Step five Decide what you are going to do when the problem occurs.

What is going to be your response when the problem occurs? Are you going to use distraction, active ignoring, time out or a warning and consequence? What consequence will you apply?

Step six Record keeping

Devise a simple record chart so that you can keep track of your progress. This can be in the form of a daily diary or a specifically designed chart.

Step seven Review the system.

Review the programme and your records after two weeks. Are you getting an improvement in the behaviour? Consider the following questions:

- Is the behaviour that I am expecting too difficult for the child?
- Can I make it a bit easier for the child to achieve success?
- Do I need to change the way in which I am trying to motivate the child?
- What else can I do to encourage the desired behaviour to occur?
- Should I introduce stories or use visual reminders to revise my routine?