Lesson 11.2 Helping Children Manage Their Behavior

**Goal:** To increase parents’ knowledge of the concept of discipline.

**Materials:** Parent Handbooks, clipboard/flip chart, magic markers

## Procedures:

1. Today’s lesson focuses on some very useful techniques in getting children to manage their own behavior. The goal of behavior encouragement is to gradually increase the child’s ability to manage their own behavior. Self-management takes power. The techniques that parents will be learning will be additional ways to empower children.

2. Review with the parents the concept of **PERSONAL POWER**. Remind the parents that children desire to have personal power and will express it in a positive or negative way.

a. **Positive use of personal power** - cooperating, coming to meals on time, following rules, etc.

b. **Negative use of personal power** - temper tantrums, being uncooperative, hurting himself or herself or someone else, etc.

3. Mention that when children feel they don’t have any power, that’s when they use their personal power in a negative way. It’s their way of proving to their parents that they are powerful. Ask parents to locate the information on **Pages 92-94** in the **Parent Handbook** titled, **“Helping Children Manage Their Behavior”** and review the following strategies to encourage children to use their personal power in positive ways:

a. **Giving Children Choices.** One way to provide children with power and to reduce power struggles and to teach them to manage their own behavior is to give them choices. Giving children choices provides them with a good way to use their power. Choices help children learn to take responsibility for their own behavior. Choices also let children know that they have power, which can defuse potential power struggles between parents and children.

b. **Giving children choices can begin very early in life**. Choices can be given in dressing, eating, bath time, and playtime. Brainstorm with the parents other areas and situations where they can provide children with choices.

c. **Choices should never be used when there aren’t any.** Giving a child a choice to get dressed when a parent really needs the child to cooperate and get dressed is not a choice. Remind the parents that a choice is between two concepts (to eat beans or peas; to wear black or gray shoes; to brush teeth before or after washing hands, etc.) A good rule to remember is if a “no” or a refusal of something is not acceptable to the parent, it’s not a choice for the child.

4. Also mention that a request for a child to do something followed by an “OK?” is a choice. “Belinda, please close the door, OK?” is actually giving the choice of “not OK!” Better to make the statement (Belinda, please close the door) without the “OK”.

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Write the following formula on your clipboard or flip chart:

**(Child’s name) , you have a choice: you can do either \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ (A) \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ (B).**

**If you choose \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ (A), then \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ will happen.**

**If you choose to do \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ (B), then \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ will happen. What’s your choice?**

Have the parent(s) role-play by identifying a choice they would like to practice. If working with one parent, the facilitator can play the role of the child. Using the formula, have parent(s) fill in the blanks with choices and consequences. Let the “child” respond to the choices and consequences with a check on clarity and reasonableness of the consequences.

Review the **Rules of Giving Children Choices**:

**#1 Never use threats as choices.** Parents either can’t carry them through or don’t want to. (Example - “If you don’t leave your sister alone, I’m gonna break your neck!”)

**#2 Never give ultimatums as choices.** (Example - “I’ll never talk to you again if you don’t shut up!”) Ultimatums can rarely be carried through and soon children learn your words are hot air.

**#3 Never give choices when there aren’t any.** (Example - “Son, would you like to get your coat on now? We have to go!”) If the child answers “no,” but he really has to get his coat on anyway, he never really had a choice.

6. **Using Humor.** Mention to the parents that without a doubt, happy children are easier to be with, manage, and encourage than children who are angry, resentful and oppositional. Humor is an outstanding strategy to help children learn to manage their own behavior, as well as an effective way to prevent arguments, rebellious behavior, and power struggles.

Review the following techniques where humor can be used in parenting children:

a. **Fooler Approach.** After telling children to do something, or requesting that they eat their food, or brush their teeth, etc., try to “fool” the child into believing he or she “really can’t eat their food or brush their teeth.” Of course, the statement is said in jest with a noticeable hint of laughter: “I bet you can’t really brush your teeth all by yourself.” The child in an effort to utilize their power performs the behavior and feels they can’t be fooled.

b. **Reverse Psychology.** Another technique to help children accomplish a task is reverse psychology. The object is to say exactly what you don’t want - but mean exactly what you do want. A father attempting to get his children to the supper table says: “All right, food is on the table but I don’t want any of you here watching television to come join us. You guys stay right here.” The children, knowing it’s a game, race to the table ahead of Dad. Another example could be with certain food items on the plate. “All right, I don’t want to see any children at this table eating their carrots. I better not catch anyone.” Like magic, carrots are eaten.

c. **Talking Objects.** Talking bathtubs, ice cream bars, shoes, etc. are all helpful in getting children to cooperate. A shoe that says, “Put me on, put me on” is much more exciting than a parent telling her child, “Put your shoes on.” A bathtub calling a child to jump in is more fun than a parent telling a child to get in.

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7. **Transition Time.** Providing children with a transition time between activities and before requests is important. No one likes to be told that they have to do something immediately. Mentioning to children, “Five more minutes and it will be time to eat,” helps children prepare to make the transition from what they are doing to what you want them to do.

8. **Asking, *“What can I do instead?”***So many times parents are asked to solve a problem or to remedy a situation. While we parents certainly give our two cents worth, a better way would be to empower your children to come up with their own solutions. “Well sweetie, what can you do instead?” Encourage several solutions and both of you pick out the best one or two. If you’re stuck on which one to do, identify the positives and the negatives to each solution. The one with the most positives is generally the better solution.

9. **Asking, *“What have I learned?”***Making mistakes is one thing - learning from them is another. Asking, “What have you learned?” from both successes and failures is a powerful way to empower children with insights. Let them tell you and sit back in amazement.

## Notes and Suggestions:

1. Although this lesson contains a tremendous amount of information, make it practical and understandable. These verbal management strategies build parent-child communication patterns that last a lifetime.

2. Make the techniques work for the parents. When working with children, remember to stress the functional use of the techniques with expressive language.

**Visit Time:** As parents transition to the supervised visit, ask them to practice giving their child(ren) choices during the visit.

**Post Visit:** If possible spend 10-15 minutes processing the visit after the children leave.

**Home Assignment:** Ask the parents to list three ways they would like to see their children express their personal power.