

## Applying behavioral Management Strategies to Children Parental Counseling

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**Abstract:** According to Mash and Terdal (1996), the purpose of any behavioral assessment and intervention must be very clearly defined, ie to be relevant to the allegations made by the child and his family, to be relevant to the child's current and future adaptation, to be based on a appropriate theory of developing and maintaining adaptation. The main target of this intervention program, the non-compliant and difficult child, certainly meets these requirements (Forehand and McMahon, 1981). The child's behavior does not correspond to normal age-specific behaviors and is statistically deviant, in the sense that it occurs significantly more often than usual in the case of children in the same age group. For effective control of children's inappropriate behavior, the consequences, whether positive or negative, must be immediate. Often, parents have unilateral beliefs about the causes of their children's problematic behavior, in the sense that they believe that either they as parents are exclusively to blame, or the child is to blame.

**Keywords:** behavior on-compliance; behavioral pattern; behavioral pattern; consequences

### Introduction

When it comes to a difficult child, we refer to the fact that it is non-compliant, a term that refers to three categories of child behavior. First, we refer to his ability to initiate, in a timely manner, the behaviors required by an adult. Generally, by timely we mean about 15 seconds from the time an order was placed. Secondly, we are talking about the child's failure to maintain compliance at the command of an adult until the fulfillment of the specific requirements of the order. Some people consider this category a form of attention maintained in pregnancy. On the other hand, parents can also be hit by the child's failure to follow the pre-established rules of conduct in a

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given situation. Behaviors such as leaving the bank in the classroom or running into a store without permission, stealing, lying, hitting or assaulting others, cursing parents, are just some of the behaviors that parents consider violations of specific rules of conduct.

The term non-compliance also has the connotation of passive avoidance of fulfilling the orders / requests given by the parents or that of submitting to the house rules previously established. Therefore, the term “difficult” can be used for a number of situations in which noncompliant behavior occurs, when the child shows active verbal or physical resistance to compliance with parental commands, such as verbal refusal, outbursts of anger, and even aggression. Physical condition of one of the parents, when he tries to impose the child’s compliance by resorting to.

In preschoolers, a number of non-compliant and difficult behaviors can be considered normal. Just because they occur sporadically, these behaviors should not be considered abnormal or pathological intensity and do not justify participation in a clinical intervention program. In order to determine whether or not non-compliant behavior by a child justifies clinical intervention, clinicians must identify at least two of the following three criteria:

- The child’s behavior does not correspond to normal age-specific behaviors and is statistically deviant, in the sense that it occurs significantly more often than usual in the case of children in the same age group. This can be investigated by using scales that measure children’s behaviors and include this dimension of behavior, often called aggression or problematic behaviors.
- The child’s behavior leads to impaired functioning, ie the behavioral pattern interferes with the child’s ability to respond according to age and we refer here in particular to his ability: to take care, to have adequate social interactions with family members and friends, to accept age-specific responsibilities for homework or homework, as well as the ability to be trustworthy when asked to follow the rules even in the absence of adult supervision (usually parents). The level of dysfunction can be determined on the basis of child behavior assessment scales, which address the dimensions of adaptive behavior, or through interviews and questionnaires that explicitly assess adaptive functioning (eg: Vineland Adaptive Behavior Scale), The Normative Adaptive Behavior Scale or other similar instruments.
- The child’s behavior leads to a high level of distress or can cause harm, either to the child or to parents, siblings or friends. The child’s distress can be assessed by

self-assessment scales of emotional adjustment, such as assessments of anxiety or depression. These assessments provide information about the child's condition, if he is unhappy with his current condition, in the family or about his dissatisfaction with his general social adaptation. The distraction felt by parents can be assessed more directly, through tools designed to investigate this area, such as the Short Form of the Parenting Stress Index (Abidin, 1986). The distraction felt by friends can be assessed using the scales for assessing social skills or the degree of acceptance by friends, scales completed by parents or educators (teachers).

Before parents can intervene in the behavioral modeling of difficult children, they must understand the importance of each step they are about to take, so that they are prompt, firm and achieve the optimal results expected. Behavioral modeling must be based on sound principles and concepts behavioral pattern.

### **The Consequences Must be Immediate**

For effective control of children's inappropriate behavior, the consequences, whether positive or negative, must be immediate. Parents must internalize the fact that they must provide the immediate consequence of the targeted behavior, they must not wait hours or minutes to correct or reward the child. Because of their lifestyle and daily hustle and bustle, parents are reluctant to respond to behavior, especially when it comes to positive behavior. Most of the time, parents become much more attentive to inappropriate and intrusive behaviors, giving a command several times until they react to the child's non-compliance. So, the sooner a type of behavior is responded to, the sooner the manifest behavior can be controlled and adjusted.

### **The Consequences Should be Specific**

Parents should be informed that both praise and criticism and reproach should be strict about the target behavior, but not a vague and general reference to the child, his or her behavior in general, or his or her personal integrity. Also, in the case of punishments considered as consequences, they must be strictly related to the target behavior, but not to the frustration of the parents towards the behavior, the lack of patience or other episodes of inappropriate behavior.

### **The Consequences Should be Consistent**

The key element in almost all behavioral approaches is the consistency with which the consequences are offered, this element is an important factor in obtaining behavioral control. To achieve this result, the consequences must be consistent, to apply in any situation the child would be in, in any setting and by any of the parents. Consistency in many situations refers to the fact that if a behavior is punished in a certain context (eg at home), when it occurs in another situation (eg in the store), it will also be punished. Although there may sometimes be exceptions to this rule, it is a good strategy for parents to respond to similar behavior regardless of their social situation. Most of the time, the inconsistency of the parents shows the children the situations in which the non-compliance is successful.

Consistency over time refers to the fact that parents' standards for the child's accepted or inappropriate behaviors should not fluctuate much from one moment to the next or from one situation to another. Regardless of whether the child grows up, for short periods of time, behavioral reinforcement or punishment should not change.

Consistency between parents refers to the fact that in the case of both parents the same set of rules must be followed. Most of the time, it is the mother who imposes the rules and the punishments, but this attitude must also be mastered by the father. Differences related to this topic can create conflicts both in terms of the consistency of establishing the set of rules and conflicts in the relationship between parents.

### **Establishing Incentive Programs Applicable before the Sentence**

Another important concept is that the punishment of inappropriate behavior should be used only after a special reward program has been established valid for the acceptable variant of the same behavior. Most of the time parents focus on negative behavior and very rarely reinforce or praise appropriate behaviors, so punishment will be the most common type of interaction within the family. In this way, the punishment will lose its effectiveness, due to the lack of stimulation of positive behavior. The key element in educating parents, through which they can reformulate their concerns about children's behavior in such a way as to lead to appropriate, pro-social alternatives, is to find incentives that can encourage the frequency of such behaviors. Only after these issues have been resolved will the methods of punishment be considered, through which the unacceptable behaviors of the child can be reduced. This is especially true in situations where one learns about punishment, otherwise

parents may believe that the therapist advocates the use of punishment as a prime response to the child's inappropriate behavior.

### **Anticipating and Planning Inappropriate Behavior**

The clinical psychologist, with experience in the field, can realize that many parents react impulsively in different situations to the inappropriate behavior of the child. In this case the parents focus too much on the problem itself, on punishing the behavior and give the patina importance, perhaps not at all analyzing, anticipating and preventing situations in which the child could create problems. If parents could anticipate problematic situations, they could develop ways to reduce the likelihood of inappropriate behavior. It is necessary to discuss regularly with parents about anticipating problematic situations and preparing a behavioral management plan for the child, before the potential problematic situation arises. This is contrary to the typical situation in which one waits until disruptive behavior occurs, after which one tries to solve it, a strategy that leads to what can be called in the management of the difficult child "too little, too late".

### **Accepting that Family Interactions are Reciprocal**

Often, parents have unilateral beliefs about the causes of their children's problematic behavior, in the sense that they believe that either they as parents are exclusively to blame, or the child is to blame. It should be emphasized that the patterns of interaction within the family are very complex and not yet well understood. However, there are already clear indications that parents' behaviors towards the child, the child's temperament, physical characteristics and abilities, as well as parents' previous experiences with the child are largely the causes of children's behaviors towards them (Bell and Harper, 1977; Patterson, 1982). Because of this two-way influence between parent and child, it is difficult to identify who is to blame in the current state of conflict. Both the parent and the child are responsible for solving existing problems. That parents are designated as the main elements needed for change is determined by objective considerations and their motivation to change the pattern of problematic interaction, rather than by trying to find mistakes in how they tried to solve the problem.

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