

Developing Behavior Plans-Five Rules

Forever and ever, parents have been emotional in the discipline of their children. When discipline is administered with emotion, good or bad, it's not always rational! A written behavior plan can provide a guide for parents and consistent expectations for children.

1. You can't change everything (at once).

Pick the 5 most problematic behaviors to target. Also pick 5 routine expectations. These will serve as the basics of your behavior plan. Rewards and consequences will be assigned for performing, or not, in the desired manner. Be specific with those behaviors.

2. It's meant to be revised.

As behaviors seem to become habit, you want to add others in while deleting the ones that have ceased to be a challenge. When you find things that don't seem to be working, you can change it! Just make sure you do this when you're thinking clearly.

3. The plan works if you work the plan.

As with all habits, consistency is essential. You have to commit to consistently call the plan into action and take a few minutes to review the plan daily. The plan must be used to reward and consequence.

4. Get consensus.

Negotiate the terms of the plan when everyone can participate and is calm. Participation helps to build ownership. Ownership can increase the effectiveness of the plan.

5. Talk less and act more.

Many parents believe they should explain decisions to the nth degree. Children soon tune out what they perceive as nagging. Have clear consequences, implement them and shut up!!

Start Your Plan

So, if you still want to create a behavior plan, here are some very simple steps. The parents in the home should identify a group of problem behaviors. These behaviors should be the most troubling behaviors that the child is exhibiting at the time. No matter the age of the child, just identify some of the most troubling behaviors. List them below:

Problem Behaviors

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____
7. _____

You will note that I list 7 rather than the 5 I mentioned above. Unless you have a very young child, you will want your child to have some feeling of self determination in selecting the behaviors to work on.

Note: the problem behaviors need to be very specific rather than general. For instance, bad attitude or disrespect are what I call BIG words. They mean a lot of different things. Break that behavior down to specifics like screaming, saying no when asked to do something, or rolling eyes.

These problem behaviors occurring will result in consequences in your final behavior plan. If the problem behaviors do not occur, the child will earn points. In this way, your child has a double reward for maintaining these behaviors in a positive way.

Next, parents identify some behaviors that your child is expected to do daily. These can include chores or self care behaviors or any good habits you want your child to build.

Expected behaviors

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____
7. _____

Again, the child should be allowed to help pick the 5 behaviors they wish to track. These expected behaviors will result in earning points for completing or earning no points for not completing. There is no consequence applied for not completing expected behaviors.

Once you have picked the 5 problem behaviors and the 5 regular behaviors, list them below:

Top 10 Target Behaviors

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____
7. _____
8. _____
9. _____
10. _____

Now that you've got your working list, you will arrange them in order of significance of problem or importance. Re-arrange your list with the most important one first, the second most important one second and so on.

Top 10 Target Behaviors in Order of Importance

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____
7. _____
8. _____
9. _____
10. _____

You will now rework the problem behaviors to reflect the desired behavior in the positive. For instance, yelling is reworked to talking calmly. Staying out past curfew is reworked to keeping curfew. All behaviors to be measured should be presented in the positive.

Top 10 Target Behaviors Stated in the Positive

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____
7. _____
8. _____
9. _____
10. _____

Assign each behavior a point value congruent with your desire to have the behavior occur. This is a matter of personal judgment; I suggest a point value of 1-10 with 10 assigned to the most important and so on. If you want to make it easier, you can assign the same number of points to each item.

Top 10 Target Behaviors with Assigned Points

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____
7. _____
8. _____
9. _____
10. _____

Consequences are given for behaviors not achieved. Rewards are given in exchange for points. Each reward should reflect a point value that is appropriate. (See list of suggested consequences and rewards below.)

Arrange the behaviors on a chart as below. Post the chart in a conspicuous place and stay consistent. Problem behaviors not controlled earn a consequence. Expected behaviors not completed earn 0 points.

Sample Behavior Plan:

	Mon	Tues	Wed	Thurs	Fri	Sat	Sun
Points used	Enter points used	Enter points used	Enter points used	Enter points used	Enter points used	Enter points used	Enter points used
1.Behavior	Enter points earned	Enter points earned	Enter points earned	Enter points earned	Enter points earned	Enter points earned	Enter points earned
2.Behavior	Enter points earned	Enter points earned	Enter points earned	Enter points earned	Enter points earned	Enter points earned	Enter points earned
3.Behavior	Enter points earned	Enter points earned	Enter points earned	Enter points earned	Enter points earned	Enter points earned	Enter points earned
4.Behavior	Enter points earned	Enter points earned	Enter points earned	Enter points earned	Enter points earned	Enter points earned	Enter points earned
5.Behavior	Enter points earned	Enter points earned	Enter points earned	Enter points earned	Enter points earned	Enter points earned	Enter points earned
6.Behavior	Enter points earned	Enter points earned	Enter points earned	Enter points earned	Enter points earned	Enter points earned	Enter points earned
7.Behavior	Enter points earned	Enter points earned	Enter points earned	Enter points earned	Enter points earned	Enter points earned	Enter points earned
8.Behavior	Enter points earned	Enter points earned	Enter points earned	Enter points earned	Enter points earned	Enter points earned	Enter points earned
9.Behavior	Enter points earned	Enter points earned	Enter points earned	Enter points earned	Enter points earned	Enter points earned	Enter points earned
10.Behavior	Enter points earned	Enter points earned	Enter points earned	Enter points earned	Enter points earned	Enter points earned	Enter points earned
Total points	Enter points	Enter points	Enter points	Enter points	Enter points	Enter points	Enter points

Behavior Plan provided courtesy of Allison Velez, LMHC, LMFT, CAP
www.allisonvelez.com, www.emotionmastery.com

	earned for day	earned for day	earned for day	earned for day	earned for day	earned for day	earned for day
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Guidelines for Rewards and Consequences

Rewards and Consequences must be individualized for your child. They are dependent on your child's age, likes and dislikes, and level of ability.

Rewards should be enjoyable things that your child may already participate in daily. Rewards are assigned a point exchange value. You can use the same point value for each reward if you want to make it easier.

Consequences should be things that might not be as enjoyable such as extra chores. Consequences are given when one of the problem behaviors occurs. Consequences must be completed before rewards are collected. "Good habits" that you want your child to build can make great consequences.

Use index cards for each reward and consequence. Each reward card should clearly indicate the points required. You will want to come up with about 20 of each for variety.

Suggestions for Rewards and Consequences

<i>Rewards</i>	<i>Consequences</i>
Computer or electronic time, 30 minutes=3 points	Dust the living room
Story time with parent=2 points	Clean the bathroom
Ice cream=4 points	Vacuum
Dinner at restaurant choice=20 points	Write a story about someone who got a gift
\$1.00=10 points	Unload the dishwasher
Trip to the zoo=20 points	Take out the trash
Walk to the park=10 points	Clean out the garage
Assorted small toys=2-5 points	Etc., etc.

List each of the above on a separate index card and keep each stack in a separate envelope. Selection of a reward or a consequence is something that a child should have some control over selecting.

Daily, you will tally the points earned and deduct any points used. Consequences should be given as close in time to the objectionable behavior. HOWEVER, applying consequences is not an opportunity for a parent to express their anger. If you are angry, wait until you can calmly explain that the child has earned a consequence and allow them to select their card. A consequence applied in anger may result in a power struggle between parents and children.

Completed Behavior Plan Sample Guide

Problem Behaviors

1. Screaming in anger
2. Hitting sibling
3. Throwing things
4. Refusing requests
5. Leaving dishes in rooms other than kitchen
6. Leaving homework or supplies at school
7. (Any behavior you want your child to STOP)

Expected behaviors

1. Brush teeth before bed
2. Read for 20 minutes
3. Feed the dog
4. Pick up toys
5. Take out the trash
6. Unload the dishwasher
7. (Any behavior you expect your child to do every day)

Top 10 Target Behaviors (parents and child have agreed)

1. Screaming in anger
2. Hitting sibling
3. Throwing things
4. Refusing requests
5. Leaving dishes in rooms other than kitchen
6. Brush teeth before bed
7. Read for 20 minutes
8. Feed the dog

9. Pick up toys
10. Take out the trash

Top 10 Target Behaviors in Order of Importance

1. Hitting sibling
2. Throwing things
3. Feed the dog
4. Screaming in anger
5. Refusing requests
6. Leaving dishes in rooms other than kitchen
7. Take out the trash
8. Brush teeth before bed
9. Read for 20 minutes
10. Pick up toys

Top 10 Target Behaviors Stated in the Positive

1. Hitting sibling-Using kind touch with my brother
2. Throwing things –Handling things with respect
3. Feed the dog-Already positive
4. Screaming in anger-Using a talking voice when I'm upset
5. Refusing requests-Following directions
6. Leaving dishes in rooms other than kitchen-Putting dishes away after eating
7. Take out the trash-Already positive
8. Brush teeth before bed-Already positive
9. Read for 20 minutes-Already positive
10. Pick up toys-Already positive

Top 10 Target Behaviors with Assigned Points

1. Using kind touch with my brother=10
2. Handling things with respect=8
3. Feed the dog=6
4. Using a talking voice when I'm upset=6
5. Following directions=5
6. Putting dishes away after eating=4
7. Take out the trash=3
8. Brush teeth before bed=3

9. Read for 20 minutes=3

10. Pick up toys=2

Completed Sample Behavior Plan Chart:

	Mon	Tues	Wed	Thurs	Fri	Sat	Sun
Points cashed in	Enter points used	Enter points used	Enter points used	Enter points used	Enter points used	Enter points used	Enter points used
Using kind touch with my brother=10	Enter points earned	Enter points earned	Enter points earned	Enter points earned	Enter points earned	Enter points earned	Enter points earned
Handling things with respect=8	Enter points earned	Enter points earned	Enter points earned	Enter points earned	Enter points earned	Enter points earned	Enter points earned
Feed the dog=6	Enter points earned	Enter points earned	Enter points earned	Enter points earned	Enter points earned	Enter points earned	Enter points earned
Using a talking voice when I'm upset=6	Enter points earned	Enter points earned	Enter points earned	Enter points earned	Enter points earned	Enter points earned	Enter points earned
Following directions=5	Enter points earned	Enter points earned	Enter points earned	Enter points earned	Enter points earned	Enter points earned	Enter points earned
Putting dishes away after eating=4	Enter points earned	Enter points earned	Enter points earned	Enter points earned	Enter points earned	Enter points earned	Enter points earned
Take out the trash=3	Enter points earned	Enter points earned	Enter points earned	Enter points earned	Enter points earned	Enter points earned	Enter points earned
Brush teeth before bed=3	Enter points earned	Enter points earned	Enter points earned	Enter points earned	Enter points earned	Enter points earned	Enter points earned
Read for 20 minutes=3	Enter points earned	Enter points earned	Enter points earned	Enter points earned	Enter points earned	Enter points earned	Enter points earned
Pick up toys=2	Enter points earned	Enter points earned	Enter points earned	Enter points earned	Enter points earned	Enter points earned	Enter points earned
Total points	Enter daily points and carry	Enter daily points and carry	Enter daily points and carry	Enter daily points and carry	Enter daily points and carry	Enter daily points and carry	Enter daily points and carry

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Frequently Asked Questions

What if my child refuses to participate? In this case, I recommend making the rewards things that are meaningful to the child. For example, a child who likes to watch TV will be rewarded with TV. Watching TV is only allowed when earned by reward points.

What if my child refuses to do their consequences? Then rewards are withheld until consequences are completed.

How do I know how many points to assign a behavior? The point level earned should be appropriate to the difficulty of the desired behavior. The points assigned to a reward should reflect the level of complexity of the reward. Lower points indicate rewards with low cost and impact. Higher points should be assigned to rewards that are time or money intensive.

When do I change rewards or consequences? Rewards and consequences can be added or modified any time. This is a good way to be creative with your plan. Consequences can reflect things that need to be done in the home. Rewards can reflect activities that the family is going to participate in. For instance, you have a trip to the library planned; a reward could be allowing the child to check out any book they choose for 1 point. This might be something you would have allowed the child to do anyway, but in this way, the child gains a sense of having earned and “paid” for the privilege.

When do I change target behaviors? I encourage you to retain the 10 behaviors you have chosen until your child has consistently earned points for this behavior for at least 3 weeks. It is commonly believed that it takes 3 weeks to build a habit! Once your child has the behavior as a “habit”, you can change the behavior out for another one. If the child starts to slip on completing the first behavior, add it back in as another behavior is attained. Consistency is important for children and for parents. Both of you will feel more confident knowing the contents of your chart. You won’t have this confidence if you are continuously revising the chart.

Many times, parents find they left an important behavior off the first draft list. For this reason, take your time in deciding your list of the most highly desired target behaviors. If you truly find you have made a serious omission, then revise your chart. Chart revisions should not be made every time your child demonstrates an undesired behavior.