



Managing Challenging Behaviors

Michelle Rizzo & Ed Skeffington
February 12, 2020


The 3 pillars of rule following



Knowledge




Skills



Motivation


The 1st pillar of rule following: Knowledge

- ▶ Does the individual know the rule? Can they state the rule on command?
- ▶ For children who possess a wide range of skills and who are properly motivated to follow rules, knowledge is usually all that is necessary.
- ▶ Unfortunately, for those with special needs and/or typically developing individuals with problem behavior, knowledge is typically the least important factor in rule following behavior.
- ▶ Rule knowledge is typically overrated in terms of reliability for producing rule-following behavior.




The 2nd pillar of rule following: Skills


- ▶ Does the child have the skills to follow the rules? Some rules only require a simple skill (e.g., "No picking your nose") others require highly specific skill sets (e.g., "Make good choices").
- ▶ Not enough to just say "Don't ____." What should they do instead.
- ▶ We may need to teach the child a functionally equivalent appropriate replacement behavior (e.g., instead of screaming, teach "Mom").
- ▶ Let's take an example... No Hitting!
 - ◆ complex skill set?
- ▶ When creating rules, always ask yourself "What skills does my child need to demonstrate in order to comply with the rule?"



The 3rd pillar of rule following: Motivation

- ▶ Okay, so Billy has the **Knowledge** and he's got the **Skills** to follow the rules.
- ◆ Now we're all set. No more behavior problems! Smooth sailing ahead right???


Survey says... 



Motivation

- ▶ Forget about thinking of behavior in terms of "Good" or "Bad".
- ▶ Start to view it as "Effective" or "Ineffective".
 - ◆ Effective behavior is behavior that works. It serves a function. The child gets what they want and the behavior is therefore reinforced. Now it's more likely to occur under similar circumstances in the future. It doesn't matter if this behavior is "Good" or "Bad".
 - ◆ Ineffective behavior is behavior that doesn't work. The child doesn't get what they want. The behavior hasn't achieved the goal. This behavior is less likely to occur under similar circumstances in the future. Again, it doesn't matter if this behavior is "Good" or "Bad".
- ▶ Behavior that works will continue. Behavior that doesn't work fades away. Sounds simple, so all we have to do is make sure the unwanted behavior is ineffective right?
 - ◆ WRONG!!! We have to find an appropriate functionally equivalent behavior to replace the unwanted inappropriate behavior. Teach this skill to the child and reinforce the occurrence of this appropriate alternative each time it occurs. If we don't provide an appropriate alternative, the child will find another behavior to try and it might be even worse than the original!!!


**Motivation
John & Dave**



- ▶ John and Dave are both 6 years old. They are best friends and both have the same rule in their homes, "Keep your hands to yourself". John and Dave have both been taught skills to replace their hitting behaviors (e.g., asking sibling to give their toy back, take a deep breath, and find mom or dad and ask for help if needed).
- ▶ Let's take a look at two different approaches to decrease an unwanted behavior.

**Motivation
John & Dave (Cont'd)**

- ▶ In John's house, each time he puts his hands on someone else he gets a red X on his behavior chart. If he receives 5 X's, he can't use the iPad after dinner.
- ▶ In Dave's house, he can earn bonus iPad time for using his strategies (i.e., asking brother to give him the toy back, taking deep breaths, and asking parent for help). He will also lose 1 minute of iPad time for each time he puts his hands on someone else.
- ▶ Who do you think will exhibit less behavior? Who will be more motivated to use the replacement skills? WHY???



**Factors That Influence
Effectiveness of Reinforcement**

- ▶ **Timing** – must be immediate
- ▶ **Contingent**– reinforcement is dependent on the student displaying specific behavior(s) or the absence of a specific behavior(s). Catch them being "GOOD"!
- ▶ **Amount of Reinforcement** – reinforcer must equal behavior
- ▶ **Novelty** – how often the individual comes in contact with the reinforcer
- ▶ **Consistency** – reinforcement usually begins on a continuous schedule and is systematically faded

Why Does He/She Do That? Functions of Behaviors

- ▶ Attention - gaining a reaction (positive or negative)
- ▶ Escape - avoid or get out of an activity
- ▶ Sensory - internally pleasing in some way, not reliant on anything external to the person
- ▶ Tangible - obtain access to an object and/or activity

Strategies for Attention Motivated Behaviors

- ▶ Provide as neutral a response as possible (Don't yell, monitor body language and facial expressions)
- ▶ Do not engage with child when they are displaying the inappropriate behavior
- ▶ Prompt appropriate behavior (e.g., "Mom" or "Excuse me")
- ▶ Use nonverbal cues and or gestures (e.g., model tapping your own shoulder, point to schedule)
- ▶ Provide attention when they are acting appropriately, "CATCH THEM BEING GOOD"
- ▶ When providing reinforcement make it behavior specific. "I love the way you said excuse me to get my attention!"



Strategies for Escape Motivated Behaviors

- ▶ Provide clear expectations prior to giving a directive
- ▶ Once you place a demand, you have to follow through with the demand. Modifications to demands (tasks) can be made but ONLY BEFORE you give the demand. "You're not getting up until you finish all of your homework" vs "Finish your math and then you can take a break".
- ▶ Use **Grandma's Rule...** "First clean up your Legos and then you can have a snack." Use a highly preferred activity to increase the likelihood of a less preferred activity occurring. This can be done verbally or using a first, then schedule.
- ▶ Use **Behavior Momentum.** If child is being noncompliant, try starting some easy, quick demands and moving toward the more difficult demands. Child builds momentum by completing simple demands and being reinforced before moving to a difficult/less preferred demand.



Strategies For Behaviors Exhibited in Order to Gain Access to a Tangible



- ▶ When transitioning from a preferred activity to a less preferred activity, make sure you let the child know what the next preferred activity is and when/how they can earn it. Use a timer or visual timer
- ▶ Make sure the student knows what they need to do in order to gain access to what they want. Parents must have consistent expectations. If not the child will test to see if they can get away with doing less or engaging in the maladaptive behavior that has worked for them in the past.
- ▶ If the student cannot have something when they requests it, make sure you tell them when they can have access to it and/or provide alternative choices.
- ▶ Utilize schedules and/or first, then boards. Display rules, use pictures if necessary. Use these materials to redirect the child non-verbally.



Strategies for Behaviors that are Automatically Reinforced (Sensory)

Pinch timer



- ▶ Try to determine what it is about the behavior that is reinforcing (is it the noise, feeling, etc.)
- ▶ Replace with a more appropriate behavior (i.e., glitter jar, spinning a top, hand fidgets)



How to Determine Function Ask the Million \$\$\$ Questions



▶ I don't believe you! Your child is an angel. I'll give you 1 million dollars if you can make the behavior occur right now.

▶ Okay, I believe you! I'll give you 1 million dollars if you can make it stop right now!



Bobby and his iPad

- ▶ Bobby really loves the iPad. Whenever his parents try to take the iPad away from him he throws tantrums that include screaming, crying, hitting, and destruction of property.
- ▶ Sometimes his parents have had a long day and aren't up for the fight, so they give him back the iPad right away when he starts crying and screaming. Other times he screams for 10-15 minutes and then they give it back to him.
- ▶ Other times they decide this tantrum behavior is unacceptable and they are not going to give the iPad back no matter how loud he screams. Then after 30 minutes of screaming he starts hitting his parents or siblings. This is getting dangerous and the parents don't want anyone to get hurt, so they give Bobby the iPad.
- ▶ Now the parents have had enough! This behavior needs to stop, so they make a pact to "ride out the storm". Bobby cries, screams, and hits others. The parents hold strong and block his attempts to hit. Now Bobby takes it up another notch and begins to break things. He throws a glass at the TV. He smashes mom's laptop. He's now endangering everyone's safety including his own. This is a crisis situation. The parents need him to stop. It's been 1.5 hours since the parents took the iPad. The parents say it's been long enough. He needs to calm down and he made it without the iPad for a whole 1.5 hours. They give it back to him. They held tough for an hour and a half. The parents feel they've made progress. They've proved that he can go that long without the iPad.

Final Thoughts

- ▶ Are behavior problems in your home due to lack of knowledge, skills, or motivation?
- ▶ If it's a skill problem...What skills need to be taught?
- ▶ If it's a motivational problem...ADD something to environment that makes the child want to engage in the replacement behavior more frequently.
- ▶ Why are behaviors occurring (Million \$\$\$ questions)? What strategies can I use to decrease them?

References

1. Breakin' The Law: Ways to increase compliance with rules and expectations. Professional Crisis Management Association (PCMA), Inc. 2014.
