



Managing Challenging Behaviors: Part 2

Rewarding appropriate behaviors and ignoring inappropriate behaviors result in the likelihood that the behaviors you wish your child to exhibit will occur more frequently, and those you wish your child to extinguish will occur less frequently. However, there are some behaviors which cannot be ignored, such as running away, aggression, etc. These behaviors must be eliminated and replaced by positive appropriate behaviors. To help the child learn replacement behaviors, the parents must analyze the events surrounding the behaviors, as well as the behavior itself.

In *Managing Challenging Behaviors: Part 1*, we gave the example of a child whose challenging behavior is throwing tantrums which include screaming and head banging. Observation of the child's behavior reveals that the tantrums occur whenever the child doesn't get his way, which of course, is often. Looking more carefully at the behavior and what happens before it occurs, one can see that the child, who does not communicate verbally, often indicates by pointing, squealing, or eye gaze, that there is something that he wants or wants to do. These indicators occur within seconds prior to the breakdown, if not acknowledged.

The second step is to identify what the breakdown looks like, asking questions like, *How long does it last? How often does it happen per day/week? What is the child's awareness of himself/others while it is happening? Is there any condition that influences or changes the nature of the breakdown?*

Finally, the parent must consider what his/her responses are to the behaviors, writing down, if necessary, how they have been handled, i.e., picking the child up, rubbing his head, saying something to the child, etc. Behaviorists talk about events occurring before the breakdown as antecedent events, and those occurring after the breakdown as consequent events. In addition, the analysis and measurement of the breakdown behaviors themselves allow behaviorists to know when a change has been effected.

Once antecedent events are identified, the parent can modify or structure the child's environment so that they occur less frequently, i.e., being on the lookout for the pointing or eye gaze of the child in the example above and acting quickly to acknowledge the child's communication. They can also determine if the consequent events are in any way positively reinforcing the child's negative behavior, i.e., soothing the child and patting his head. If consequent events are positively reinforcing the negative behavior, the parent can remove them. Finally, the parent can set up replacement behaviors, which are broken down into small steps which the child can handle and which the parent can reinforce with praise and other rewards.