



CHILD MIND[®]
INSTITUTE

Managing Challenging Behaviors in the time of COVID-19

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Transforming Children's Lives



The Child Mind Institute is an independent, national nonprofit dedicated to transforming the lives of children and families struggling with mental health and learning disorders. Our teams work every day to [deliver the highest standards of care](#), [advance the science of the developing brain](#) and empower parents, professionals and policymakers to [support children when and where they need it most](#).

Learning Objectives

- Understand the impact the coronavirus is having on ourselves and our students
- Recognize signs of stress for yourself and your students
- Learn strategies to reduce your child's anxiety and manage your own expectations during this crisis
- Learn practical skills for effective behavior management
- Identify ways to provide compassionate self-care



Accepting our “New Normal”



- Understanding that uncertainty is stressful
 - This is an invisible threat and anxiety is expected
 - There will be good days and “not so good” days
- It’s normal for our children (and you, too) to mourn the loss of typical school and a normal routine
- Remember that our thoughts affect our feelings which affect our behaviors and actions

Understanding the New Challenges

- Managing our own anxiety and expectations during this time
- Balancing personal and professional life
- Juggling siblings engaging in different types of schooling
 - Similarly, managing difficulties of multiple children
- Thinking about the amount of screen time for kids
 - Understanding that this is short-term, we *may* need to be more flexible during this time
- Difficulty finding moments to feel grounded and centered
- Acknowledging and accepting our mixed emotions
 - Grateful for extra family time while feeling exhausted from your children needing extra attention
- How do we look forward?

Appropriately Responding to Stress

- Remember that our kids are feeling just as destabilized as we are right now
 - Expect an increase in disruptive behavior, acting out, tantrums and other attention-seeking behaviors
 - Expect behaviors that look like anxiety: thumb-sucking, wetting the bed, clinginess and separation anxiety
- Collect yourself and remain empathetic towards children
 - Remind them of behavioral expectations when needed
- Keep things light when you can
 - Remember to create time for fun



Typical Responses to a Stressful Situation

- We all respond to stress in a different way, children may respond to stress in the following ways:
 - Excessive crying or irritation in younger children
 - Regressive behaviors, such as toileting accidents
 - Clinginess or separation anxiety; need for extra attention
 - Unhealthy eating or sleeping habits
 - Poor school performance or acting out
 - Difficulty with attention and concentration
 - Irritability and disruptive behaviors
 - Excessive worry or sadness
 - Unexplained aches and pains
 - Excessive fatigue

How to Reduce Children's Anxiety

- Kids feel better when they are kept in the loop, but keep it simple
 - Help children understand what is happening and keep the dialogue open
- The use of visual story books or *social stories* can support teaching children about the virus in an age-appropriate way
- Validate their feelings and provide answers to their questions
- Find a calm, undistracted time to help children understand their feelings and respond to disruptive behavior in a calm way
- Minimize media exposure
- Be a positive role model

Set the Stage for Success

- Positive antecedents **increase** the likelihood of the behavior you want to encourage
 - Set a clear schedule and routine
 - Provide a warning for transitions
 - Make expectations for behavior clear before an activity
 - Be creative about new activities, use the support of others
 - Plan ahead (and expect bumps in the road!)
 - Give choices when possible (two options)
 - When, then statements



Set the Stage for Success Online

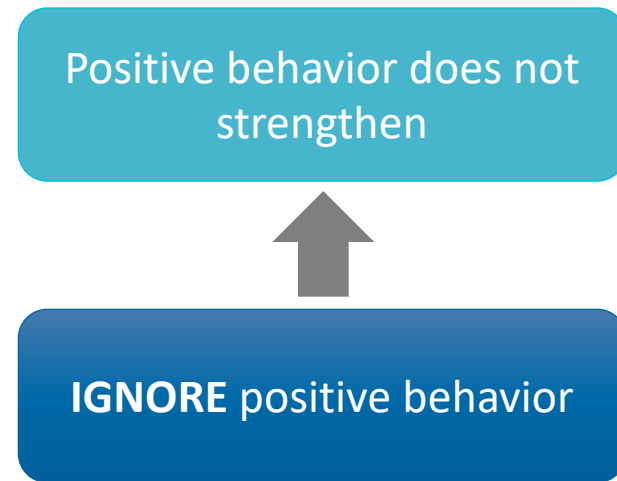
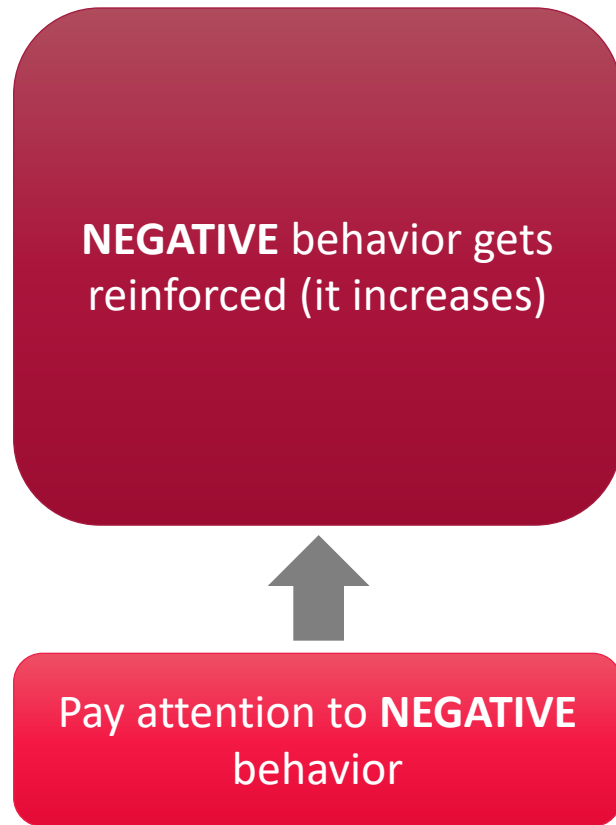
- Set a daily or weekly agenda to parents, inform them what they will need
- Ensure that you are informing your students of behavioral expectations
 - Set up the environment to help kids succeed (i.e., disable private chat, mute all participants, etc.)
- Ensure parents have created the optimal space for kids
 - Away from any distractions, kids have all their needs met, ways to delineate space for academics, reinforcing activities post-schooltime
- Smaller interactive groups whenever possible
- Use multiple visual elements within your teaching (i.e., text, images, videos)
- Utilize breaks whenever possible– 15 minutes teaching, 5-minute break, 10 minutes movement break, 15 minutes teaching

Model Positive Behaviors

- Now more than ever we must teach, and model use of adaptive coping skills
- If appropriate, talk aloud if you are feeling stressed to show how you solve problems and handle strong emotions
- Help your child identify and manage emotions– at the right time!
 - Strike when the iron is cold
- Manage your own expectations!



The Power of Your Attention



The Power of Your Attention

Become a detective for positive behavior!



NEGATIVE behavior reduces



IGNORE negative behavior

Positive behavior
STRENGTHENS



Pay attention to **POSITIVE** behavior

Defining Behaviors

- Define behaviors in **specific, observable, and measurable** terms
- How could you make these more measurable, observable, and specific?
 - Having a bad attitude
 - Not behaving
- How do behaviors thrive? What is the function?
 - Sensory- provides preferred sensory experiences, behavior feels good
 - A child jumping around during class
 - Escape- removes undesired activities or interactions
 - A child shutting down or shuts the computer when the class starts up
 - Attention- provides access to people or interactions
 - Calling out or interrupting during class
 - Tangible- provides preferred items or activities

PRIDE Skills to Reinforce Positive Behaviors

Praise – labeled praise

“Thank you for sharing that with me!”

Reflection

Child: “I read a book to my sister yesterday!”

Adult: “You read to your sister yesterday”

Imitate

Describe – behavior description

“You’re moving the trains”

Enjoy

How to Make Praise Most Effective

- Be specific
- Be consistent
- Be sincere
- Occurs immediately after the behavior
- Occurs when you are physically close*
- Use non-verbal reinforces
- Use at a high dose (3:1 ratio)
- Focus on behaviors you want to **increase**



Reinforcing Positive Behaviors Online

- Ensure that you are informing your students of behavioral expectations
 - Set up the environment to help kids succeed (i.e., disable private chat, mute all participants, etc.)
 - Use these expectations to increase engagement and focus
 - As soon as I see everyone's thumbs up, I can begin the book; as soon as I see everyone's shoulders in the camera, we can do a GoNoodle
- Create simple reward systems to promote positive behaviors
 - Privilege Points, iReward, Dojo points, whiteboard function, etc.
 - Develop a class-wide reward system, if possible
 - Think about group-based rewards: watch a video, do a specific dance or movement activity, play an online math game, etc.
- Children that need more support may benefit from home-school Daily Report Card where parents would provide rewards for on-task and positive school behaviors

Withdrawal of Attention (aka Active Ignoring)

- Only for minor misbehaviors (that are reinforced by attention)
 - Whining
 - Arguing
 - Tantrums
 - Interrupting
 - Purposefully annoying
- Involves waiting for good behavior
- Is **NOT** tolerating misbehavior
- **MUST** be combined with positive attention when appropriate behavior resumes
- **WARNING:** Extinction burst may occur; when withdrawing your attention from a behavior that used to get attention, the problem behavior will likely get worse before it gets better

Prioritizing Compassionate Self-Care

- During this time, everyone's stress is running high. We need to prioritize compassionate self-care now more than ever before:
 - Intentionally create time for yourself
 - Be thoughtful of how you're treating yourself and your body
 - Reconnect with activities that you once loved
 - Limit consumption of news
 - Be realistic with your expectations
 - Send boundaries with yourself and others, understand when you're getting too much information
 - Prioritize kindness and self-compassion



Key Takeaways

- This crisis is changing the way we're going about our daily lives
 - We are forced to adjust to find our new normal
- Remember to have open conversations, kids feel better when they have answers
- Kids need routine and structure, empathy and clear behavioral expectations now more than ever before
- Focus on reinforcing positive behaviors with labeled praise
- Prioritizing your own self-care will allow you to be there for the ones you love



Selected Resources

- Websites related to child mental health
 - Child Mind Institute: <http://www.childmind.org>
 - Association for Behavioral and Cognitive Therapies: <http://www.abct.org/home/>
- School-based behavioral intervention
 - Akin-Little, A., Little, S.G., Bray, M.A., & Kehle, T. (2009). Behavioral interventions in schools: Evidence-based positive strategies. Washington, D.C.: American Psychological Association.
 - Pfiffner, Linda J. (2011). All about ADHD. New York: Scholastic, Inc.
- Behavioral Intervention at Home
 - Barkley, Russell (2013). Taking Charge of ADHD: The Complete, Authoritative Guide for Parents (3rd ed.). New York: The Guilford Press.
 - Kazdin, A.E. (2009). The Kazdin Method for Parenting the Defiant Child. New York: First Mariner Books.
 - Kazdin, A.E. (2013). The Everyday Parenting Toolkit: The Kazdin Method for Easy, Step-by-Step, Lasting Change for You and Your Child. New York: Mariner Books.
- Social Skills and Peer Relationships
 - Frankel, Fred. (2010). Friends Forever: How Parents Can Help Their Kids Make and Keep Good Friends. San Francisco: Wiley & Sons.



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