

# STEPS TO POSITIVE BEHAVIOR







# STEPS to Positive Behavior

STRENGTHENING FAMILIES AND YOUTH

Fact Sheet No. 1

**Introduction:** Those of us who work or live with kids would probably agree that being with youth is a never-ending learning experience! Just when we think we have the kids figured out, they do or say something that totally confuses or frustrates us. This fact sheet and the others to follow are written to give us a boost in trying to figure out just what is happening with our kids. Although the information given focuses on youth 5–14 years old, it can be modified for use with younger and older kids.

Just like builders who must learn their trade and obtain the necessary tools before constructing a new house, we, too, must learn our trade (working with kids) and obtain the necessary tools (understanding of the basics of youth development) before we attempt to influence youth. But, remember, it is a *never-ending* process. As the kids grow, we must grow also in our knowledge and experience to keep up with them.

*The foundation of the information given in STEPS will be based on the premise that we, as youth workers or parents, want our kids to be **capable, competent, and caring citizens.***

## Where in the World?

In working with kids, the old saying, “An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure,” certainly holds true. If we want positive behavior from kids, then we must provide the kind of environment (or space) and activities that enhance this type of behavior. Let’s start with the space we provide in which kids can play, work, and interact.

*Space is a powerful stabilizer of behavior.* Certain space invites specific activity; i.e., an open field invites running, a bean bag chair invites comfort and quiet. Do we give our kids the kind of space they need to act in a positive manner?

Complete this checklist:

Yes    No

\_\_\_    \_\_\_ *In the space I provide for kids (home, school, daycare, meeting place) there are definite areas for specific activities. (Example: There is an open yard or room for active games / running, a kitchen area for preparing snacks,*

*eating, and messy projects, or a quiet area for reading, meetings, discussions.)*

\_\_\_    \_\_\_ *The space where I live or work with kids has boundaries (either physical or imaginary) so kids know where they can or cannot go.*

\_\_\_    \_\_\_ *Most important the kids know and understand the rules for the areas of my home or other space. I have discussed the space requirements with each child, and the rules are reviewed often.*

Kids do not always know or remember that certain spaces are for certain activities; for example, a living room is usually for visiting, reading, or watching television. And, many homes and places have different expectations. In some homes, eating is only done in the kitchen area; in others, eating is allowed anywhere. *We must tell kids what behavior we expect in each space we use with them.*<sup>1</sup>



## Lights, Camera, Action! Try these ideas:

- Let the kids tell you what they think a certain space should be used for and why. If possible, give it a try and then discuss with the kids what happened. Did it work?
- Involve the kids in decorating and arranging a space that can be all theirs. With older kids, give them a budget to work with to improve their planning and math skills. Discuss in advance what the limits are to decorating. (Can they paint on the walls or is that not acceptable?) Evaluate the process.

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<sup>1</sup> *Guidance & Discipline*, Illinois Dept. of Children & Family Services, October 1989.

**Coming Next Time:**  
Rules, Rules, and More Rules! Establishing expectations.



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# STEPS to Positive Behavior

STRENGTHENING FAMILIES AND YOUTH

Fact Sheet No. 2

## Rules, Rules, and More Rules! Establishing our Expectations

**Introduction:** Kids, like adults, need and want to know what is expected of them in different situations. Often kids “misbehave” simply because they have not been given enough information to act according to our expectations of them. Setting clear expectations for kids is a must in promoting positive behavior.

### Check yourself:

Yes No Sometimes

When establishing expectations, I:

- \_\_\_ \_\_\_ \_\_\_ 1. Know what can be expected developmentally of the kids I work with. (Example: A 7-year-old can sit for 5–7 minutes for a discussion, while a 13-year-old can usually discuss topics of interest to them for up to 30 minutes.)
- \_\_\_ \_\_\_ \_\_\_ 2. Take into consideration the individual person and his or her family and cultural heritage.
- \_\_\_ \_\_\_ \_\_\_ 3. State clearly the “house rules” in a positive manner. (Example: “During meetings everyone is expected to remain in the meeting room,” instead of “Do not leave the meeting room.”)
- \_\_\_ \_\_\_ \_\_\_ 4. Have legitimate reasons for the rules and explain them to the kids. (“Because I said so!” is usually not a legitimate reason!)
- \_\_\_ \_\_\_ \_\_\_ 5. Post the rules where everyone can see them.
- \_\_\_ \_\_\_ \_\_\_ 6. Involve the kids, whenever possible, in deciding additional rules and expectations of behavior **and** the consequences of not following the rules.
- \_\_\_ \_\_\_ \_\_\_ 7. Follow the rules myself!

How did you do? Pat yourself on the back for all the “yes” answers and challenge yourself to work on one item at a time that you marked “no” or “sometimes.” Remember, kids learn to forgive those who first forgive themselves. So, don’t dwell on what you may not have done well in the past, just move on to the future!



### Lights, Camera, Action! Try these ideas:

1. Next time a rule is “broken,” ask yourself:
  - “Is this a rule we really need or could we all live without it?” Sometimes rules outlive their usefulness and we must let go of them and move on.
  - “Was the child who broke the rule truly aware of the rule in the first place?” Check to see if the child understands what the rule was, why it exists, if he/ she is aware the rule was broken, and what the consequences of his/her actions are.
  - “Is this rule realistic for this child, at this time, in this situation?” After all, we are human and sometimes a rule needs to be “bent” to best achieve the goal of a caring, happy child.
2. Challenge yourself and the kids with whom you work or live. Post a big sign that states **EVERY RULE HERE CAN BE CHALLENGED, EXCEPT THIS ONE.**

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### Coming Next Time:

“What Now?” Planning the time you spend with kids.



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# STEPS

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Fact Sheet No. 3

## “What Now?”

### Planning The Time You Spend With Kids

**Introduction:** Thoroughly planning an event in advance is an essential step to positive behavior. Kids need to know what is happening in their lives. Anything that involves kids in something out of their usual routine, whether an hour-long club meeting or a 2-week family vacation, needs to be well planned. And, having kids help plan it can be fun. Here are some questions to ask yourself when planning for steps to positive behavior.

- *Is everyone involved in the beginning stages of planning as much as possible?* Kids' behavior will be more positive when they feel they have a say in what is happening.
- *When planning the event, do I give careful thought to the time, space, and equipment needed to complete the activity successfully?* Nothing can lead to frustration and misbehavior faster than not having the pieces to finish an art project or forgetting to bring a swimsuit to a swimming party. **Be prepared!**
- *Before the event, are the kids informed?* Kids need to know what is happening. They'll want to know: Where are we going? What are we going to do? Do I need to bring money? extra clothing? food? How will I get there? Who will I go with? What is expected of me? Give them all the information they need to help sidetrack undesirable behavior.
- *During the event, is there something for everyone, no matter what age they are?* Misbehavior is often caused by boredom or frustration. This can be avoided by making sure there is something for everyone to do that is appropriate to their age. Five-year-olds cannot be expected to sit through a long adult movie, nor can 15-year-olds be expected to play in a sandbox for an hour!
- *Is there a balance of quiet and lively activities during the event?* Kids sometimes have a difficult time calming themselves down after an active game or

activity, or they become bored if only quiet projects are offered. Both these situations can lead to misbehavior. Plan a variety of activities.

- *Lastly, am I having fun?* If you are enjoying the time you spend with the kids, the kids will know it. Their behavior will tend to be more positive if you are positive, too.



#### Lights, Camera, Action! Try these ideas:

1. As a group or family, list ideas of what everyone wants to do. Give everyone a chance to speak and consider every idea. Choose one or two and keep the extra ideas in a “Dream Box” for future use.
2. *Form committees.* Whether in a family of 4 or a group of 14, there is always something for everyone to do when planning. Let everyone be on or chair a “committee”—refreshments, transportation, activities, budget, scheduling. When given some guidance, kids will learn responsibility, build self-confidence, and be more interested in what is happening. Involvement equals positive behavior!

#### A Final Note:

As adults, we sometimes plan events that focus on safety, structure, and lots of activities. **Kids, on the other hand, look for fun, friendship, and not too much pressure to succeed.** Let's remember the kid in us when planning!

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#### Coming Next Time:

“What To Say and How To Say It” Communication tips



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Fact Sheet No. 4

### “What To Say and How To Say It” Communication Tips

**Introduction:** “Those kids never listen to me! Don’t they hear what I say?” Communicating with kids can be frustrating or rewarding, depending on our communication skills. Good communication skills help people feel better about themselves and get along better with others. So, learning good communication skills can benefit the kids we work or live with, as well as ourselves, and are a *step to positive behavior*.

**Rate Yourself.** Rate yourself on the following skills. Give yourself a “1” if you rarely use this skill, a “2” if you use this skill about half the time, and a “3” if you use this skill most of the time.

#### When communicating with kids, I:

- \_\_\_\_\_ 1. *Focus on “do’s” and avoid “don’ts.”* Example: Use “Please walk” instead of “Don’t run.” Do’s are more specific and give kids information on how to behave. “Please eat your snack outside on the porch,” gives kids more information than “Don’t eat that in here!”
- \_\_\_\_\_ 2. *Attempt to get down on their level (kneeling or bending) to make eye to eye contact.* No one likes being talked down to!
- \_\_\_\_\_ 3. *Listen carefully to what they are saying, without interrupting.*
- \_\_\_\_\_ 4. *Ask the kids questions if I do not understand what they are saying.*
- \_\_\_\_\_ 5. *Accept what they are saying as important to them, even if I think it is unimportant.*
- \_\_\_\_\_ 6. *Use the same good manners as I would with adults.* Example: “Please,” “Thank you,” “Excuse me.”

- \_\_\_\_\_ 7. *Try to always use their name.* If I cannot remember it or do not know it, I politely ask.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 8. *Am honest if I do not know an answer to a question.*
- \_\_\_\_\_ 9. *Talk with kids about what is happening.* Kids, like adults, like to know **what** will be happening **when**. It is important to tell kids, “In five minutes we will be leaving to go home. You need to finish up what you are doing so you can get ready to go.” Then stick to your words!
- \_\_\_\_\_ 10. *Give the kids a choice only when there really is one.* Example: If it is time to leave the house (or store, school, etc.) and there is **no choice**, say, “It is time to go now.” Do not ask the kids, “Are you ready to go?” or “Do you want to leave now?” They may answer with a “NO!” and then you have a problem!

\_\_\_\_\_ My Score

#### How did you do?

**30–24:** WOW! HURRAH for you! Keep up the good work. Share your skills with others.

**23–16:** You are on the right track. Keep practicing. Try the ideas from **Lights, Camera, Action!** on the back page.

**15 & under:** Congratulations on finishing the exercise. However, your skills could use some sharpening. Try one new skill for a week and then add another the next week. As with anything else, practice makes perfect.



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**Lights, Camera, Action!**  
Try these ideas:



1. Practice changing negatives to positives. Make these “don’ts” into “do’s”:

- Don’t talk so loudly!
- Don’t speak to me that way!
- Don’t wear those muddy shoes in here!
- Don’t go outside dressed like that!
- Don’t bother me!

**Positive responses:**

- Please speak more quietly (or in a lower voice).
- Please speak more calmly (or more softly or with a different tone of voice).
- Please take off your muddy shoes on the porch (or by the back door).

OR

Please stay outside with those muddy shoes.

- Please put on your hat and gloves before you go outside.

OR

Please take off your good clothes before going outside.

- Please talk to me later—after supper (or any other specific time).

OR

Please keep your hands to yourself.

OR

Please stop (identify specific behavior) touching me on the head or hitting my arm.

2. Three times during the day give your kids an opportunity to make a choice. When giving kids choices, limit the options to 2 or 3, unless you are willing to accept whatever they choose.

*Example:*

*Instead of:* “What do you want for breakfast?”

*Say:* “Do you want toast or cereal?”

*Instead of:* “What time are you coming home from the party?”

*Say:* “Will you be home at 9:00 or 9.30?”

**Effective communication is possibly one of the most important, yet most difficult, things we do with kids. Let’s keep at it.**

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**Coming Next Time:**

“If prevention isn’t enough, what next?”

# STEPS

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Fact Sheet No. 5

### “When Prevention Isn’t Enough: What Next?”

**Introduction:** You’ve done everything you could think of to prevent misbehavior. You checked all the things we’ve talked about in the last four fact sheets—space, establishing expectations, planning the time you spend with kids, and communication tips. But, the kids are still sometimes causing trouble. What can you do instead of screaming? First, a few points to remember:

- \* *Kids are kids.* All kids misbehave sometimes, simply because they haven’t learned the social rules of our world. It is our job as adults and role models to help them learn acceptable behavior.
- \* *Kids have bad days, just like adults.* Sometimes all the planning and patience in the world cannot make up for the fact that a child feels grumpy because of something beyond your control. That’s when it’s best to give him or her space, time, and quiet, if possible, or change the plans to better fit his or her needs.
- \* *Kids usually act out for some reason.* Knowing the cause of a behavior can be helpful in changing it.

### Why? Why? Why?

Adults often ask kids, “Why did you do that? Why did you say that? Why did you not do that? Why did you not say that?” Unfortunately, kids often do not know why they have acted in a certain way. We must be detectives and search for the cause *if we think knowing the cause can help with a solution.*

Children misbehave for many reasons. Some reasons are:

- \* They feel they have something to gain from the misbehavior—attention, power, revenge.

- \* They are unaware of the expectations/ rules of the situation or setting.
- \* They lack the skills or maturity to meet the expectations/ rules.
- \* Their temperament or personality does not fit the situation.

Although knowing the cause can help determine what to do next, it is not always necessary or possible. Do not dwell so long on the cause that you forget to act on the behavior!

### Take action:

1. *Modify the situation.* In our eagerness to provide kids with a variety of activities, we sometimes over-schedule and over-plan. Too much planning can do as much harm as no planning. Look to see if the situation fits the needs of the children involved. Are the activities too easy? too difficult? too long? too short? Are the activities what the kids need **right now, right here?** If not, change the situation and avoid misbehavior.
2. *Redirect the child.* Frequently, misbehavior is simply behavior misplaced. If the behavior is appropriate in a different setting or space, redirect the child to that setting. Example: If kids are running in the hall, can they go outside to run? If kids are talking in the reading area, can they go in another room to talk?
3. *Teach the child.* A little knowledge can go a long way. Often children misbehave because they feel inadequate or do not know any other way of behaving. Is there a social or physical skill you can teach the child to stop the undesirable behavior? <sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Guidance & Discipline*, Illinois Dept. of Children & Family Services, October 1989.



**Lights, Camera, Action!**  
**Try these ideas:**



1. *Look at the total child.* If one or more children tend to misbehave consistently, try to find out what you can about their lives when not with you. What is their life like in school? at home? during nonschool hours? This information may help you understand why the children behave as they do.
2. *Look at the room where the kids spend most of their time.* Ask yourself, "If I were a kid, what would I want to do in this room?" (Run? sit? play games? talk to friends? read?) Then ask yourself, "Is this what I want kids to do in this room?" If the answer is "No," then change the environment.

3. *Separate the child from the behavior.* When discussing children's behavior with them, always identify the specific behavior you do not like, not the child as a whole. Say, "I do not like it when you hit your sister." Do not say, "You are a bad girl!" Children need to know that you still care for them even if occasionally they behave in ways you do not like.

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**Coming Next Time:**  
When Prevention Isn't Enough: Part II



# STEPS to Positive Behavior

STRENGTHENING FAMILIES AND YOUTH

Fact Sheet No. 6

## When Prevention Isn't Enough: Part II

**Let's Review:** In the previous fact sheets we have discussed ways to prevent misbehavior. Changing the situation, redirecting the child, or teaching the child were three methods suggested if prevention was not enough. Now let's go one step further and look at what can be done when the misbehavior does occur and one of the other three methods is not possible.

**What's Our Goal?** First, let's make some assumptions: We want the best for our kids. We want them to grow up and know how to handle themselves in social, business, and home environments. We want them to be healthy and happy. And, we want them to develop self-control. Self-control is the ability to regulate your own actions to match family and societal values and expectations rather than depending on other people to enforce your behavior. We can help our kids learn self-control by following the ideas. We have talked about in the past fact sheets and by *establishing consequences*.

**Establishing Consequences:** All kids need to know that choices and behavior have consequences. Consequences are outcomes that make a particular behavior more or less likely to happen again. There are two kinds of consequences: natural and logical.

- *Natural consequences* are the outcomes which follow directly from a child's action without intervention by anyone else. Example: child misses the bus and has to walk home; teen forgets her lunch money and has to go without lunch.
- *Logical consequences* are the outcomes which are predetermined and created by others: child runs down a school hallway and has to go back and walk; older child arrives home too late for dinner and must make his or her own.

Try to establish consequences before the behavior occurs so the kids are aware of the outcome of that particular behavior. **Show them how the consequence relates to the behavior.** Kids who fight during an activity may need to move to another activity. Children who tease other children may need to work alone for

a period of time. Kids who don't use equipment properly may be given the job of cleanup for a few days.

### Final Thoughts:

- Developing self-control takes time. Have patience and perseverance.
- Praise appropriate behavior. Never let a desirable behavior go unnoticed! A simple pat on the back, a smile, or "good job" is all that's necessary. Challenge yourself to find one positive thing about each child every day.
- Show respect for the child. Children, like adults, deserve our respect. If we ask their opinions, listen to their views, and act on their suggestions when possible, kids will do the same for us.



### Lights, Camera, Action!

#### Try these ideas:

1. Have a family or group meeting. Discuss the behaviors that are distracting, annoying, or harmful to self or others. Talk about why they do not benefit the goals of the family/group. Do this on a regular basis as needed.
2. As a family/group, discuss consequences. Involve the kids in this. Write down the consequences and stick to them.
3. End the meeting by practicing giving "put-ups" (the opposite of "put-downs"). Have each person say a positive thing about the other people in the group. It is easy for some people to be negative. For them, being positive takes practice!
4. Most of all enjoy the enthusiasm of young people.

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