

Understanding Children's Behavior

Children learn from the results of their actions and by observing the behavior of role models such as parents, older siblings, peers and celebrities. Since they often imitate those they admire, it is important that they observe positive behaviors. Talk with your child about the real-life consequences of smoking, alcohol, drugs, cartoon and video game violence and promiscuity.

When a behavior is followed by rewards or praise, it is more likely to reoccur. This goes for adults, children and even pets. Be sure to praise effort as well as behavior.

Children are likely to repeat negative behaviors until they learn new, more effective behaviors. Teach your child what you desire and reward them when they act accordingly. When they misbehave, tell them a more acceptable behavior for next time to improve the child's coping skills.

If a behavior is ignored consistently, this lack of reward reduces the likelihood that it will occur again. If you ignore negative behavior for a while and then react to it, you are teaching your child to have longer tantrums in their effort to seek your attention or getting their way.

Even when punishment works, it is upsetting to both the child and the parent. Whenever possible, punishment should include consequences related to the misbehavior.

Positive social interactions with family members and others, and dependable and consistent parenting encourages trust, security, social comfort and interest in interacting with others.

Negative social interactions and inconsistent parenting encourages feelings of anxiety and mistrust and not seeing others as potential sources of support when stressed. This also contributes to feelings of low self-esteem and self-confidence, which leads to low effort when in challenging situations. This results in poorer performance since greater effort leads to increased success.

Therefore, parents act as educators for their children, teaching them coping skills, the actions that will get attention and be rewarded, and how others can be seen as supportive.

