

Parent Support & Behavior Guide

Start With Yourself First

Children borrow regulation from the adults around them. Before responding to challenging behavior, try to regulate yourself first whenever possible.

Prioritize:

- Stress management
- Self-care
- Rest
- Taking breaks when needed
- Calm communication
- Family routines and connection

When adults are overwhelmed, children often become more dysregulated as well.

Co-Regulation Is Your Superpower

Young children do not yet have fully developed emotional regulation skills. Before children can regulate independently, they first need repeated experiences of being regulated *with* a calm, supportive adult.

Co-regulation may look like:

1. Noticing your child's emotions
2. Viewing emotions as opportunities for connection and teaching
3. Listening empathetically and validating feelings
4. Helping your child identify and label emotions
5. Setting limits while helping problem-solve

Example:

“I understand you are upset. It is okay to feel angry, but it is not okay to hit.”

The goal is to connect first, then teach.

Calm Corners Instead of “Time Outs”

A calm corner is a safe space where children can practice calming their bodies and emotions with support. Unlike punitive “time outs,” calm corners focus on emotional regulation and coping skills.

Ideas for Calm Corner Items

- Stress balls/fidgets
- Emotion wheel or feelings chart
- Coping skill reminders
- Sensory items
- Favorite books
- Soft blankets or stuffed animals
- Calming music
- Pictures of loved ones or happy memories
- Weighted items
- Items with calming scents

Creating the calm corner together can help children feel more engaged and supported.

Visual Supports Help Children Feel Successful and Motivated

Visual aids help provide:

- Structure and routine
- Predictability
- Time management support
- Easier transitions
- Reduced frustration and anxiety

Helpful Visual Supports

- Daily schedules
- Visual timers
- Circle of control
- Behavior expectations/rules
- Reward and consequence menus
- Coping skill reminders
- Custody schedules
- Morning or bedtime routines

Using Warnings & Timers Effectively

Transitions are difficult for many children. Giving brief warnings before transitions can help reduce frustration and improve flexibility.

Helpful strategies:

- Use visual timers or sand timers
- Give approximately one to two warnings
- Avoid repeated warnings or negotiating
- Follow through calmly and consistently

Example:

“You have five more minutes, then it is time to clean up.”

Consistency helps children build trust in routines and expectations.

Consequences Should Teach, Not Punish

Consequences are most effective when they are:

- Calm
- Predictable
- Related to the behavior
- Short-term
- Developmentally appropriate
- Focused on learning

The goal is not punishment — it is helping children build better skills and decision-making over time.

Helpful Consequence Principles

- Connect consequences directly to behavior
- Avoid stacking multiple punishments
- Keep consequences brief and clear
- Save problem-solving conversations for after the child is calm
- Focus on progress rather than perfection
- Be firm and warm, not harsh or overly permissive

Examples

- “If toys are thrown, toys are put away for now.”

- “If homework is not completed, electronics wait until it is done.”

It is generally not recommended to remove:

- Important celebrations
- Family events
- Sports/extracurriculars
- Comfort/safety items

Reinforcement Works Better Than Punishment

Research consistently shows reinforcement is more effective long-term than punishment alone.

Children are not always internally motivated yet and often benefit from external reinforcement while learning new skills.

Reinforcement Ideas

- Praise
- Stickers/points
- Extra privileges
- Special time with caregivers
- Small rewards
- Earning toward larger rewards

Helpful Tips

- Small goals = smaller rewards
- Bigger goals = bigger rewards
- Reinforce effort and progress, not just perfection
- Make rewards motivating for your child specifically
- Allow your child to help choose rewards when possible

Type

Purpose

Example

Positive Reinforcement

Increases behavior by adding something rewarding

Praise, treats, extra playtime

Negative Reinforcement

Increases behavior by removing something unpleasant

Earning a chore-free night

<u>Type</u>	<u>Purpose</u>	<u>Example</u>
Positive Punishment	Decreases behavior by adding something unpleasant	Extra chore
Negative Punishment	Decreases behavior by removing something preferred	Losing electronics temporarily

Reinforcement Systems

Behavior systems work best when they are:

- Clear
- Consistent
- Realistic
- Collaborative
- Easy to follow

Continuous Reinforcement

At first, rewards should happen frequently, so children connect behavior with success.

Example:

“If you meet your goal three days this week, you earn a reward.”

Intermittent Reinforcement

Over time, rewards can become less predictable and more spaced out as skills improve.

Understanding the Function of Behavior (S.E.A.T.)

Behavior usually serves a purpose. Understanding *why* a behavior is happening can help determine the best response.

S — Sensory

The behavior feels regulating or satisfying internally.

Examples:

- Rocking
- Chewing
- Jumping
- Repetitive movements

E — Escape

The child is trying to avoid something.

Possible triggers:

- Difficult tasks
- Anxiety
- Boredom
- Frustration
- Overwhelm

Helpful strategy:

“First ____, then ____.”

Sometimes escape behaviors happen because a task feels too hard, not because the child is “being difficult.”

A — Attention

The child is seeking connection or interaction.

Attention-seeking behaviors may increase when children need:

- Connection
- Play
- Affection
- Praise
- Engagement

Remember:

Negative attention can still reinforce behavior.

T — Tangible

The child wants access to something preferred.

Examples:

- Electronics
- Toys
- Snacks
- Activities

Triggers often include:

- Being told “no”

- Losing access to preferred items
- Waiting

Optional Behavior Tracking Tool

Tracking patterns can sometimes help identify triggers and effective supports.

Helpful Things to Track

1. Day/time
2. What happened beforehand
3. Specific behaviors observed
4. Duration
5. Possible function (S.E.A.T.)
6. How adults responded
7. Outcome/consequence
8. Intensity (1–10)
9. Positive progress or successful coping observed

The goal of tracking is not to “catch” children being bad — it is to better understand patterns and support skill-building over time.