

## CHANGING BEHAVIOR PATTERNS

Behavior is influenced by:

- \* **genetics** (child inherits certain traits, e.g. temperament, coping skills, resilience)
- \* **early neurological development** (0-4 is when 90% of brain development occurs)
- \* **environment** (exposure to calm, predictable, nurturing parental figures)
- \* **relationships** (level of connectedness to adult figures, desire for their approval)
- \* **repetition/reinforcement** (making brain connections and eventually habits)

Human beings are creatures of habit and once formed they are hard to change. However the human mind is plastic and connections can be changed throughout life. This requires motivation on the child's part and consistency on the parents' part.

However individuals differ in their motivations, strengths/weaknesses, ability to change (e.g. cognitive level, coping skills, tolerance level). Therefore discipline must be customized for each child and depends on the given situation. It also should be administered in a calm manner, without anger or frustration. Behaviors cannot be changed permanently if they are based on fear. Parents should avoid nagging or belittling children, using too many negatives to describe them (which is also a habit).

The following methods are recommended:

- **Praise** – by far the most effective means of securing permanent change is to praise your child for little as well as big accomplishments. Children will rise to the occasion if they know the parent supports them and believes in them.
- **Selective ignoring**-home life is not the military and you cannot expect blind obedience from your children. It isn't even desirable as we want children who can think for themselves and occasionally even challenge others.
- **Time-In's**- Much more effective than time-outs. Keeping child next to you helps him feel safe and calms him down. The parent then role models the kind of coping skills and problem-solving necessary to make it in this world.
- **Consequences**- at times allowing the child to face the consequences of their actions is the best teacher. However these must be carefully selected and the parent should step back to allow the child to experience the consequences. This will give a child a sense of control as well as teach him responsibility.
- **Motivators**-everyone needs some incentive to put forth an effort. We go to work to get paid, we do a good job to get praise. Children are no different. They need a reason to change their behavior; use positive reinforcement.
- **Reminders**-Don't assume that children are deliberately procrastinating or ignoring you. They have even shorter attention spans than adults and are easily distracted. Put up written reminders (photos for little ones), develop a code or other cues that will remind them.
- **Negotiations**-especially for older children it can be helpful to find out what they really want and trade for compliance in other behaviors (this is NOT bribing, it is simply teaching a life skill).
- **Withdrawal of privileges**-reserved for when nothing else works and parent needs some leverage (sometimes needed with Oppositional Defiant children).