



At Home Tips for Your Special Education Student

If your student is enrolled in a special education program, chances are you've seen some wonderful progress at school. Wondering how to translate that into success at home? Here are some tips!



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Five Tips for Helping Your Child Deal with Emotions at Home

Knowing how to respond to your child's negative emotions (e.g. sadness, fear, anger) can be difficult. However, it is normal, and expected, for your child to experience such emotions, and how you respond significantly shapes your child's actions. Your child learns how to manage his/her emotions in healthy and productive ways when you respond calmly and consistently.

A popular quote by L.R. Knost states, "when little people are overwhelmed by big emotions, it's our job to share our calm, not to join their chaos." But that may be easier said than done. How can you remain calm when your child is displaying intense negative emotions? By practicing what psychologists refer to as "emotion coaching," a five-step process in which you use teachable moments to develop your child's emotional competence.

Emotional coaching is not always practical, nor easy. It takes practice and, when pressed for time, you may only be able to implement one step. However, it is portable. It doesn't require special tools or materials, and it can be used to reinforce other strategies your child is learning (e.g., yoga, exercise, relaxation).

The use of emotional coaching has been proven to be extremely effective. Studies have shown that children whose parents use emotion coaching tend to be more physically healthy, socially skilled, academically successful, emotionally stable and demonstrate fewer behavioral problems and less violence than their peers.

The next time you are faced with responding to your child's negative emotions, try making the experience a teachable moment with emotional coaching.

About the Author:

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The Five Steps of Emotional Coaching

- 1 - Become aware of both your and your child's emotions (e.g. recognize you and your child seem angry).**
- 2 - Recognize your child's emotional reaction as an opportunity to connect with and teach your child skills to regulate emotions, rather than punishing or disciplining.**
- 3 - Listen with empathy and validate how your child is feeling.**
Remember, validating a feeling does not mean accepting a behavior.
- 5 - Help your child name the emotion he/she is feeling, which often includes building your child's emotion vocabulary.**
- 5 - Set limits on your child's behavior and help him/her problem solve.**
As an example, if an angry child hits a sibling, you could say "It's okay you felt angry, but it is not okay you hit your brother. We need to brainstorm how you can make it up to your brother, and what you can do next time when you get angry at him." It is important to develop solutions that address the present situation and help prevent similar situations in the future.

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Tips for Changing Your Child's Routine

By Kara Kessel , MS, LBS, BCBA

Change is one of the biggest anxiety provoking transitions for both children and adults. Children with autism can be especially sensitive to disruptions to their routine. Transitions to their child's schedule resets the expectation for their new normal. They may have questions and concerns about what comes next, or how they should deal with changes. Here are a few tips for helping to ensure that changes to your child's routine go as smoothly as possible.

Not all schedule changes allow for all of the steps above, but work them in where you can and hopefully, you can help your child feel less anxious and more easily adapt to changes.

- **Preparation-** You can help your child with their schedule change by working to create structure before the change. You may create a calendar schedule, a list of expectations to be posted on the refrigerator, or a visual schedule to name a few.
- **Discussion** Talk about it in advance! Once the schedule has been created, set up expectations for each of the scheduled items so your child knows what is coming.

- **Practice-** Plan to implement the new schedule on a predetermined date. Create schedules so they can practice, and problem solve through the schedule with you! If possible, allow your child to have some control of a component of the new routine/schedule.
- **Be open-** Allow your child to have doubts and fears about their new schedule. Talking about their new schedule will assist in normalizing the routine and will help decrease the stigma associated with the schedule change. Social stories, depending upon functioning level and age, may be a good tool to discuss the new schedule with your child.
- **Make a plan-** Help them create plans to face those uncertainties that may arise while they are moving through their schedule. Help them identify a network of resources if they encounter a stressor while learning their new schedule.
- **Find Your Support-** Seek assistance from others who have faced the struggle you currently find yourself facing as a parent of a child with unique needs. For example, online networking via social media, local parent groups, Local Autism Societies may provide social networking and idea sharing to help you get creative in helping your child adapt to their new schedule.



Tips to Getting Your Child Dressed

Written by Nick Wadas
Occupational Therapy Supervisor
Category: At-home help for special needs students

Getting your child dressed in the morning can be overwhelming for both you and your child. Picking out an outfit and changing out of comfy pajamas and into day clothes can make leaving the house on time a real challenge. Follow these tips to make getting ready a less stressful morning routine.

With some pre-planning, establishing a morning dressing routine and breaking down dressing tasks into small steps, dressing in the morning will have you and your child feeling more at ease to welcome the day.



1. Assist your child with picking and laying out his/her clothes the night before. You may have to check the clothing choices to make sure they are school appropriate. When picking out clothing, narrow the number of options. For example, only provide two outfits to choose from.
2. Establish and stick to a morning routine, so your child knows what the expectations are each morning.
3. Consider if your child understands how to put on and remove various types of clothing. Your child may experience anxiety because he or she does not understand how or has difficulty using the proper motor patterns to put on clothing (e.g. threading a leg in a pair of pants or an arm in a shirt). If your child has difficulty with motor planning and sequencing skills, he/she will have difficulty initiating and sequencing through the steps of dressing. Breaking down the task in small steps and providing demonstrations can help.
4. Make sure your child goes to sleep at a consistent time and is getting enough sleep. This will help reduce the stress and anxiety your child may experience while dressing.
5. Identify any sensory aversions your child may have toward certain fabrics or textures. Your child may resist dressing based on how he or she reacts to different fabric textures, seams and tags. You may find it beneficial to involve your child in shopping for new clothes, so purchases include clothes he/she is comfortable wearing.

Over time, if your child is extremely aversive to clothing, he/she may need services to help to work with sensory integration and processing skills.



ABA Tips for Reinforcing Positive Behaviors

There are many ways to help your child understand the kind of behavior you expect, and to reinforce those good behaviors when they happen. Positive Reinforcement is one strong option. Here are some tips about how you can incorporate this into your interactions with your child.

What is Positive Reinforcement?

Positive Reinforcement is a strategy that involves adding something to the environment when a specific behavior occurs, in order to increase that behavior in the future. For example, if your child responds well to praise, you can say, "Thank you for cleaning up your toys!" If your child likes music, add a song to the clean-up routine to make the task more appealing. Many teachers and parents also use tangible items such as small edible treats, or fidget items such as playdough, to positively reinforce behaviors.

Positive reinforcement teaches children that engaging in appropriate behaviors produces a greater benefit than engaging in problem behavior, which usually results in some type of consequence (loss of privileges, extra chores, etc.).

When can Positive Reinforcement be used?

Positive Reinforcement can be used to teach new skills or strengthen existing behaviors. New skills could include writing, making a bed, sharing with others, reading, or playing a musical instrument. Existing behaviors that can be improved using positive reinforcement can include following directions, improving social skills, communication skills, and increasing independence with life skills such as feeding and caring for oneself.

Developing replacement behaviors is essential for teaching new behaviors and strengthening existing behaviors. For example, if your child becomes frustrated when asked to clean up and acts out by arguing, verbally refusing and throwing items, you could replace those behaviors by teaching the student to ask for help or ask for a break. When the child engages in the replacement behavior instead of the problem behavior, reinforce that behavior using some of the ideas you're reading about here.

What can I use to positively reinforce appropriate behaviors?

There are a few things to consider when choosing a reinforcer for your child. Most importantly, you will need to find items or activities that are highly motivating. In order to increase the value of the reinforcer, restrict the use of the item activity when it is not earned. For example, if your child is earning screen time, then keep the screen time limited outside of the reward. If access to the reinforcer is always readily available, it will lose its appeal.

Another consideration is your child's age. Younger children may be motivated by stickers, small edibles, helping an adult, or playing on the computer. Older children and teens may be motivated by a monetary allowance, extended curfew, independence during activities, and time with friends.

Lastly, consider varying the reinforcer based on the response effort of the child. The greater the effort, the greater the reward! You can easily modify the reinforcer based on the child's performance. If they do a superb job with a task, give extra or a larger reward. If only a mediocre amount of effort was given, reduce the amount of the reinforcer or provide a less-preferred item.

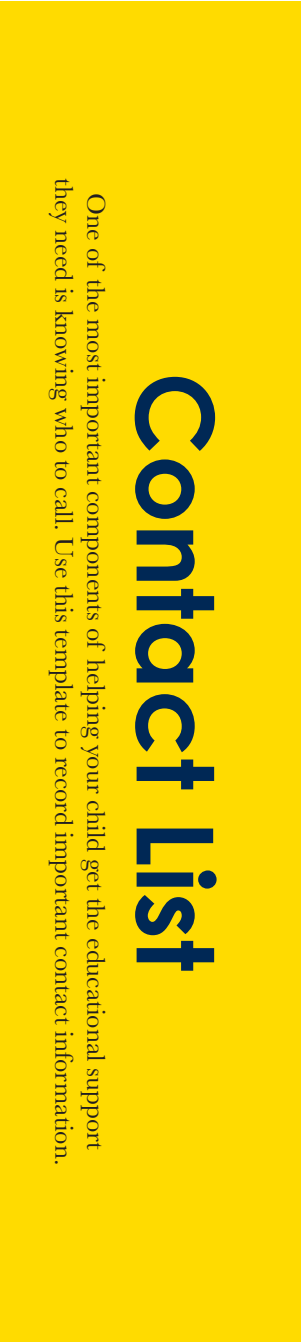
How often should I reinforce positive behaviors?

Many parents share a concern that children may become dependent upon positive reinforcement in order to behave appropriately. This will not happen if reinforcement is faded out over time. The goal is for reinforcement to come from the natural environment instead of a contrived source. For example, if a child is working on improving social skills with peers, having positive relationships will become the natural reinforcer, not rewards from an adult.

It is best practice to provide reinforcement for new skills frequently in the beginning, and then fade back the reinforcement as the skill becomes acquired. Once the skill is mastered and can be performed independently, reinforcement can be provided sparingly, on an intermittent basis. The age and development level of the child will also have an impact on the amount of reinforcement that is necessary. For example, an older child who is more independent, may require less frequent reinforcement than a younger child. Children and young adults with disabilities may require more frequent reinforcement than their typically developing peers.

Hopefully, this has helped you with some ideas on how to reinforce positive behavior with your child.

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While the process of developing your child's IEP may seem daunting, there are many resources available to help guide you. We've included a few helpful organizations that might provide you some additional support.

1. The U.S. Department of Education has extensive online resources explaining your rights and responsibilities in securing additional support for your student through an IEP. Visit <https://www2.ed.gov/parents/needsspeced/iepguide/index.html> to learn more.

2. Your state's department of education will likely offer additional information on processes within your area. Here is a list of the sites for some of the states we serve.

- New Jersey: www.nj.gov/education/
- Ohio: education.ohio.gov
- Pennsylvania: www.education.pa.gov
- Virginia: www.doe.virginia.gov

3. Several national organizations provide resources and support to the special education community. Some of these include...

- The Council for Exceptional Children: <https://exceptionalchildren.org/>
- Autism Society: www.autism-society.org
- Learning Disabilities Association of America: ldaamerica.org
