

disciplinary action. Many approaches are available. Reasoning involves explaining why an act is wrong and is usually appropriate for older children, especially when moral issues are involved. However, young children cannot be expected to “see the other side” because of their egocentrism. Children in the preoperative stage of cognitive development (toddlers and preschoolers) have a limited ability to distinguish between their point of view and that of others. Sometimes children use “reasoning” as a way of gaining attention. For example, they may misbehave, thinking the parents will give them a lengthy explanation of the wrongdoing and knowing that negative attention is better than no attention. When children use this technique, parents should end the explanation by stating, “This is the rule, and this is how I expect you to behave. I won't explain it any further.”

Unfortunately, reasoning is often combined with scolding, which sometimes takes the form of shame or criticism. For example, the parent may state, “You are a bad boy for hitting your brother.” Children take such remarks seriously and personally, believing that they are bad.

### **Nursing Alert**

When reprimanding children, focus only on the misbehavior, not on the child. Use of “I” messages rather than “you” messages expresses personal feelings without accusation or ridicule. For example, an “I” message attacks the behavior (“I am upset when Johnny is punched; I don't like to see him hurt”) not the child.

Positive and negative reinforcement is the basis of behavior modification theory—behavior that is rewarded will be repeated; behavior that is not rewarded will be extinguished. Using rewards is a positive approach. By encouraging children to behave in specified ways, the parents can decrease the tendency to misbehave. With young children, using paper stars is an effective method. For older children, the “token system” is appropriate, especially if a certain number of stars or tokens yields a special reward, such as a trip to the movies or a new book. In planning a reward system, the parents must explain expected behaviors to the child and establish rewards that are reinforcing. They should use a