

Helpful Strategies to Promote Positive Behavior

Celebrate and build strengths and successes

Tell the child what they do well and what you like. A sense of competence fosters motivation. Use positive feedback more often than corrections.

Example: “Great job putting your dishes in the sink!”

Respect and listen

Pay attention to both verbal and non-verbal communication.

Example: “You keep sitting on that side. Is the sun in your eyes over here?”

Validate concerns and emotions

Acknowledge fears or discomfort. Help label emotions.

Examples:

- “I know you don’t like spiders. I can see that you’re afraid.”
- “I can see that you’re angry our plans have changed.”

Provide clear expectations of behavior

Use visual aids, photos, or video models. A helpful strategy is “Tell-Show-Do.”

Set them up for success

Offer accommodations (e.g., one-word answers, Velcro shoes). Modify the environment for better outcomes.

Ignore challenging behavior (strategically)

Avoid reinforcing negative behavior. Be consistent, and pair this approach with positive reinforcement.

Example: Do not give a lollipop to stop a tantrum.

Alternate tasks

Balance difficult tasks with enjoyable or easier ones to prevent frustration.

Teach at their learning level

Avoid tasks that are too easy or too hard. Focus on growth and realistic goals.

Give choices within limits

Allow some control while keeping structure.

Example: “Do you want to eat first, or paint first?”

Provide access to breaks

Teach how to request breaks (e.g., PECS card) and always honor valid requests.

Promote calm-down spaces

Create a safe space the child can use voluntarily—not as punishment.

Use reinforcement systems

Reward desired behavior with praise or preferred items.

Example: “You stayed with me while shopping. You’ve earned a ride on the toy airplane!”

Allow personal time

Let them engage in preferred or self-soothing behaviors (“stimming”) when appropriate.

Reward flexibility and self-control

Example: “The pool was closed but you stayed calm—let’s go get ice cream!”

Pick your battles

Focus on the most essential behaviors. Balance discipline with enjoyment and positivity.

Use positive/proactive language

Say what you want them to do rather than what not to do.

Example: Instead of “Stop picking your nose,” say “Use a tissue.”