Basic Home Behavior Management
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State the Rules
All children need and want boundaries and limits. Rules exist even though they may not be spoken or written. Try to state your rules in positive terms – "Keep your hands and feet to yourself." Have a few reasonable rules. Be consistent in using and enforcing rules. It is important to call attention to rules even when your child is following them. Don't wait until your child has violated them.
❖ *K.I.S.S. (Keep it Short and Simple)*

Make the World Predictable
Develop routines and write out a daily schedule. Homework, TV, school, play, baths and meals should all be written down. Scheduling helps children (and adults) to gauge time, organize activities, and prioritize in terms of importance. Schedules provide a visual cue of when things will happen and imply an agreement of when it is time to stop one activity and move on to another. This decreases arguing. Reinforce adherence to the schedule. Use the calendar, lists, and timers to help structure time and activities. Timers help decrease parental nagging and reminding.
❖ *Set the Stage for Success*

When Behavior is Appropriate, Praise it
Focus on the many positive behaviors that your child exhibits. When you enter a room, ask yourself "What is going right?" Make specific, positive comments. For example, notice when your child responds to directions the first time you give them. Even if the child does it because it is something he wants to do, it still merits special attention. This will help your child to notice the exact behavior(s) that you want him to demonstrate. If a task has been partially completed, comment positively on the completed part first. When you notice things that a child does right, it breaks the cycle of negative redirection (nagging) and makes him feel better about himself and you. Increase the amount of nonverbal praise. Give lots of warm smiles, pats, and thumbs up. Your attention is something your child needs, use it at the right time. Provide extra praise for behaviors that you want to increase.
❖ *Catch the child being good*

When Behavior is Inappropriate, ignore it
For a child, negative attention is better than no attention at all. Attention reinforces behavior. Before you look at, speak to, or touch the child, ask yourself. "Do I want the behavior my child is not engaging in to increase?" If not, ignore it! Turn your attention to other matters or other children (siblings) who are behaving appropriately. If the behavior is not dangerous or destructive and you can ignore it, you should do so. When you refuse to give attention to undesirable behavior, a child must do something else to get your attention. Quickly give positive attention to more appropriate behaviors. Be aware that when you begin to ignore a problem behavior, it may increase rather than decrease at first. Be firm and consistent.
❖ *If there is no audience, the show will close*

When Giving Directions, State Them Clearly
Do not phrase directions as questions when you mean them as directions. For Example, don't ask "Are you ready for bed when it is bedtime. Instead say, "John, it is time for bed." Get the child's attention, give the direction, and reinforce compliance. Some children need help stopping and shifting activities. Use timers and verbal reminders to structure transitions. "Five more minutes, then it is time to clean up." Whenever possible, give a choice between two acceptable options, but your child should know when he has a choice and when he has no option. State expectations clearly. "Straighten up your bedroom" leaves room for debate.
❖ *Say what you mean*

Never Give a Direction Unless you are Ready to Enforce it

Reserve directions for important situations when you are prepared to follow through. If you don't feel like getting up to check, don't tell your child to put away his toys. When you are concerned about inconsistency, ask yourself exactly what message you want to convey. It is ok to leave the toys out or it is okay not to listen to your directions.

❖ *Mean what you say*

Focus on One or Two Behaviors and be Consistent

Pick one or two behaviors to work on and respond consistently. This way your child will learn what to expect and, in turn, he will behave more consistently. Try to discuss specific behaviors with your spouse and agree on specific responses/consequences. A consensus improves consistency. Writing it down is helpful. Try to have others provide the same structure. This increases the rate of learning- there is less testing behavior and it decreases the likelihood that the new skill will be person specific.

❖ *Pick your battles to win the war*

Understand the Limitations of Punishment

Punishment procedures, such as time-out, only interrupt behavior but do not teach an alternative behavior. If punishment procedure is used, be sure to deliver the punishment in a matter-of-fact manner, deliver it immediately, and every time the behavior occurs. Effective punishments entail a warning, have as set beginning, and a set end. Reinforce incompatible behaviors and positive alternative behaviors. In a pinch, ask the child what the punishment should be.

❖ *Teach them what to do as well as what not to do*

Ask a Question

What all else fails and redirection in necessary, ask your child a question such as "What guideline applies to that situation." Reinforce his/her ability to repeat the rule. This is less judgmental, provides an opportunity for the child to be reinforced, and redirects a negative interaction into an exchange of information. Be calm. Try writing down the child's responses. Build on what was said. Encourage problem solving.

❖ *A Statement provokes a defense, a question evokes a response*

Model Appropriate Behavior

Demonstrate the behaviors you want your child to display. Model the target behaviors then encourage your child to imitate you. Pretend to do it wrong and let the child correct you. It is easier to remember new behavior if there is a visual image and a chance for supervised, positive practice.

❖ *A picture is worth...*