How to support your child’s positive behavior and encourage school success

Helping your child learn positive behaviors at home can encourage success at school. One proven strategy for teaching positive behaviors is called Positive Behavior Supports (PBS), a method families can put into practice at home.

Some Minnesota schools are using Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports at school, since research shows that it supports all students and creates a positive environment at school that makes it easier for students to learn. Families can also make a Positive Behavior Supports plan at home for their child.

Before you begin
Before you make a PBS plan at home, it’s important to understand the meaning of your child’s behavior. Behavior is a way people communicate what they need.

At each stage of development, children use the language they know to get what they need. Infants may cry when hungry, toddlers might throw a toy to gain attention, and elementary-age children may scream to express their anger. In middle school, children often argue when they disagree. High school students may refuse to follow rules when denied a privilege.

If children get what they need because of their behavior, that behavior will continue. You can help your child meet his or her needs by using appropriate behavior.

What are Positive Behavior Supports?
Managing and improving your child’s behavior isn’t about punishment or consequences. Although punishment might temporarily stop negative behavior, it doesn’t teach your child the behavior you would like to see.

PBS is a process that teaches children how to behave appropriately by focusing on teaching, practicing, and rewarding good behavior.

How parents can use Positive Behavior Supports
This strategy works well at school, but it can work just as well at home. Teach the behavior you want to see. Then support and reinforce that positive behavior. Helping your child use appropriate behavior also means changing the environment so that it reinforces the new behavior. To make this work, your family will need to decide what behavior you expect, how you are going to teach the new behavior, and how you will reinforce it.

When your child is doing the positive behavior, it’s important that you notice. A good rule to remember is to recognize the positive behaviors five times more frequently than you recognize the inappropriate behaviors.

For example, you could put a golf tee in a jar every time you “catch” the child doing the right thing, and then create a reward system so that the golf tees can be used to gain a reward. Most families find that it works well for children to be rewarded with “alone time” with a parent for a special activity. Would your child like to fish, hike, go to a movie, or play a game with you? Remember, effective rewards don’t have to cost money.

Putting it all together
Parenting isn’t always easy, especially if your child has challenging behaviors. It will take effort to help your child develop positive behavior: you will need to teach the expectations, reward positive behaviors, and model and practice them yourself. Yet research shows that PBS is effective.

Using PBS can refocus your family on the concept of working together, will help you create a more enjoyable and harmonious home life, and will support your child’s progress at school.

For more information on PBS and understanding challenging behavior, contact Renelle Nelson at PACER Center at 952-838-9000 or rnelson@PACER.org.