

PRACTICAL STRATEGIES FOR COMMON BEHAVIORAL PROBLEMS IN YOUNG CHILDREN WITH AUTISM RICHARD SOLOMON MD

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Welcome Misbehavior!

"Misbehavior is the immature expression of a valid feeling."

This talk offers practical strategies for helping children with ASD learn to express their feelings in a "good negative" way

Use behavior problems to help with development ultimately to become mature emotional thinkers and. . .

Well Behaved! (Because they *want* to)



Overview

- Developmental, Biopsychosocial Approach
 - When should the GBU approach begin?
 - Case study: Adam, The Difficult
- Family Systems Framework—The Big Picture
 - Family Ecology
- Parenting Styles
- The Good, The Bad, & The Ugly—A Systematic Model of Discipline
 Family Dynamic Issues & Discipline
- Promoting Maturity: The Impulse Sandwich







Developmental Readiness

- Discipline for misbehavior is appropriate for children when they *understand* they are misbehaving
- Earliest neurotypical ages: 18 months to 2 years – Greenspan FDC 5-6
- Before that, keep the home safe, use distraction and stop dangerous/destructive behavior
- Strictly behavioral approaches work well with earlier developmental stages







Who is Adam?

- 5 ½ years old
- I diagnosed him at age 3 with moderate ASD
- Received PLAY Project and intensive SLP and OT for 2 years
- Progress very good to excellent. "Adam has come a long way."
- Talking in sentences now
- Emotional age 2 ½ to 3
- Impulsive behavior
- Adam's Greenspan Functional Developmental Capacities...



What is Adam's FDL Profile?

- FDL I: Mostly "with us." Easily upset, impulsive, angry, stubborn. Over-reactive.
- FDL 2: Warmly connected; easily engaged. Well attached.
- FDL 3: Responsive to overtures. Solid.
- FDL 4: Follows 1-2 step commands. Can problem solve. Oppositional. Interacts well.
- FDL 5: Understands simple meanings. Enjoys thematic pretend play.
- FDL 6: Talking in short sentences. Beginning to answer 'why' type questions and can recall the immediate past i.e. he can understand consequences and put two ideas together.

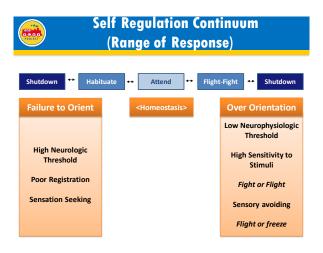


Adam, The Difficult

- Tantrums quickly
- Trouble with transitions (morning transitions, sleep, stopping activities, traveling, etc.)
- Aggression: hitting, throwing in anger
- · Sibling rivalry with younger neurotypical sister
- Difficulty with self organization, inattention, impulsive, not listening. Easily dysregulated. Mixed reactive type

Besides that, very sweet!

The Good, The Bad & The Ugly







Adam's Self Reg Profile

- Over-reactive emotionally
- · Hyper-sensitive to environment
- Sensory Seeker
- Poor Impulse Control
- Temperament and the *Goodness of Fit* with the family system is challenging



Adam: Summary

Perfect Brain For Misbehavior! But Ready for Rules,

Reasons and Consequences



Diagnostic Considerations

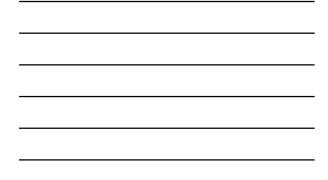
- Common behavioral difficulties? (large majority of children)
- Childhood anxiety/fearfulness is common. Not Adam.
- ADD/ADHD
 - Can be diagnosed reliably by age 6-7
 - Early ADD/ADHD by age 4-5 but meds not recommended 4-5 ADD/ADHD
- Oppositional Defiant Disorder
 - Uncommon in pre-adolescent
- Psychiatric diagnoses (uncommon in pre-adolescents): See FH
 - Depression Bipolar Mood disorder
 - OCD
 - Regulatory Disorder (Yes!)
 - Autism (Yes!)

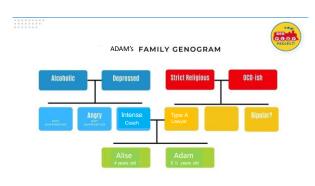


Screening for Common Pediatric Behavioral Issues*

- Questionnaires (can shorten the time if done beforehand
 - CARS 2: Autism Evaluation (M-CHAT Screening)
 - Development
 - Ages and Stages (ASQ 3) and (ASQ 3)
 - ASQ-SE 2 (Social Emotional) ASQ-SE 2
 - Autism: CHAT (Screen)
 - ADHD Questionnaires
 - Conners Vanderbilt
 - Behavioral Questionnaires
 - Child Behavior Checklist
 - Depression: PHQ9
 - ACES—Adverse Childhood Experiences
 - (*Not needed for most common behavioral concerns)







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ACEs: Adverse Childhood Experiences

- Physical abuse.
- Sexual abuse.
- Emotional abuse.
- Physical neglect.
- Emotional neglect.
- Mental illness.
- Divorce.
- Substance abuse.



Adam's Family

- Dad is a lawyer with a very busy practice
- Mom is an ex-basketball coach who is home most of the time with Adam and his younger sister
- Mom is intense and wants Adam to get 'the best' therapy. Has high expectations for herself and Adam.
- Adam has a younger 4 year old sister who neurotypical smart and annoying. An attention seeker.
- No major risk factors except for Adam's autism
- No major life stressors/changes/events
- Good social support. Hired a nanny to work with Adam.



	Assessment of Behavioral Concerns in Childhood
• 4 T	pes of parents/caregivers:
	Authoritarian
-	Permissive
	Authoritative
-	Neglectful
	<u>horitative</u> parenting has been shown to reduce ression

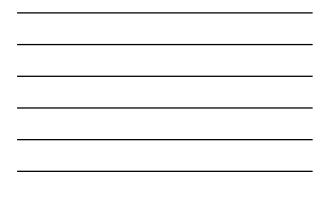


Types of Parenting Patterns

	Con	trol	Quality of Communication		Maturity Demands		Nurturing	
Pattern	High	Low	High	Low	High	Low	High	Low
Authoritarian	x			x	x			x
Authoritative	х		x		х		х	
Permissive		x	x			х	х	
Neglectful		х		x		х		х

Style of Parenting and Children's Aggressiveness

	High Punitiveness	Low Punitiveness
High	Most	Moderately
Permissiveness	Aggressive	Aggressive
Low	Moderately	Least
Permissiveness	Aggressive	Aggressive



Helping Caregivers Understand Misbehavior— 'The Talk'

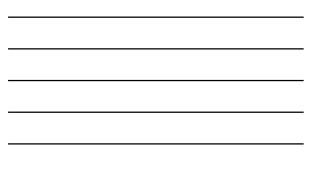
- Once you have considered the child's development and profile, the family's genogram and system, other causes for misbehavior (neglect, ACES, etc), and the parenting style, then what is your plan?
 First, join the family system
 - Parallel process. Read the family cues, follow their lead, etc
- Second, mirror the parents' perspectives.
 - Remember, we don't blame; we find out why
 - Use your own feelings to get info about the family (induction)
- Third, explain your approach: "I take an <u>authoritative</u> approach. I believe in rules with reasons, and I want to be loving, nurturing, fair, and positive but if the children don't follow my few important rules, then they will suffer consequences. Are you good with this?"



Family Dynamics

- · The family system influences discipline
- There must be a balance between "nurturing & discipline"
- Assess the "Goodness of fit" between family system and child's temperament
- What is the "conflict profile" of the family genogram?
 - How do the parents handle conflict?





Adam's Family: Mom's Parenting Style

- Adam's mom is more authoritarian
 Strict: 'Moralistic'
- She is demanding with high expectations
- She gets angry with him when he doesn't perform
- She was an athlete. Demands respect
- Needs to be more nurturing and less critical



Adam's Family: Dad's Parenting Style

- Dad works a lot and feels guilty
- Tends to give in and spoil Adam and his sister
- Permissive parent
- Parents disagree on parenting but mom dominat





Emotional "Buttons"

- Parents tend to make what's impersonal (the child's behavior), personal...
- They let their "buttons get pushed"
- Mom misinterprets Adam's upsets as "disobedient" and reacts with anger. She's a rule follower.
- Dad reacts with guilt (for being so busy), sadness for his child, and indulgent.
- These "buttons" <u>dis</u>allow accurate perception of Adam's feeling life
- How to discuss this with the parents?

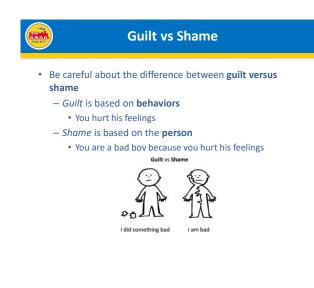


The Talk: How PARENTS Feel

- · How parents FEEL when they discipline is key!
- If you (the parent) are yelling, very angry etc. you are probably misinterpreting your child's behavior.
 - Mom: Not sure Adam is able to handle his impulses
 - Dad: You don't have to feel sorry for Adam
- When children successfully push your buttons, they figure out that this gets them attention
 Even if it's not need attention
 - Even if it's not good attention!
- Getting to NEUTRAL should be your goal so you can see the true intent and feeling of your child

Sharing Positive and Negative Feelings

- Closely related to the modeling of caring/empathy is for parents and professionals to sharing one's own feelings/emotions
 - Both negative and positive emotions are good
 - Your 'dark side' emotions are also legitimate
 - Anger, frustration, fed up with behavior, etc
- Let the children know how you feel in a way that does not create shame
 - Use 'l' statements. "I get very frustrated with you when you don't listen to me."





Message of Competence

 When you tell your child to do what you tell them to do without understanding the reasons you give your child a (subliminal —unintentional) message

> "You poor autistic child you are not competent to understand the reasons for rule and I have to do everything for you."









Mirroring Feelings

- Mirroring feelings is a form of complex labeling where the caregiver tells (not asks) the child how they are feeling
 - "You look so sad. Your sister took your stroller, and you want it back, now!!"
- This form of sympathetic listening is perhaps the most important form of parental empathic interaction especially when followed by caring interactions



Faber, Adele, et al. How to Talk so Kids Will Listen & Listen so Kids Will Talk, 2012



Mirroring Feelings

- Mirroring feelings introduces the child to a range of feelings by name
- The child will begin to recognize and label a range of basic emotions in themselves AND others
 - Mad, sad, happy, disappointed, frustrated, etc.
- This ability forms the substrate of empathy
 - "If I have feelings, others have feelings"

Faber, Adele, et al. How to Talk so Kids Will Listen & Listen so Kids Will Talk, 2012

Reasons, Self Awareness, and El

- · Reasoning about feelings is called 'emotional intelligence'
- Reasoning improves self awareness and empathy

 Aware of your feelings and others' feelings
- Reasoning makes sense of the world and, when internalized, leads to generalization and independence.
 - I know why I should follow rules
 - I understand the 'golden rule'
 - I understand why I should share
- Reasoning leads to a feeling of competence

The Impulse Sandwich

- The "Impulsive Brain"
- From the amygdala to the cingulate gyrus to the frontal lobe
- Gain control through awareness of feelings, reasoning about feelings and understanding the reasons for rules

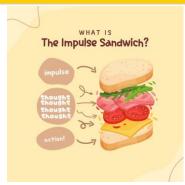


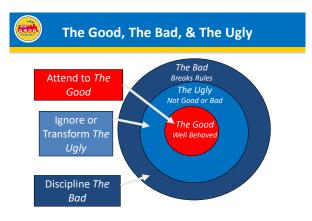
IMPULSE

 Instead of an Impulse Sandwich with nothing in it just impulse & impulsive action you get a sandwich...



The Impulse Sandwich





Label the Following Behaviors

- Whining
- Tantruming
- Hitting
- Helping
- Throwing things in anger
- Arguing logically
- Listening
- Ignoring parents
- Sharing

Rules, Reasons & Consequences Chart

Rules	Reasons	Consequences



Family Rules: The Top 3

Most families have about a dozen true rules

- Go to school on time Go to bed on time Eat dinner together Brush your teeth Put on your seat belt
- But the top 3 are. . .
- 1. No hitting, no aggression—it hurts people
- 2. No destroying things on purpose—it breaks things
- 3. We listen to each other. No ignoring—I listen to you; you should listen to me (Golden Rule)



Rules: Do's and Don'ts

- Nurture, nurture, nurture (well loved): Attention, Love & Fun
- The "mirror" technique:
 Feeling reflections
 Behavior reflections

- Language reflections

- Do <u>not</u> ask <u>questions</u>. *Make statements*: "You're mad because your brother took your toy!!!"
- The "never ever ever ever ever ever rule."
- Rule by the rules, not emotions (not because 'I said so')
- Toe over the line rule (Children like clarity)
- Message of competence
- GOYA

Message of Competence

- Discipline is about teaching through reasoning, not punishment.
 - We don't want to hurt the child's feelings
 (the unit want to be in a bild on a feeling)
 - (though very good parents hurt their children's feeling sometimes)
- "Iron fist in a velvet glove." approach
 - Gentle, fair, kind on the outside but tough if necessary
 - Pick your battles (ignore ugly behavior) and win all important battles.
- When you expect the child to do what he can & should = Message of Competence.
- The 'Philosophy of CAN' (see below)
- Goal: A mature impulse sandwich



Consequences: Following the Rules

- Makes life better for everyone
- Family gets along
- Resolve conflicts in a mature way
- Less chaos and conflict
- More good attention
- More fun and rewards
- Kindness, love, joy, fun
- Happier family



Consequences: Not Following Rules

- Message of Incompetence
- Warnings: Toe Over the Line
- Mini time out in a chair (Remember, it's not punishment)
- 5-minute time out in room or chair
- 10-minute time out if not cooperative in room (make room safe!)
- Holding ("I love you very much, but you may not hit or break."





Impulse Sandwich: Aggression

- *Impulse*: I hate when my sister takes my stuff and I'm going to yell, hit and do whatever it takes to get it back!!
- *Feeling1*: I had that stroller. It's mine. Alise took it when I left it for a minute and I'm going to get it back by force.
- Feeling 2: If I don't get what I want I'll yell, hit, scream, and attack her until I get it.
- Feeling 3: But when I hit, I never get (what I want). I go to time out.
- Feeling 4: If I make a better choice, "use my words" and call my mom or dad I will get what I want almost all the time.
- <u>Action</u>: "Mom, I'm mad. Alise took my stroller and won't give it back even after I asked nicely."



Sibling Rivalry





Sibling Rivalry

- Being born:
 - Jealousy and love.
 - The threat to order: Younger siblings who take your stuff
- Great Book: Siblings Without Rivalry
- Poor Boundaries: The main source of aggression
 between sibs
- The 6 Rules for Sharing





6 Rules for Sharing

- 1. You don't have to share
- If you have a special toy, and you don't want anyone to play with, put it away, otherwise...
- 3. Toys, games, etc. are 'first come, first serve'
- If I want the toy, game, etc., parents should invoke the 10minute rule:

i.e., you get to play with the toy/game in 10 minutes, or 'when your brother is done'

- 5. If both parties arrive at the toy/game at the same time, flip a coin
- It's nice to share. If you share with your brother, your brother is more likely to share with you and it will make your brother happy



Hold Court

- Get a towel as a cloak and hammer as a gavel.
- Sit the children down
- Listen to their complaints
- Reflect the feelings and summarize

• Take a long time.

Mediate.Assign consequences.



Conclusion

- · Welcome misbehaviors the immature expression of a valid feelings
- Use misbehavior to promote maturity by authoritative parenting

 Mirroring feelings, following rules for reasons, promoting impulse control (competence), improving family life
- They are *opportunities* to help the child with ASD improve functional development, imagination, and social skills.
- The ultimate goal: A mature emotional thinker!





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Autism & Transitions

- · Autistic children want to 'keep the world the same'
- · So, they predictably have problems with transitions.
- Adam throws fits when he has to stop what he's doing e.g. Won't stop watching TV to come to dinner
 - Trouble with morning transitions too
 - $-\,$ Trouble with getting him to bed
- Let's say that Adam is watching TV and doesn't want to transition to the kitchen to eat dinner.
- As part of the GBU approach we want to nurture, nurture, nurture and try some Transition Tricks (see free chapter)



Transition Tricks: Principles

- Most important! Reflect feelings: anxiety/anger/upset
- Motivate: Reasons for transition. Be positive
- Put things in **perspective**. Is this really something to get upset about
- Philosophy of "can": You <u>can</u> handle this. Give a message of competence.





Transition Tricks: Methods

- Create structure: Calendars, schedules, lists, and sequences.
 - Picture the sequence
 - Use a transitional object
 - Use sensory "blinders" (hat, headphones)
- Use social stories/fables/cartoons
- Desensitize by successive approximations & repeated exposures : time, countdown, practice.
 - Talk about transitions at the right time
 - Small steps/no sudden "No!"s

Transition Tricks: Techniques

- "Tussle"/argue/negotiate
- Preview/Review
- "Re-play" the scene using video modeling
- Competition with sibling.
- Offer reward/prizes (bribes!)
- Good, Bad, Ugly
- First ignore
- Then threaten
- Time out if appropriate
- After enough time just do it !!



The Consequences

- Well, then you will tell Adam the consequences:
 - "Adam, if you don't turn of TV and come to dinner, I will count to 3 and turn off TV. You will not get any more TV tonight and I will take you to your room until you are ready to sit at the table. I don't want to fight. Please sit at the table. We eat together as a family. That is our rule because it's important to be together as a family."
- If Adam <u>doesn't</u> cooperate then the parents can count to 3, turn off the TV, and ask Adam to sit at the table again.



The Consequences

- If he doesn't then the parents (without anger, guilt, or sadness!) will take him physically to her room by picking her up if necessary and carry him to his room
- If he changes his mind, he can sit at the table whenever he decides to
- Otherwise, he will miss dinner with everyone and not get TV at all for the evening
- If he comes out of his room a parent may have to stand by the door or go into the room with Adam (no talking to him!) and prevent him from leaving until everyone has eaten.
- The time of the time out will be once everyone has eaten.



Guess What

Soon he will be sitting at the table!

