Chapter 28

Verbal and Physical Redirection

Redirection is a parenting technique to help children learn appropriate behavior.

- Redirection is used by parents to:

- Prevent personal injury.

- Promote desirable behavior.

- Reducing punishing interactions.

- Promote learning and exploration.

Goal: ***To increase parents' use of verbal and physical redirection as a behavior management technique***

Verbal Redirection

Verbal redirection is a way of managing your child's behavior by verbally expressing a command or request. It is a way of redirecting the behavior of your child by talking to him. A parent tells a child that the behavior that is occurring, or is about to occur, is not acceptable. A statement telling the child what is acceptable follows.

Appropriate Examples:

- "Chairs are for sitting. No standing, please."

- "No standing in the tubby. Sit, please."

- "Oh what a nice toy. Put it back on the shelf, please."

Inappropriate Examples:

- "No standing on the chair. You'll fall and break your neck."

- "Quit standing in the tub. What do you want, an accident?"

- "Yes, I see your toy. Now just don't leave it on the floor."

From these examples, you can see that the appropriate use of verbal redirection helps the child know what the parent expects and doesn't expect. The inappropriate use of verbal redirection actually doesn't redirect a child's behavior at all. Threats, statements of doom, and telling a child what not to do are not the correct ways to use verbal redirection
Verbal redirection also includes directing the child's attention and behavior to other more appropriate activities and avoiding unnecessary confrontations.

Example: Adam is about to run out of the bedroom when mom is trying to finish dressing him. She calls out, "Adam, close the door for mom, please." Adam's attention is redirected from running away and he ends up complying and feeling like a helper.
This type of redirection works well with toddlers who haven't yet figured out that they are being redirected. It is not as effective after the age of three years.

Physical Redirection

Physical redirection is similar to verbal redirection with one added feature. As you are verbally redirecting a child, you are physically redirecting him as well. In the correct use of physical redirection, parents are using nurturing touch to redirect the child to perform more appropriate behavior. A hand gently placed on the child's back, or object taken from a child's grasp, or hand redirected from a dangerous object, are some ways parents use physical redirection.

Appropriate Examples:

- Physical redirecting a child away from an electric socket to a safe toy to play with.

- Escorting a child from the bathroom to the living room and engaging the child in play.

- Taking a dangerous object away from a child and substituting it with a safer one.

Inappropriate Examples:

- Physically jerking a child away from the electric socket.

- Spanking a child for entering the bathroom unassisted.

- Slapping a child's hand for touching a dangerous object.

In the appropriate use of physical redirection, a parent is using nurturing touch. In the inappropriate use of physical redirection, harsh and abusive touch is being used. The young preschool child is unable to make the connection between the harsh physical touch administered by the parent, and the danger to the object being touched. In the Nurturing Program, we believe the use of hitting, slapping, spanking, and other forms or harsh touch are abusive and have no positive value in helping a child learn appropriate behaviors.

Verbal and Physical Redirection Used Together

The ideal way to redirect a child's behavior is through the combined use of verbal and physical redirection. Used together, the child quickly learns that a particular behavior is unacceptable to his parents.

How to Use Verbal and Physical Redirection

1. In a firm voice, let the child know he is performing or about to perform an unacceptable behavior. The firm voice indicates this is not a game; the "No" indicates he is to stop the behavior immediately.

2. Approach the child, stoop down, make eye contact, and hold his hands.

3. Tell the child his behavior is unacceptable. Use words like, "icky," or "ouch," or "hot" if he is near something that could injure him like an electric socket, or hot oven. Use other words if the child has something in his hand, or is touching something you prefer him not touching. Words like, "No," or "This is Mommy's; not for Billy," or "Sorry, this is not for little boys," convey the message. Used consistently, a child will begin to associate these words with certain behaviors.

4. Attempt to let the child re-establish the original setting. That is, if he has taken something, physically and verbally redirect him to return the object to where it belongs. If he has turned on an appliance, have him turn the appliance off. In this instance, you are encouraging the child to perform behaviors that are pleasing to you. Children like to please their parents.

5. The next step is the use of physical and verbal redirection. The goal is not to inhibit a child's natural curiosity, but to foster it through more appropriate activity. Engage the child in play. Some things children like are:

   - Keys and locks

   - Putting anything smaller into something bigger

   - Puzzles

   - Coloring/scribbling on paper.

   Make the activity you want the child to engage in so exciting that the child can't help but join you.

6. Praise the child for cooperating. Tell him he is a good listener. Praise for doing will reinforce future encounters. After all, you want your child to listen and cooperate.

7. If the child chooses to perform the inappropriate behavior again, repeat steps 1 through 6. A child is likely to repeat the behavior for two reasons: young children are too young to remember what was bad or good; and, some preschool children are likely to test you and the rule for consistency.

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8. Physical redirection is usually necessary and is more effective with younger children when their language is not as well developed. Physical redirection should always be used with some form of verbal redirection. Also, physical redirection is used less as children get older, understand language better, and want to be independent.

Some added advice:

1. Never hit or spank a child as a means of physical redirection. Hitting is an abusive practice that sends a double message: "I'm concerned about your safety, but I hit you and cause you pain and fear."

2. We caution parents in the use of the word, "NO." Because toddlers like to explore, their whole world can become one big "No-No" if you let it. Save "No" for the big things. Also, when you use the word "No," show an expression of disapproval. Slowly turning the head from side to side (physical indicator of No) and a cold, non-smiling face tells the child you are displeased. After a while, just shaking your head "no" gets the message across.

3. Child proof your house. Get all the valued objects, CD players, statues, etc. above your child's grasp level. Life will be easier for you and your child.

4. If your child continues to want to perform the unacceptable behavior despite your efforts, it may be necessary to take the child to another room, or to spend more time with the child to "take his mind off whatever he wanted to touch."

5. Finally, be consistent. A "No" is a "No" every time the unacceptable behavior appears. If you're inconsistent in the application of your redirection, expect your child to be the same. Spend the time and energy now in being consistent. You and your child will find living together an enjoyable experience.

Family Home Practice Assignment

1. Practice using verbal and physical redirection during the week.

2. Describe a situation: _____

   _____

   _____

   _____

   _____

   _____

   _____

   _____

3. Have you completed the Home Safety Checklists?

4. Praise your child at least two times each day: once for Being and once for Doing.

5. Spend a minimum of 30-45 minutes each day playing, reading, and/or massaging your child(ren).

Notes and Comments: