

Parenting the Preschooler

Working for Wisconsin Families

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Catch Your Child Being Good

How would you feel if your boss constantly noticed all the bad things you did and never gave you credit for the good things you did? Children can have the same reaction.

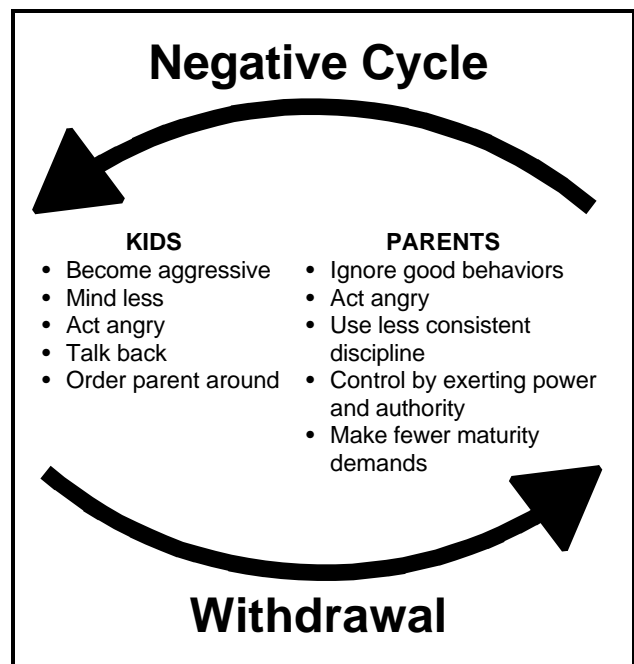
Many parents spend a good amount of time attending to their children when they're misbehaving. However, when they are behaving appropriately, parents often don't say or do anything. The attention parents give their children when they do misbehave is generally negative and may include criticism, complaints, threats and even hitting. This often leads to more inappropriate behavior by the child. A typical scene might be ... a parent may criticize the child; the child begins to argue; the parent gets angry. As a result, a negative cycle develops.

Catch 'Em Being Good

We tend to mind the "dirt" rather than the "diamonds." Give attention to good behavior. Use smiles, gestures, and verbal comments when you really like what your child is doing.

Tell them exactly what you liked. (Behaviors, ideas, or personal characteristics.)

Be Specific! Praise the **behavior, idea or characteristic** - not the child. EX: "I like how you picked up your room," rather than "Thanks for being so good."



Be Physical! Try using a hug, a smile or a touch on the shoulder.

Catch them in the Act - If You Can. The more immediate your recognition is, the more likely your child will associate the good feelings she has with the behavior she did.

Avoid Backhanded Compliments

Be Careful! No back handed compliments such as "It's about time you did such a nice job of cleaning your room" or "This is nice, BUT... This is giving a compliment and then taking it away."

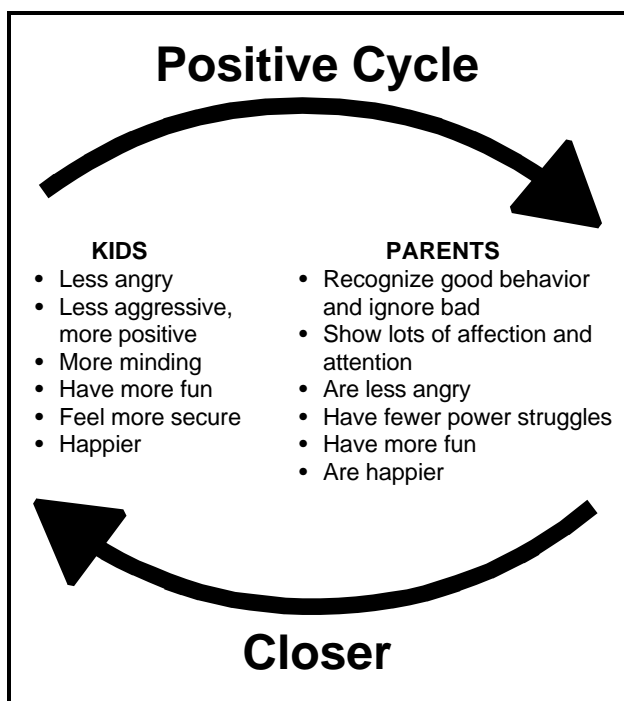
Give Attention for Good Behavior

A major principle of positive discipline is giving more attention to that which pleases and less attention to that which does not. Children crave attention and parental approval is a powerful force. Being noticed is rewarding. Some children are only noticed when they are causing problems. These children need to be “caught being good.”

That’s not easy when their undesirable behavior is very noticeable and their desirable behavior is not as obvious. It’s not easy when you are used to more criticism than praise yourself. It’s not easy, but it’s worth the effort.

Example

A father, dining at a public restaurant with his family, notices his daughter’s elbows prominently positioned on the table. His natural reaction was to say, “How many times do I have to tell you to take your elbows off the table?”



Then he thought of praise and bided his time. The opportunity came. “Cindy, you’re really learning how to eat like a young lady. You’re sitting quietly in your chair and chewing with your mouth closed. It’s fun to eat with you.” Cindy looked pleased and the rest of the family was impressed. Shortly the elbows disappeared from the table and did not reappear for the rest of the meal.

Remember that children will settle for negative attention if that’s all they get.

If kids don’t get a kiss,
they’ll settle for a kick.

So make sure they get plenty of attention when they’re doing what you want. At the end of each day, think about how often you caught your child being good.

Sources:

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