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OPTIONS FOR HELPING A YOUNG CHILD FOLLOW DIRECTIONS

1) PRAISE

- Use praise liberally for appropriate behavior.
- When a child is not following the rules, praise another child who is. The misbehaving child may straighten up in order to be praised, too.
- When a child is involved in mild misbehavior, do not say anything about the misbehavior. But then praise him for good behavior as soon as you can.

2) REWARDS – Offer rewards for good behavior. (See article entitled, “Behavior Modification: Rewarding Young children For Good Behavior.”)

3) DISTRACTION – Focus on some other positive activity that will catch the child’s attention. This will distract him from however he was misbehaving. Be sure to be enthusiastic about the new activity. You may have to make several attempts before you successfully distract him.

4) OFFER ALTERNATIVES - When you must say “no,” give an enthusiastic suggestion of what other appealing activity the child could do.

5) “WHEN-THEN” or “FIRST-THEN”

- “When you put on your shoes, then you can go outside.”
- “First you put away your toys, and then we can read a story.”

6) PUT A TOY ON TIME-OUT – When children are fighting over a toy or are using a toy inappropriately, put the toy on “time-out.” If possible, in a short time, bring the toy out of time-out. This allows the children a chance to play with it appropriately. If they resume fighting over it, return the toy to time-out. When you keep a toy on time-out too long, children lose interest in it and no longer have the motivation to be good in order to be able to play with the toy.

7) GIVE COMMANDS RATHER THAN ASKING A QUESTION

- “Time to put on your shoes,” rather than “Do you want to put on your shoes?”

- “Time for your bath,” rather than “Do you want to take a bath?”

8) GIVE REMINDERS OF TRANSITIONS

- “You can swing a little longer, and then it will be time to go inside and have a snack.”
- “After this story, it will be time to turn out the lights.”

9) GIVE CHOICES IN ORDER TO INVOLVE A CHILD IN AN ACTIVITY YOU THINK HE MAY RESIST

- “Do you want to put away your books first or your dolls?”
- “Do you want to put on your socks first or your shirt?”
- “Do you want to sing Old McDonald or Itsy Bitsy Spider while I change your diaper?”

10) IGNORE TANTRUMS

- Stay close by but do not hover. Busy yourself with something so that you are not staring at him.
- Do not talk to him during the tantrum other than once or twice to give some brief encouragement such as, “When you are quiet I’ll show you something else you can play with.” But you know your own child. If saying anything to him would intensify his anger, keep silent throughout the tantrum.
- If he is banging his head on a hard surface or doing something else that could cause injury, gently slide a towel under his head or move him to a safer area.
- Immediately give attention to your child as soon as he is calm. Be kind and loving at this point. If you are angry with him, you may re-ignite the tantrum.

11) IGNORING – Ignore annoying behavior. Never ignore aggressive or violent behavior.

12) REDUCE GROUP SIZE – When possible, a smaller number of children can help a child be more cooperative.

Margaret W. Neal, LCSW, is a Licensed Clinical Social Worker in private practice in Riverside, CA. Her work focuses on “helping young children and their parents.” For more information, visit Margaret’s website at www.margaretwneal.com.