

Parent helpsheet 1

Attending to your child

Judy Hutchings, 2002

I would like to acknowledge the contribution of Mary Last to the first version of these help sheets in 1996**

Twenty-five years ago advice to parents about how to encourage their children's good behaviour concentrated on two things. Firstly, they were advised to look at any good behaviour that the child showed and to notice and praise it and, by doing so, to make it more likely to happen again. Then they were told to look at the "bad" behaviour of which they complained and work out ways to make it less likely to happen again. (You can learn more about how to get better at doing both of these things by reading the helpsheets on rewarding good behaviour and on managing difficult behaviour).

Over the years we have recognised that the things that children do that parents think of as "good" or "bad" only account for a small amount of their time, in fact less than one quarter of it. What children do the rest of the time is seen by parents as "doing their own thing" or playing, the sort of thing that parents might think of as childish and in which they often take very little interest. After all it provides a welcome opportunity for a busy parent to get on with the daily chores. For a parent who has a difficult or demanding child the tendency to let the child get on with it when they are occupied may be even stronger.

Play, however, is very important to children. By showing interest in their play parents of difficult children can improve their relationship with their children much more quickly and effectively. By play can be playing with toys, acting and most other things that children do without instructions from adults or things that we might like them to do on their own. If a parent shows that what their child is doing is important to them too, it improves their relationship with their child and increases the likelihood that it will happen again. We call this taking notice of your child "attending".

Attending lets children know that we are watching them and interested in what they are doing when they are doing something which they have chosen to do. It is not about keeping track of the child's behaviour, to make sure that they are behaving

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properly, which is another important skill that parents need. It is about showing your interest in a child for its own sake.

Many parents with children with difficult behaviour do not get much pleasure from their relationships with their children. Parents of disruptive or difficult children spend a lot of time trying to stop them from being naughty. When children are playing or occupying themselves quietly parents heave a sigh of relief and leave them to their own devices. But this is just when it helps to “attend” to your child and to what they are doing.

Attending helps children to feel that their parents value them as individuals, appreciate the things that they do and are not **only** concerned with getting them to do as they are told. Difficult children often do not feel valued or appreciated because for much of their time they are locked in battle with their parents.

Attending is a way that parents can "tune in" to the things that children are doing and notice and respond to the things that they are saying and doing to communicate with their parents. When someone really listens to you and notices what you are doing it makes you feel good because you feel valued. Think of the people who seem to care about you. You know it because they show an interest in you and let you know that your views matter to them. When a relationship between a parent and child is going well, this happens naturally. Children notice their parents' attention and, in return, respond more positively to it.

There is a lot that parents can do to get better at 'attending'. Often parents were good at attending with babies before they could talk but forgot to do it when children got older, more mobile and more challenging.

Look at this example of a mother with her six month old child who is sitting in a high chair banging a wooden spoon on a pan lid whilst she is getting the dinner.

(Baby bangs)

Mother "Ooh, that's a lovely noise"

(Baby looks up at mother and bangs again with a smile)

Mother "Bang, bang, what a noise"

(Baby bangs again knocking the pan lid down)

Mother "Oh-oh, Now you've knocked it down"

(Baby looks at her)

Mother "Mummy get it for you, here you are"

This mother is telling her baby what she is seeing and she describes it positively "that's a lovely noise". She picks up her baby's attempt to communicate with her by looking at her and she responds by doing what she thinks she wants her to do. She does not ask questions or tell her baby what to do or how to bang.

Unfortunately, this pattern of attending often changes once the child starts to talk and parents can turn into teachers or instructors. Parents are the most important teachers that children have. But as well as being teachers there are times, like when children are playing, when the job of parents is to let them know that you are watching and interested in what they are doing for its own sake. At these times you are not there as

a teacher or instructor you are there to attend, support and encourage your child in their chosen activity. We have found twenty useful rules to help parents get better at attending.

1. When attending to your child you must give **no instructions** or directions. Of course you have to take action if your child does something that he is not allowed to do, such as ignoring an agreed house rule (see help sheet on "how to get better at giving instructions") but generally when you are attending your child is the boss.

2. **Try not to ask questions** unless they clearly leave the child in charge. Do not say "why don't you make a car?" or "What is that supposed to be?" Questions like this can distract a child and take their concentration away from the task. Poor concentration is often a problem for disruptive children. An occasional question can be asked such as "Is that going to be a shed for the horses?" but it is much better to make a comment like "I wonder if that shed is for the horse." This leaves the child free to answer or not and they know that you are watching them closely.

3. **Be a reporter** and describe what is happening. Parents often do not know what to say when attending and the best advice is to be like the TV commentator and just describe what you see.
"Now you are making a tower with the yellow bricks, and now there is a red one you are putting on top."
"Now you are putting the animals into the truck and they are going on a journey."

4. **Name your child** when you say something to him or her. Say things like "You are putting the red block on the blue block, Peter." This of course is also important when you are giving instructions, but when giving instructions it is best to name the child first so that you get their attention before giving the instruction.

5. Make only **positive comments** and avoid critical comments. Remember this is the child's game. Can you think how you have felt recently when someone has been critical of you? There is no right and wrong in play and, within reason, what your child chooses to play is right for them. Your job is to find something about which you can show an interest and say something nice.

6. Show your child that what they are doing is valuable by **copying them**. If they are playing with play dough and making a person you can do the same but remember not to try to outshine them or to change the direction of the game. (Play dough is useful for encouraging children over a surprisingly wide age range to play creatively and for quite a long time and it can be made very cheaply).

7. Set aside a **special time** to attend to your child each day. If you are having difficulties with your child it is likely that you are not attending often enough or you do not do it regularly. Whilst you are trying to help your child to improve their behaviour you should set aside a special time when you practice attending with your child. This is the most difficult thing to do in a busy family but some parents find time for each child just before they go to bed. Choose a time when you are not likely to be interrupted and when your child does not have something else

that they want to do like watch their favourite TV cartoon. Switch off the television. Tell your child that you would like to watch them play and that they can choose what to do. The best things are those that involve some imagination or creativity; building, modelling, drawing, pretend play with little people, animals, cars or dressing up.

8. **Listen** to what your child is saying and **watch** them.

Listening to your child is more important than talking to them at this time. If you do talk you should describe what your child is doing. If your child asks a question you should answer but do not let them put you in a position of telling them what to do. Put the choice back to the child, "I wonder what you will decide to do?"

9. Get your **partner or a friend to watch you** attending.

Parents of difficult children often find attending hard - they are so used to trying to get their child to do as he is told or to stop him from doing something that is a problem. If there are two of you, you can watch each other and tell each other when they follow the attending rules. Or you could get a friend to sit in with you. Take turns and help each other to improve.

10. **Show your child's achievements to others.**

Try to keep the "lego castle" until someone calls to whom it can be shown or put the painting up on the wall, mention it on the phone to Granny and so on.

11. When you get good at attending in your special sessions start to **do it at other times.**

When you feel confident that you are getting it right you can attend at other times including when you are busy at some other task. You can attend to your child's drawing when you are peeling potatoes or to the building on the kitchen floor whilst you are loading the washing machine. This is a lot more useful and enjoyable for your child than sitting passively in front of the television. Your child also has to learn that you cannot attend whilst you are watching your favourite TV programme or talking to a friend on the phone because attending means concentrating on your child.

12. **Make sure that your child knows** that you are attending.

You need to sit close to your child and give them your full attention. Turn your body towards them or sit beside them.

13. Speak with **enthusiasm** when describing what your child is doing.

Although parents often say that attending makes them feel awkward, much to their surprise, their children do not usually notice this and respond very positively to this attention. An unenthusiastic reporter would not keep their job for long.

14. **Hand your child materials** while they are playing.

You can support your child without directing their play by a statement like "let me know if I can get something for you or if you need anything" which does not need a reply.

15. You can **say no to certain games** when you are attending.

Some games may not encourage creativity and, although you may not want to stop your child from playing them at other times, you may decide that there is some play to which you do not wish to attend. An example may be copying violent characters on

the TV. If you let your child play games that you are not comfortable with they will sense this and if your relationship with them is not good they may pick on that sort of game every time. Wrestling or rough physical play is not suitable for attending and needs to be treated with caution. For children with behaviour problems it can wind them up and make them harder to control. For some of these children this is the only sort of physical contact that they get but as they get other attention their need for this kind of contact reduces.

16 Avoid activities that cannot be done by the child on their own.

Some activities are less well suited to attending, do not let your child choose activities like board games or reading for this special time. Board games can result in a lot of problem behaviour. Children need to learn how to win and lose but this is not the aim when you are attending. Helping children to read is also important but it can easily turn the parent into a teacher rather than a supporter. Colouring books, although developing co-ordination skills, are also not ideal for attending and they do not encourage creativity and children can easily feel that they have made a mistake e.g. by going over a line and/or parents feel an urge to point out how to do it better.

17. During the attending session try to **ignore** the things that you do not like your child to do.

Even if you help your child to choose a creative activity like play dough he may still do some things that you do not like, for example aggressive acts. This is best dealt with by ignoring (see also help sheet four on ignoring). Pick up the paper or a magazine for a moment or two until the play returns to something that you like.

18. **You are in charge** of how long the session lasts.

You must decide when the session finishes, don't get trapped for longer than you want or it will put you off finding time tomorrow for an attending session.

19. Let things go at your **child's pace**.

Children need to do things in their own time, try to give them that time, do not try to hurry them on.

20. Try to **avoid helping** your child too much.

It is important that children have pleasure in their own efforts or achievements. Play alongside and copy what they are doing but try to let them keep the initiative. If they ask what to do turn the question back by asking what they could do or think that they might do next. For children who do not have self-confidence it is particularly important that they do not get directions from adults all the time.

Conclusion.

The benefits of attending are enormous. Attending makes children feel that they are valuable in their own right. The feelings that we have about ourselves are a reflection of the views that we have learned from other people about our worth. When you attend to your child he or she will respond to this and the fear that some parents have that their child will become disruptive if allowed to have control of the play session is usually not well founded. You can withdraw your attention from play that you do not want to encourage (see helpsheet 4 – ignoring). Attending also helps children to develop language and communication skills and teaches them how to show an interest in others.

By encouraging children to play we help to develop their creativity and their understanding of the world. Many children spend too much of their time in passive activities, such as watching TV, and do not learn to feel confident in their skills or pride in their own achievements. Some parents feel that attending is a waste of time and boring and what they want is for their children to learn to do as they are told. But all the evidence says that building a relationship with your child through attending is an essential step in teaching your child **to want to do** what you ask.

Attending gives you a chance to learn a lot about your child's interests and abilities. In one of our parent support groups the mother of a pair of "identical" twins only learned through attending that they were different and each had some different interests and abilities from the other.

Finally many parents have not got much money and worry about not being able to give their children all the "things" that other children seem to have. By practicing attending many parents have found that their time is worth a million dollars to their children.

Parent helpsheet no. 2

Rewarding your child's behaviour

Judy Hutchings, 2002

I would like to acknowledge the contribution of Mary Last to the first version of these help sheets in 1996**

Everything we do is more likely to happen again if it is rewarded in some way. Behaviour that is ignored, or not rewarded, is less likely to happen again. So, it is important to reward children when they behave in a way that we would like to see them repeat.

Imagine new neighbours have moved into your street. The first time you see them in the street you smile at them and say "Hello!". They take no notice of you whatsoever and walk on by. The second time you see them in the street the same thing happens. The chances are that the next time you see your new neighbours you will not bother to greet them.

But, imagine if things had been different. What if the first time you saw your new neighbours in the street, and smiled and said "Hello" to them, they smiled back and greeted you, and maybe stopped to chat with you. The second time you saw them you would smile and say "hello" and as they returned the greeting you would have been rewarded for being pleasant and you would be encouraged to do this next time you saw them.

When a person returns your greeting it is a small but important reward to you for your greeting. It lets you know that the other person is pleased that you have shown interest in them. Rewarding children for behaving in a way that you approve of will encourage them to behave in that way again in the future, and we need to do this no matter how small that behaviour that we want to encourage might seem! We can use our knowledge of the effect of rewarding to create a system: when children behave in a way that we like - we reward - they will behave again in that way in the future.

Andy's mother, Kate, did not notice when he was being helpful by passing toys to his baby brother. She made no comment on his helpful behaviour. When Andy was

* Mary Last was head of the Child Clinical Psychology Service in North West Wales for many years and helped with the development of the parenting programme at the Child and Family Research Centre. She died in 1998.

rough with him this annoyed his mother and she reacted by scolding Andy. We asked Kate to make a special effort to notice the times when Andy was being helpful. So, the next time Andy was chatting in a friendly way with his brother Kate rewarded him by smiling at him and saying "I'm glad that you are being friendly with your brother." Andy looked pleased, and continued to chat nicely for a further five minutes.

With some children, especially children who have behaviour problems, it can be difficult to notice **any** behaviour of which we want to see more. We have to keep a close eye on these children and 'catch' them doing the things we like to see them doing. To begin with we might have to reward them for the smallest things, such as putting their coat on, or sitting quietly watching the TV for two minutes. Our patience will soon be rewarded as our child starts to show more of the behaviours we have rewarded. To begin with we will be rewarding all of the desired behaviours in our child. However, after a week or so we will not have to 'catch' them every time, only often enough that they realise that we are noticing the behaviours. With time our child will want to behave in those ways without our rewards, as they will have taken our values on board, and will become less dependent on our rewards.

Types of rewards

We often think of a reward as a big prize given for some important action, such as passing an exam. Although we might not realise it we, actually reward ourselves, and others, many times a day for simple actions and behaviours. We even reward some unwanted behaviours by paying attention to them. (For more information about this see helpsheet four on ignoring). As adults we are rewarded at work through promotion, status and wage increases and by friends through pleasant social interaction and demonstrations of friendship, care and trust.

There are two main types of rewards, *social rewards* and *tangible rewards (or things such as prizes or activities)*. Social rewards include praise, attention, smiles and touch. These rewards are most effective, especially with young children, particularly if we have also been attending to, or valuing the child. Older children like to have objects such as stickers and toys, and enjoy taking part in activities outside the home, so they are also encouraged by tangible rewards. However, it is important to remember to always praise your child when giving a tangible reward, and to be clear about what they have done to gain the reward.

Social Rewards

Social rewards are the most effective and important rewards we can give to children (and adults too). Not only do they make the behaviours, which we want to see, happen more often, they also give children high self-esteem and promote their social skills through modelling these friendly behaviours for them. Social rewards are the positive attention we give children when they have behaved in a way we like. Positive attention includes praise, smiles, hugs and nice comments about the child's behaviour. The way in which we give praise is also important. We must be warm and friendly with our children and tell them what exactly they have done that has pleased us.

How to praise your child effectively:

1. When your child behaves in a way that you like, or has done something which you want them to do, **give praise straight away**. Do not wait until later on to praise them.
2. Give praise for a **specific** thing that your child has done, or for a specific way your child has behaved. Tell them what it was.
3. Give your child your **undivided attention** when you are praising them.
4. **Move close** to your child. **Touch** your child whilst you are praising them.
5. **Name your child** when you speak to them. Look them in the eye. This way your child will know that you are talking to them and giving them the praise.
6. **Smile** at your child so that they know that they are pleasing you.
7. Give your child a **hug**. It will make them feel good about themselves.
8. Praise your child **in front of other adults**. They will know that you are proud of them and not ashamed to tell the world.
9. **Never praise and then criticise** in the same breath. Praise should be nothing but good.

To help you get started, here is a list of things you can say to reward your child:

- "Thank you for....." (putting the toys away, not interrupting when I was talking, laying the table, etc.)
- "I like it when you...." (tidy up when I ask you to, eat tidily, etc.)
- " You've done a good job of....." (putting you're socks on, building the bricks, etc.)
- "Good boy for....." (sitting down when I asked you to, fetching the baby wipes, etc.)
- "Well done!"
- " I'm very happy that you....." (had fun doing that jigsaw, did as I asked you, etc.)
- " Great! Wonderful! Brilliant! Perfect!"
- " Look how well you...."
- " I am really proud of you for....."
- " I'm really pleased that you....."
- " I like playing with you."
- "That was a very friendly thing to do"
- "That was difficult and you were so patient"

Here are some ways of touching your child to reward them:

- A pat on the shoulder
- A squeeze of the arm or waist

- A rub of the head
- A hug
- A kiss

Tangible rewards

Tangible rewards are things that can also be given to encourage children to behave in the way that we want them to. These are things which your child might like to have or special treats, such as being allowed to do something special at home or choosing to do an activity outside your home. They should not be expensive and many can be free like going to the park to play.

Examples of Tangible Rewards:

- sticking a star on a star chart
- crayons, stickers, etc.
- small sums of money, for example twenty pence
- choosing a favourite cereal when shopping or a pudding for dinner
- a special snack after school
- having a friend over to play or for a sleep over
- choosing what to have for tea
- going to the park/ going on a picnic
- going swimming/horse riding
- an extra bedtime story
- doing a jigsaw with you
- having an extra five minutes playtime
- helping a parent with a special task
- listening to a favourite tape

You might decide to give your child a special reward after filling a star chart with stars. Remember to praise your child when they gain a star and remind them of what they did to be rewarded with a star.

Reward your child with the things they like. It is a good idea to make a list of some of the things that your child likes, for example food, activities and toys. You can then use the list to remind you of things you can use to reward him/her.

Do not think that your child needs expensive rewards. Sometimes you can turn things your child already has into rewards. It is not the material value of the reward that is important, but rather its rewarding value. If you give small rewards from the start, and make your child feel pleased about gaining them by giving social rewards as well, they will not expect expensive rewards. We all like to own material possessions, and money can certainly make life easier but social rewards are still the most effective at encouraging behaviour.

Some things to think about when using rewards

- Praising can be hard if you have not received much yourself
- Many parents feel embarrassed about praising and rewarding children, and in our adult lives we may have few experiences of praise or positive attention ourselves. We also may have had little praise as children so we are lacking positive role models.

Praising however becomes easier each time that we do it and it is also rewarded by the responses that it gets for us.

- Rewards must follow desired behaviour

Once you get used to rewarding you will find that it becomes an easy and natural way of telling your child that you approve of their behaviour. Rewarding can be a very effective way of increasing that behaviour. However, it is important to remember that you must always reward after the behaviour you want has occurred. You must never reward your child before they have behaved in a way you like, even if you think that there is a very good chance that your child is going to behave in that way. Say that you have asked your child to put the toys away and you've agreed that they will have a biscuit when the job is done. You must give your child the biscuit only when all the toys have been put away and not before (remembering to give praise as well, of course!). If your child says "If you let me watch this programme now I will do my homework afterwards" you may well have trouble getting them to do it. It is far more effective to record the programme for them to watch later when the homework is done and you will not have to nag them later to do it.

- Rewarding makes children more independent

Some parents feel uneasy about using rewarding to change their child's behaviour. They feel that the child should be motivated to do things without having to be rewarded for them. Some parents feel that their child might become dependent on rewards, and will not behave in the way they want them to unless they are given a reward. In fact, we have seen the opposite of this to be true. Children who are rewarded for their behaviour become less dependent on their parents' praises and rewards as they grow older and they become more independent.

- Rewarding is not bribing

Another concern that some parents might have is that they feel that they are bribing their child to behave appropriately. There is a difference between bribing and rewarding. Bribes are given or offered when one person is trying to make another person behave in an illegal or unethical way and are often given before the required behaviour. Rewarding a child for appropriate behaviour is showing that you approve of that behaviour. Even though we are not always aware of rewarding behaviour, it is something we have all learned to do, and do at times, but maybe not routinely. By **planning** to reward and using rewarding **systematically** we are consciously using a natural response to encourage appropriate behaviour. We are in control of the learning situation in a way that is beneficial to both us and to our children.

- You will soon get the benefit of the rewarding that you do

When a parent rewards a child for good behaviour, that parent is also rewarded by the child. If your child is misbehaving, you might feel tense, annoyed or cross. But, when your child is behaving in a manner of which you approve, you feel much more relaxed, friendly and calm. It can be embarrassing when your child is behaving inappropriately in front of your friends or family, so if you have a strategy to encourage good behaviour, visiting friends can be a more pleasant experience for you.

- We are models for our children

Whether they are aware of it or not, children imitate adults - and adults imitate adults, especially when they can see by example the benefits of reacting in a certain way.

When we reward children the chances are that they will also start rewarding their friends and brothers and sisters. Giving positive attention to their peers will make our child fun to be with and popular. You might even notice that your partner, family and friends start to give praise and positive attention for behaviour which might have gone unnoticed in the past if they see you praising.

Conclusion

By receiving social rewards regularly and systematically our children's self-esteem will increase. Children who have high self-esteem will be less dependent on their parents and will grow up with feelings of satisfaction and confidence. This is what all parents want for their children but it only happens with planning and practice by parents.

Parent helpsheet 3

How to get better at giving instructions

Judy Hutchings, 2002

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Many parents have problems getting children to follow instructions. In fact children who do not have problems only follow about 75% of the instructions that they are given by their parents. Children who have difficulty in following instructions generally follow more instructions than we realise. Unfortunately if we know that a child has challenging behaviour we look for, and notice, the problems and may miss the times when they do as they are told.

We have found that there are a number of common mistakes often made by parents of these children when giving instructions and that it is possible to make it more likely that a child will follow instructions by sticking to the rules described in this Help Sheet.

This help sheet is divided into two parts. The first part describes common problems and difficulties. The second gives a set of rules that you can use to remind yourself about how you can improve the way that you give instructions.

Typical Problems

- Too many instructions

The thing that we notice most about parents of children with disruptive behaviour is that these parents usually give large numbers of instructions. This can be many hundreds of instructions in an hour. However the number of instructions that are actually followed by the child can be very few indeed. On one occasion I observed a mother give 67 instructions in a short space of time, none of which were followed by the child.

- Instructions are too general

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Instructions are often much too general such as "Be good" or "Tidy your room". For an obedient child these may be quite acceptable instructions but for a child who has difficulty following instructions they are far too vague.

- Negative instructions

Another problem is instructions that are phrased negatively. The parent says "Stop doing that" or "Don't do that" rather than directing them to do something else. It is better to give a specific instruction that will interfere with what a child is doing. So instead of saying "Stop climbing on the settee" you could say "Get off the settee and come over here".

- A string of instructions

Parents often repeat instructions many times and give a string of instructions. For example "Get yourself up, washed and dressed. Put a clean vest on and don't forget to clean your teeth".

- Failure to follow through with instructions by parents

A typical problem with the children that we see is that parents give an instruction but then become distracted from following it through. This can be for several reasons. The simplest reason may be that the phone rings the baby cries and the instruction is forgotten. The children that we see frequently distract their parents by challenging the instruction and setting up a debate "Why should I?", "You didn't make my brother do that", "My friend doesn't have to go to bed at 8 o'clock" etc.. Some parents have learned to expect such challenges and then start to justify why the instruction should be followed. This often leads to long discussion and negotiation, which is unhelpful and unnecessary. Children need lots of explanations and chances to discuss things but not when given a specific instruction.

- Parental body language and non-verbal messages says "I do not think that you will do this"

Probably as a result of all the difficulties they have had in getting their child to follow instructions, we often find that the parent's tone of voice and body language as they give the child the instruction tells the child that the parent does not expect them to comply. It is not uncommon for parents initially to give an instruction in a half-hearted way, hardly expecting the child to do as they are told. When as expected the child does not obey the parent explodes and become very angry with the child in an attempt to get them to follow the instruction.

- Failure to get the child's attention

Some parents give instructions without first getting the child's attention. The child may be busy doing something, such as watching the television and the parent may fail to get the child to acknowledge, by looking or answering that they are listening to the instruction.

- Instructions may sound like a choice

Many parents fail to recognise that there are only two options, either you tell a child to do something or you give the child a choice. It can be very confusing to a child when instructions are given in a way that implies that they have a choice when this is not the parent's intention. For example, if the toys must be put away it is not helpful to say "Are you going to put your toys away?" "Would you like to put your toys

away?" or "Shall we put the toys away?" The child can answer "No" to all of these questions and that then makes it hard for you to insist on the job being done.

- Rules are applied inconsistently

In relation to family rules, we find that parents are often inconsistent. They allow their children to climb on the settee for quite a long time, then suddenly decide this is not acceptable and shout at the child saying something like "How many times have I told you not to climb on the settee?" It is important for the child to know what rules there are and that they apply all of the time.

- Threats are made but not carried out

Another problem, which we often see, is the use of threats which the parent makes in an attempt to get the child to follow instructions but they either cannot or do not carry them out. From November onwards we hear "If you don't do as you are told then Father Christmas won't come". Children rapidly learn that such threats are meaningless and, in any case, only immediate consequences are likely to affect the child's behaviour.

Rules to increase instruction following:

The following set of rules for instruction giving will be useful guidelines to help you avoid some of the common pitfalls described above and to increase your child's compliance with instructions.

- 1 Decide first "Do I have to give this instruction?" If it does not really matter do not give the instruction.
- 2 Once you give an instruction you **must** follow it through, do not give up or be distracted.
- 3 Decide on the rules and agree them with your partner, then stick to them. If the rule is "Drinks only at the table" this must always be the rule, and for all the children, or not at all.
- 4 Have few but clear rules.
- 5 Do not raise your voice. Because you know that you are going to follow it through, you know that you are in control and can remain calm when giving an instruction. Behave all the time as if you expect the child to do what you ask. The instruction should be given in a firm voice that suggests to the child that you expect them to comply.
- 6 Once the child has done what you ask, praise them even if they have behaved badly whilst doing it, perhaps swearing or shouting at you for example. Do not mention the bad behaviour, only the fact that the child did what they were told.
- 7 Have action replays of good behaviour - remind the child of good things that they have done and tell other people when the child is there. **Never** remind the child of their bad behaviour.

8 Give lots of instructions that you know the child will want to follow. For example "Come here and get this ice-cream" or "Put your coat on to go to the park" or "Put your toys away so that we can go for a pizza" or "OK, when you have got your pyjamas on, you can bring the story book for me to read"

9 Give the child instructions to do things that they are just about to do so that they are following instructions without realising it. For example "That's right put the bubble bath into the water" or "Yes open the gate for Granny to come in".

10 If a child is unlikely to follow an instruction, e.g. to stop running away, it is better not to give the instruction. Get over to the child and physically make sure, if at all possible, that they follow the instruction. Do not give an instruction that you know that a child will disobey. There is no point in giving them practice in defying you.

11 Whilst you are helping your child to learn to obey, avoid situations that are difficult to control, like supermarket shopping trips. Get control of your child's behaviour at home first.

12 All consequences for non-compliance must be immediate. Do not make threats that you cannot carry out.

13 Make sure that your instruction is specific and to do only one thing.

14 Instructions should be given to do something not to stop doing something, quiet walking feet for indoors, an indoor voice. These instructions give messages that running and shouting are not wrong but must not happen in certain places.

15 An instruction should be given only twice before you take action in whatever way you have previously decided on for dealing with non-compliance (see helpsheet five).

16 Follow through your instructions with a gesture, posture or a physical prompt that says that you mean it.

17 Get the child's attention before giving an instruction. This often involves moving close to them, saying their name and getting them to look at you before giving the instruction.

18 If an explanation is necessary, give it before the instruction so that the instruction is the last thing that the child hears. For example, "We are going to visit Granny shortly so I would now like you to put away the Lego."

19. Whenever possible, if your child is playing or watching TV give a five minute warning. "In five minutes time it will be time to pack up the toys and get ready for bed."

20. Remember children will only want to follow instructions if we have a good relationship with them at other times. Remember the importance of "attending" at other times when you are not giving instructions.

Parent helpsheet 4

Ignoring problem behaviour

Judy Hutchings, 2002

I would like to acknowledge the contribution of Mary Last to the first version of these help sheets in 1996**

Children's need for attention is established very early in their life. If it isn't given freely they work hard to get it. This is true for most of us, there is nothing worse than not being noticed or being deliberately "sent to Coventry". Attention is a powerful reward particularly when children are young. So by paying attention to problem behaviours, we teach our children to do more and more of the very things we do not want them to do.

If children get plenty of attention for just being themselves, as well as for the "good" things they do, it helps them to feel good about themselves and generally they also do what they are asked. If children do not get enough attention for positive behaviour, from the people who matter to them, they soon discover other ways to get them the attention they need. These problem behaviours can take the form of whining, demanding, showing off and lots of other undesirable behaviours that lead us to think of the child as problematic.

Ian was a disobedient and disruptive child, who came to see me with his mother, for help in managing his many problem behaviours. He also had a habit of sniffing, and this irritated his mother. When we met them we noticed that every few minutes, sometimes several times in one minute, Ian's mother interrupted her conversation to say: "Stop sniffing, Ian!" or "Don't sniff!" Ian didn't have a cold, and we suspected that he had learned to sniff because it got his mother's attention. Because his behaviour was unpleasant for much of the time, his mother did not find him much fun to be with and so gave him little attention for just being himself. His mother worked to change that and by "attending" to Ian and reward his good behaviour, but she was surprised when, at the same time, we asked her to start ignoring Ian's sniffing.

What do we mean by ignore? We mean not speaking about the behaviour, not appearing to hear or see it, acting as if it hasn't happened. Sometimes it means

* Mary Last was head of the Child Clinical Psychology Service in North West Wales for many years and helped with the development of the parenting programme at the Child and Family Research Centre. She died in 1998.

walking out of the room. This is very difficult for us to do, we seem to be “programmed” to notice and intervene when problems occur. We do this to try to help children to learn, but sometimes children are learning the wrong lesson from our attention.

When his mother started to ignore Ian’s sniffing it seemed to get worse for the first few hours, but when he and his mother returned for their next visit a week later, it had become so rare that we heard it only a couple of times in the whole day. Ian’s mother had found it very difficult to ignore. She found herself becoming tense, and being tempted to shout about it at times, but she persevered and was delighted that it was working. This confirmed our view that Ian’s sniffing was probably being reinforced by his mother’s attention. Because she was now noticing and rewarding his good behaviour and ignoring the sniffing, her strategy paid off. Ignoring only works if we give the child a more acceptable way to gain attention, otherwise we may get an even more troublesome behaviour that we cannot ignore instead. So ignoring is a powerful tool which parents can use to change some of their children’s behaviour.

When a new baby arrives, an older child may resent the fact that he or she doesn’t get as much attention as usual. This happened to Matthew - he was jealous. Like many jealous children, he discovered that he could get mother’s attention all to himself again, and away from his brother, by pinching the baby. His mother reacted by scolding or smacking him, but, by doing that, she was giving him attention. It may seem peculiar, but attention is so important to children that, in a situation like this, they might rather have unpleasant attention, such as scolding or smacks, than no attention at all.

Matthew’s mother was amazed when told to ignore Matthew when he pinched the baby, but to give lots of attention to the hurt baby instead. She was told to pick up the baby and walk out of the room with him. This was the opposite of what Matthew was expecting! In addition, his mother was told to give Matthew extra attention when he was playing nicely near the baby and to talk to him and involve him when she was changing or feeding the baby. Within two weeks there was no longer a problem and Matthew was behaving caringly towards his younger brother. This would not be the right approach for a child who hurt the baby when parents were out of sight. It works when the reward is immediate parental attention. A child that injured another child when no-one else was present is also indicating that they have some unmet needs but these would need to be dealt with in another way. Ideas about how to deal with this are included in helpsheet five on managing non-compliance and other problem behaviours.

If we decide to use ignoring to get rid of a particular behaviour that behaviour will probably get worse for a while. It is as if the child can’t believe what is happening so they try harder with the behaviour that has been rewarded in the past. However, after a while, the behaviour starts to decrease. Once this happens it generally reduces very quickly, especially if you are giving the child other ways of getting attention.

You have to make sure everybody else in the family agrees to ignore and carries it out. There are often other children around and they also can be taught to ignore and praised for helping their brother or sister by ignoring their problem behaviour.

Behaviour which has had a pay-off *every time* is generally easier to get rid of than

behaviour that is only rewarded occasionally. When the reward stops it disappears very quickly. Unfortunately, many problem behaviours are not rewarded every time. It is a bit like buying a lottery ticket, the Lottery will pay out to somebody and we may be one of the lucky ones this week. In the same way much of our behaviour occurs not because it gets the expected reward every time but because it gets a pay-off from time to time. Behaviour that has been rewarded only occasionally can be more difficult to remove than behaviour that is rewarded every time. This is because it did not get the reward every time so we have learned that we do not know when it will be rewarded.

It is important to be consistent in making sure the reward does not happen, once we have started to withhold it. Sometimes we decide to ignore difficult behaviour and we manage it for a few times but are then unable to keep this up. Maybe we are embarrassed because we have a visitor so we tell our child off. We have taught that child that **sometimes** their behaviour produces attention and they may repeat the behaviour again many times until it is rewarded again. It takes a lot more time than if the behaviour had been rewarded every time for the child learns that this behaviour is **never** going to be rewarded. If we are going to ignore we have to be sure that we can carry it through. This may mean explaining to our visitors what we are doing and why or even stopping having visitors for a while.

Rules for ignoring

- Successful ignoring depends on the person or persons attention being the reinforcer or reward for the behaviour.

Behaviours like arguing, sulking, screaming, interrupting, swearing and spitting can be ways of trying to get attention in an unhelpful way and may respond to ignoring.

- You cannot ignore behaviours that achieve other rewards.

Refusal to obey instructions is generally not done for attention so will not respond to ignoring, neither will raiding the cupboard for biscuits or stealing money from Mum's handbag.

- You must respond to dangerous or destructive behaviours.

Even though attention might be part of the pay-off with these behaviours you need another approach (see help sheet five on managing non-compliance).

- Expect the problem to get worse at first when you ignore.

This applies to any behaviour but particularly to behaviours that were only rewarded occasionally.

- Ignoring must be done very consistently or you can make the problem worse.

It involves not allowing the child to elicit any direct response. The parent must not reply to anything that is said and must try to give no eye contact.

- Ignoring must be done by everyone in the situation.

Sometimes other people can respond when you are ignoring so you must make sure that no-one gives attention to a behaviour that you are trying to stop.

- Be sure to reward another behaviour instead, at other times of the day, otherwise the child is likely to escalate to other behaviours to force parents to respond. It is particularly helpful if you can reward a behaviour that is in contrast to the problem behaviour, like rewarding a quiet indoor voice whilst ignoring shouting.

- Ignoring is easier if we have decided what we are going to do whilst ignoring. Keeping a record of what is happening can be a useful strategy for parents, as is walking to another room and keeping moving if the child follows, starting to prepare a meal or to sing a song.

Ignoring sounds easy, but is difficult to do consistently. Think carefully before you begin. If you know you will give in after a while, do not use ignoring and make sure that the child has lots of positive ways to get attention.

Parent helpsheet 5

Managing non-compliance and other difficult and resistant behaviours

Judy Hutchings, 2002

I would like to acknowledge the contribution of Mary Last to the first version of these help sheets in 1996**

The most important thing to remember in managing children's difficult behaviour is to be consistent. This means when a child does not do what we ask we must respond **in the same way** each time. This is the **best and quickest** way to help children to learn to do as they are told.

One way to deal with children's refusals to do as they are told is using a method known as "time-out". This is "time-out" from the enjoyable things in life and involves removing the child from the situation for a short time. This only needs to be a short time, not more than five minutes, and then the child can return to the situation and be asked again to carry out the instruction that had previously been given. This is important, as children must not be able to use time-out to get out of doing things that they would rather not do. Time-out can also be used in situations where children disobey a rule that has previously been explained to them. For example, if there is a family rule of no hitting and the child hits a younger brother or sister the child goes straight into time-out

Many parents tell us that they have already tried using "time-out" but that it doesn't work and they are still having problems. When we look closely with them at why this is, we discover that they are generally failing to follow one or two of the essential parts of the programme. There are a number of things that have been shown, in research, to be necessary to make "time-out" work. If you follow the "time-out" instructions **exactly** it will be effective in managing your child's problem behaviour **even if you have previously used it unsuccessfully.**

The golden rules for time out are:

1 It must happen **every time** that the child refuses to follow an instruction or breaks a known family rule.

* Mary Last was head of the Child Clinical Psychology Service in North West Wales for many years and helped with the development of the parenting programme at the Child and Family Research Centre. She died in 1998.

2 **Do not argue or reason with the child** about why this happens. Many non-compliant children are experts at engaging in debate about whether or not to do something. They generally find that discussion or argument is a very effective way of avoiding following the instruction

3 **Do not threaten your child with time out.** Just give the instruction, count to five in your head, repeat the instruction once, wait a further five seconds and then tell the child to go to time out immediately if your child has not obeyed.

4 **Time out needs to be in a definite place.** Many parents have found the bottom step of the stairs to be an ideal place, near to the parent but far enough away to be ignored and, most importantly, generally not very interesting for the child. The child's bedroom is generally not a good place since it is usually full of interesting things for the child to do. "Time out" is **time out from rewarding activities.**

How to put "time out" into practice.

Give the instruction, remember to follow all the instruction following rules, these are in helpsheet three "how to get better at giving instructions". If the instruction is not followed within five seconds it should be repeated. Remember to use the same words and speak slowly, clearly and firmly in case your child was not paying attention to you the first time. Wait a further five seconds which you should count in your head. If the child has not followed your instruction in this time period say: "You will have to go to the time-out chair, or to time-out." You must only say this once in a firm, but not cross, voice. Your manner should be entirely matter of fact. You know what you are going to do and therefore you are in control of the situation. This will enable you to deal with it without becoming cross. Once you have started to carry out a time-out procedure, do not back track because your child starts following instructions after the deadline, it is too late. They must take the time out.

Whilst the child is in "time out" they should have no verbal, physical or visual contact with anybody. This means that whatever the child is doing you should not speak to him or her. You should ignore threats or promises of "I will do as I am told" until the specified time out period has ended. Do not reply to anything that is said by the child whilst in time out, some of which may be aimed to hurt you. When you first use time out, especially if your child makes a fuss or gets off the chair you can say, once "remember the time out period only starts once you are sitting quietly on the chair."

If you have a problem keeping your child on the chair or step there are two ways of dealing with this. The first, which is a way of dealing with younger children, is to return them to the chair each time they come off. You should do this without speaking and, as far as possible, without any further eye contact. If you cannot put your child on the chair because they are too big or too aggressive, one strategy is to repeat that the time-out will not start until the child goes to time-out and then ignore them until they do go. Do not get drawn into any other conversation with the child and at this point all the rules of ignoring come into play. Remember how powerful ignoring can be and nothing else must happen for the child, no mealtimes or any other attention until the time out has taken place.

If you cannot ignore your child until they go to time-out, and many parents find ignoring very difficult, or if the child starts doing something dangerous that you cannot ignore you can try another strategy developed by Professor Webster-Stratton. This is to add on minutes for each refusal to go to time out, but when you get to ten

minutes to give the child another choice. You must say “you must go to time out for 10 minutes or you will have to take a consequence”. You must have a consequence that you can deliver and preferably one that occurs quite soon after the event, like losing your computer for this evening. Once a child has lost an important consequence they usually go to time out next time they are asked and they usually follow the instruction rather than go to time-out on the next occasion. Timeout is always given as a choice and the child will quickly learn to make the easiest and most sensible decision. Professor Webster-Stratton’s book the Incredible Years describes this process very well.

The most important thing in time-out is that **the parent decides when it is over**, not the child. We usually suggest starting with two minutes for a time out for younger children and five minutes for children over the age of five. Some people find it useful to have a kitchen timer that the child can observe but not reach which rings at the end of the time out period. Not touching the clock can become a family rule.

If the "time-out" was given because the child failed to follow an instruction, he or she must immediately be asked to follow that instruction when coming from "time-out". If the child refuses again he or she must return for another period of "time out" and so on until the task is done and you can thank the child, in a polite and matter of fact way.

Sometimes, in fact quite often among the children that we see, a child refuses to come out of time out at the end of the time period, this is another way of the child being non-compliant and trying to regain control. You must retain the initiative by saying "as you have refused to come off the chair I am giving you another time-out so you must stay on the chair for another two minutes". When **you** take the initiative from the child and decide when time out finishes, the child will soon comply.

A child must not leave "time-out" if they are making a fuss or misbehaving when the time period finishes. The child must have been quiet for at least the 30 seconds leading up to the end of the "time-out" period.

Do not start a discussion with the child about why the child was sent to "time-out" or what the purpose of "time-out" was. This can make it less effective and we want the child to learn as quickly as possible. We know that time-out is working when you find that you are not needing to use it so much and then, finally, not at all.

Remember that "time-out" is for refusing to follow an instruction or for doing something that the child knows that he or she is not allowed to do. You should have a list of house rules that lead to immediate time out for the child and take the child through them. This list can be put up on a door or wall as a reminder to both of you.

When you start using "time-out", you will generally be doing something about your child's non-compliance much sooner, after giving an instruction twice, for example, than you previously did so you may have to use "time-out" quite frequently. You have to remember all of the advice from the previous help sheets. If you use time out properly and consistently, it is unusual for high levels of time-out to continue for as much as one week because you will also be rewarding the alternative desired

behaviours. The parents that I have worked with have seen a very positive improvement within one week following setting up a "time-out" routine.

If you and your child are attending the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service, you may have been asked to do a number of things but it is **essential** that the instructions on this help sheet are followed in your management of your child's non-compliance if you are using "time-out".

These notes were developed from the work that we were doing in the Child and Family Research Centre in 1996 with recognition that many of the ideas have been described in other places as well as coming from our own clinical experience over many years. Since that time I have been particularly impressed with the work of Professor Webster-Stratton at the University of Washington, Seattle. Her book “the Incredible Years” describes the key parenting skills, on which these helpsheets focus, very well and also suggest many helpful strategies for parents to use in implementing new parenting practices. This book is available from the Child Behaviour Project Office.

Reference

Carolyn Webster-Stratton (1992) *The Incredible Years: a trouble shooting guide for parents of children aged three to eight years*. Toronto, ON: Umbrella Press