



Improving knowledge for those affected by Down syndrome

Behavior Management and Skill Teaching

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Experiencing difficult behavior problems can leave parents and care providers feeling overwhelmed and unsure of how to best handle the situation. Although there is no magic wand or quick fix for solving behavior problems, knowing the basic principles of behavior intervention can provide the tools needed to decrease stress and self doubt and make it easier to move toward positive behavioral chances. Behavior change relies on a systematic approach, based on determining why behaviors occur and finding new skills to teach to replace those previously demonstrated, inappropriate behaviors. The most important concept to know is that all of our behaviors occur for a reason and that behavior is maintained by reinforcing consequences. When a behavior is causing harm, preventing learning, or limiting access to peers and the community, then it is considered a behavior that needs to be targeted for change. The effects of positive changes in behavior not only benefit individuals around the child, but also improve the confidence, self-esteem, and social acceptance within the child.

The process used for accomplishing this change in behavior is called Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA). ABA is a science that operates under the philosophy of Positive Programming or Positive Behavior Supports. This systematic approach to behavior change relies on conducting a functional analysis to determine the function (or reason) of the target behaviors, finding and teaching a replacement skill that will meet the same function for the child, and reinforcing this new skill while removing reinforcement from the target behavior. It does not promote punishment or adverse consequences. Research has clearly shown that although punishment may temporarily stop a behavior, the effects not only can cause negative feelings towards the punisher, but do not create long term change. The function of the problem behavior still exists and if an alternative skill is not provided another inappropriate behavior will likely arise in its place. It can be said that for every behavior excess there is a skills deficit. When problem behaviors can be looked at from this perspective, it makes behavior intervention a less overwhelming experience.

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