

SNIP Training Toolkit Part 2 - The Power of Positive Messages: Helping Children and Youth Develop Positive Behavior



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The Power of Positive Messages:

Helping Children and Youth Develop Positive Behavior

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The Power of Positive Messages Training

WORKSHOP DESCRIPTION:

Building positive relationships in your after school programs is one of the most effective strategies you can use to improve everyone's experience – staff, kids, and parents. This workshop will start you in the right direction. First, we'll look at how to "reframe" behavior and think about the strengths children and youth have rather than what pops out as "what is wrong." Then we'll explore and practice some easy strategies you can use throughout your program when giving directions, redirecting behavior and just plain talking with kids.

Audience: OST line staff and staff supervisors

Content: This workshop is related to SF AFA Competencies #6, #7, #8

WORKSHOP LEARNING OBJECTIVES:

By the end of the session, participants will:

1. Know how framing behavior in positive ways can impact their approach to children and youth in their programs, and
2. Learn and practice new methods of encouraging appropriate behavior in children

WORKSHOP AGENDA:

- Arrival and Welcome
- Introduction
- Behavior Pyramid
- Reframing
- Talking to Children
- Scenario Work
- Questions and Answers
- Wrap up and Evaluation

Reframing Staff Attitudes to Build Positive Relationships

Reframing refers to the process of changing how out of school time (OST) staff thinks about a situation or problem. It involves considering a situation from a different, broader, point of view which allows staff to see challenges and opportunities rather than “problems”. This technique helps staff replace negative interpretations with positive ones. In effect, reframing can be as simple as making the problem the solution.

Reframing is a powerful tool for changing staff attitudes. Staff can use reframing techniques to change how they view a specific child’s behavior and perhaps the child himself. It can also be used to help staff view broader program situations in a more constructive way.

The ability to reframe beliefs and actions starts with understanding that all behavior has meaning and that behavior is a form of communication. Frequently, “acting out” behavior is how children express an unmet need. For staff this behavior may be considered a problem but for children it may be a solution.

When staff takes a moment to think “what is this child trying to tell me with this behavior?” or “what is the meaning behind the behavior?” they can see the behavior differently. The reframing activity we do in the training asks staff to go one step further, identify underlying strengths that can be attached to the behavior. For instance a child who is “bossy” might be seen as a child with strong opinions who wants to be a leader. Once behavior has been reframed in a more positive light, it becomes clear how we can help children be more successful.

Using reframing techniques does not immediately change a child’s behavior, rather it helps staff change how they interact with and support the child. Reframing helps staff see children from a strength based perspective which contributes to more positive relationships among staff and children.

Talking to Children*

Much of the following information has been adapted from Dr. Mac’s Website: www.behavioradvisor.com :

We are going to look at ways to encourage students to show appropriate behavior that also promotes self-control of their own behavior.

These simple techniques are nice things to try before going to your penalties for non-compliance and misbehavior. While these strategies may be initially ineffective with some of your "tough" kids, they gain

*McIntyre, Tom. Nice Ways to Gain Compliance & Help Kids Develop Self Management of Their Behavior. Retrieved 9/2010 from <http://www.behavioradvisor.com/715TipsInsert.html>

effectiveness quickly. If you still find yourself having to go to your penalties, the youngsters come to understand that the nice interventions are their "warnings". They begin to respond to these strategies in order to avoid the penalties. And now, because you are treating them respectfully, they come to like you better and return the respectful treatment.

Another nice thing about these strategies is that they build inner control over behavior. Kids have to take the limited amount of information that you provide to them and figure out why you said it to them. They try to discern what the problem must be and what they should do about it. They become self-disciplined "thinkers".

Rephrasing Our Comments

How we word and deliver our comments to others determines the outcome. Our delivery of the message will have an enormous impact on our effectiveness, our relationships with our students, the self-image of the other, and happiness with ourselves as teacher/parent. The "4 No No's" (see below) hurt others, blame. When we address misbehavior, it's important to delete four things from our commentary.

1. "Why Questions" Why are your socks on the floor? Why did you forget your homework again?"
2. The word "YOU" You never pick up your things when I tell you to. You always disobey me on the playground.
3. The words "NO" and "DON'T"
4. Lecturing/Nagging/Berating

All place blame rather than seek solutions. They make matters worse rather than better.

Why Questions

"Why are your socks on the floor?" "Why is the toilet seat up?" "Why did you forget your homework again?"

When used in this tone – they are not really an attempt to get information. They are "wolves in sheep's' clothing". They appear to be seeking but it really means "GOTCHA!!." Kids know "Why?" means "I've

caught you being bad, and I'm going to let you dig a bigger hole for yourself before I really come down on you hard."

Kids, realizing they are facing impending penalties, then lie, deceive, make excuses, or otherwise try to escape the inevitable punishment /criticism/chastisement. Our approach forces them into more undesirable behavior. Then we lose the focus, having to deal with the new excuses/misbehaviors that emerge instead of the original one.

The word "Why" should only be used when a nice, concerned tone of voice is attached by someone who has true concern about the student's behavior.

"YOU"

Delete this word from your vocabulary when dealing with misbehavior. It attacks and hurts. It is condescending and controlling. It fails to solve the problem.

What can you say in place of "YOU" when talking with kids? A particularly good way to prevent escalation of arguments and avoid putting others on the defensive is to state feelings or directions in the form of an "I message": WHAT YOU WANT TO SEE DONE.

Examples include "I need quiet in this room right now." (As opposed to "Why are you talking?") "I'm disappointed in what I saw out on the yard. I don't expect to see that sort of thing now that we're in 3rd (6th, 9th) grade. I expect to see better in the future."

We can also bond and connect with our pupils by using the plural form... the "We message" combined with 3rd person references ("all of us", "my students") in place of "YOU". So, instead of saying "You're being too noisy" try "We all need to be quiet so that we can hear our classmate's report." (We' revisit this in a minute)

Using Praise

Praise is something we all love to receive. We all feel good when someone says something positive about us – about something we've done or said, or about the way we look.

Children and youth love praise more even more than adults do. As they are in the constant process of developing their own self-esteem and confidence, feeling good about themselves is extremely important.

When you're unsure about what you're doing, or don't feel confident, getting feedback is a great way to learn that you're on the right track.

Of course, as adults and educators, it's much easier for us to see & respond to behavior that we don't like. Undesirable behaviors tend to be much more obvious.

How often do you hear or say:

"Turn off the TV"VS "Thanks for turning off the TV when I asked"

"Haven't you finished your homework yet?" VS "Good work getting your homework things out"

"Stop running in the hall" VS..... "I like the way you're walking quietly"

So, what can we do?

Catch your students being good!

If you want to see your children or youth behave a certain way more often, make it your aim to catch them doing that behavior. Why?

- Children and youth learn what it is that you're expecting
- They get a reward for their behavior (through attention from you)
- They develop their own self-esteem and confidence, and ability to make good choices

*Research suggests you try and praise children **6 times more often** than you criticize or reprimand behavior.*

Use labeled praise

So now that you're actually catching your students doing the right thing, make your praise even more effective by being specific and letting them know exactly what it is you like. This way your student knows exactly what it is that they are doing that has made you happy, and they will be more likely to do it again. It also serves the double purpose of acting as reminder for the other students in the room.

E.g.: “Tom, great work! Thanks for sitting down and getting your homework out!”

So, what can it actually look like?

How to give labeled praise:	Example
1. Get close to the student	Teacher walks up to Jimmy in the line
2. Use child’s name	“Jimmy
3. Use praising words	Nice job!
4. Label their behavior	Thanks for lining up quietly when the bell rang”
5. Give additional cues	Use a pleasant tone of voice, gives Jimmy a high five and huge smile

Give instructions that might actually work!

One of the most common problems mentioned by educators working with kids is, “They won’t follow my instructions,” or “I ask them over and over again, and they don’t do what I ask”

Quite often the problem goes away once the adult learns how to give instructions more effectively. Telling a child or youth in your program what it is you want him to do – and having him actually do it – seems like it should be the most natural thing in the world, but it isn’t. But, there are strategies that can make giving instructions more effective, and should increase the chance the child will actually do what you’ve asked. Here are a few ideas about how to make your instructions more effective:

Make sure you’ve got their attention

- Children & youth, like adults will ‘tune out’ to things they don’t really want to hear. So instead of talking to your child from across the room, or from another room, take the time to
 - **walk to them,**
 - **make eye contact (you might want to crouch down)**
 - **say their name** before giving them an instruction. It may save you having to repeat yourself three times!

When you mean to give an instruction, actually give an instruction

Sometimes when we think we're giving an instruction we're often doing something else.

Think about the differences between:

- Giving an instruction (e.g.: hang up your bag) which is something the student must do
- Making a request (e.g.: I wish you'd be here on time) which is a statement of what you'd like, but really lets the child decide
- Asking a question (e.g.: are you ready to do homework?) which gives the student an opportunity say no
- Offering a choice (e.g.: do you want to go out to play or stay inside?) which allows a student to make an unexpected (or sometimes less desirable choice)
- Don't think that you need to only give instructions. Children and youth need to learn how to follow reasonable instructions from adults, but they also need to practice making choices about their own behavior. There are lots of opportunities within a day to allow your student to make decisions about their own behavior. It's up to you to decide ahead of time whether to give an instruction or do something else.

Provide some information

- Before you even get to needing to give an instruction, try providing a student with some information, but don't tell them what to do. Give them an opportunity to come up with their own plan of action.
- Use statements that are accurate and simple and that are non-judgmental or sarcastic. Use them as nice 'reminders' before you use more directive measures
 - E.g.: "Paste dries up when the lid isn't put back on", "rulers are for measuring things"

Describe a problem

- When there is a problem that needs to be addressed, mention it without assigning blame or the student's role in the situation.
- Describing a problem allows the student to come up with their own solution
 - E.g.: "the paint spilled, what could we do now?" or "the bell is about to go for playtime to be finished"

Use positive messages

Phrase an instruction in a way that tells your student what they should **do**, rather than what **not** to do, E.g.:
“walk inside” VS “don’t run” or “close the door quietly” VS “don’t slam the door”

- Children and youth often hear the action words in sentences... Telling a student to “stop yelling” or “don’t hit”, means they are automatically thinking or yelling or hitting.
- Children and youth learn behavior by being taught. If a child hasn’t been taught a behavior, they don’t know it yet. Help them learn what it is they should be doing.

Use ‘I’ messages

- Using the word “you” can be seen as attacking, controlling or condescending. This can lead to escalation, arguments and defensiveness from children and youth
- Try using “I” or “we” messages to give directions e.g.: “I expect to see people lining up quietly” or “We need quiet in this room”

Be clear & specific

- “Do your homework!” Sounds pretty clear to us right? But what do you think it might mean for someone else? Does it mean to do all the homework for the week? Does it mean to get it out of the backpack and start it? Does it mean to only do the sheets that I feel comfortable doing? Does it mean I can leave the worksheets I don’t know how to do? Does it mean I can put it in my backpack to do it at home? Does it mean I can just do the reading that is part of my homework?
- Try to clearly state what it is you’re expecting to see, e.g.: “get out your homework and do the first two worksheets”

Keep it short & sweet

- Give only one instruction at a time. Then the child will not be confused about what is expected.
- Long or complex instructions tend to be ignored or forgotten
- E.g.: “Fran, you’ve walked out the door again without your backpack. Where’s your head at. You’re so busy chatting that you’re not even thinking about what you’re supposed to do. Get with it girl”
What Fran actually heard was “Fran, you’ve blah, blah, blah, blah, yak, yak, blah, blah,”
instead, try “Fran, get your school bag”.

Give them enough time

- Remember that some students might need more time to focus their attention, process information and plan their actions. Take this into account when giving instructions
- Ask yourself ‘Is this an instruction that a student needs to comply with immediately?’ OR
- Can you allow the student to have some control? E.g.: “you need to do both your journal and your reading – which would you like to do first?”
- Make sure the amount of time allowed for tasks is appropriate for individual students, remembering that some students need longer time to complete tasks.

Make sure the instructions are do-able

- Make sure what you tell the child to do is something they can do.
- Is it reasonable to ask a child to “stop crying” when they are upset?
- If they have a weeks’ worth of homework, is it reasonable to ask them to “do your homework”? It may be better to break it into smaller manageable tasks e.g.: “do your reading and your math tonight”.

Give students a way to ask for help

- Make sure the student has a way to request clarification or help
- Think about whether you need to model or show the student what you’d like them to do.
- Develop a process so that students can get help when they ask for it, for example work with a peer or a group, write names on a list to request an adult’s help.

Final Thoughts

If we overpower students, what have we taught them? Essentially, they'll learn:

"Don't think, just obey." (if you can't avoid or trick them) -"I've got to get some power so that I'm the one who gives orders and bosses people around."

Do we really want our kids to follow the directions of others (e.g., child molesters, gang leaders, drug dealers) without thinking about it?

When possible, we should seek cooperation in our classroom, especially because:

- it creates a positive classroom climate
- it teaches kids how to behave appropriately
- it brings joy to our teaching and their learning

Always emphasize and express:

- mutual respect
- recognition of the inherent dignity of others
- courtesy
- maintenance of the honor of others
- belief in the student's ability to improve

You get what you give, so give good things.

Remember the ABC's of behavior management: Always Build Character.

Scenarios – now you try!

Some of these probably sound familiar. Given what you and the other members of your group now know, how could you use positive messages when talking to children in these situations?

Use I Messages

1. Why does it take you forever to get ready? How do you expect to learn anything if you take up half the morning goofing around?

I message:

2. You better start paying attention.

I message:

3. If you use your garbage mouth one more time, you're losing recess.

I message:

4. How can you be so mean? You are cruel to make fun of someone who makes a mistake.

I message:

Use Positive Messages

5. Don't run in the hall!

Positive message:

6. No screaming and yelling!

Positive message:

Give Clear and Specific Instructions

7. Hey Cosmo! Do I have to put a neon sign up to get your attention? What are you doing? Why isn't the notebook on your desk? Get on the ball. Let's go. You always take too much time to do things – it is this way every day. Get out your notebook now, not next week! Put your hands to it boy, Jeesh! I've seen faster moves from a 3-legged turtle.

Clear and Specific Instructions:

Give Information

8. Don't throw sand!!!

Informational Statement:

9. I told you not to touch that plant! Stop it!

Informational Statement:

Describe the Problem

10. Ralph, I've told you a thousand times to keep the hamster's bottle full of water.

Problem-focused statement:

11. How many times do I have to ask you to clean up the books before you leave the room?

Problem-focused statement:

Other Resources:

For more information about using Positive Messages to improve relationship and behavior:

Dr Mac's Behavior Management Site

<http://www.behavioradvisor.com/>

Children with challenging behavior: Strategies for reflective thinking

Linda and Tom Brault

http://www.sdcoe.net/student/eeps/pc/pubs/ChallengingBehavior_2005.pdf

KIT: Kids Included Together

www.kitonline.org has webinars and online trainings for a fee

CHAMPs: A Proactive and Positive Approach to Classroom Management

Randy Sprick, Mickey Garrison & Lisa M. Howard