

Learning Coach Series

Module 8

Positive behavior, for both parent and child, contributes directly to positive learning.

Introduction

Teaching and following clear expectations of appropriate behavior in your home helps your family to be more calm and productive. Children become more independent and productive when they can predict what will happen if they behave outside those expectations.

Teaching your child at home can be both rewarding and frustrating. In addition to your role as parent, you are taking on another role as their learning coach. This can be a shift in the way you and your child interact with each other.

In a perfect world, our children would willingly start their school work, stay on task, and complete assignments independently. We all know, however, that even the best of students have occasional bad days. Even the best of parents have occasional bad days! There are times when even the best of us just don't want to buckle down and get our work done!

So what can we do to help our children learn to work, stay on task, follow directions, and make the necessary progress in a home environment while maintaining a positive parent/child relationship? Here are a few ideas that may help.

- Carefully teach and follow daily routines.** Do your best to make the various tasks of schooling as predictable as possible. Taking the time to create and practice routines early on will pay off as your child develops good habits. Routines help children understand what is expected of them, how to use their time wisely, where to find the resources they need, and how to get started on and finish tasks. Eventually they become second-nature, and children no longer need to be reminded what to do.¹³

Daily Activity Schedule: Take a Break!

Gavin's Work Schedule		
1.	Spellings	First
2.	Number Game	Second
3.	Take a Break	Third
4.	Drawing	Fourth
5.	Maths	Fifth

Begin by teaching the routine, including the purpose, sequence and time limits. Practice it over and over in positive ways. For instance, a morning routine may be something as simple as

- 1) get up,
- 2) straighten up our rooms,
- 3) get dressed,
- 3) eat breakfast, then
- 4) report to the learning area each day by 9:00.

Children become stronger and more independent when they understand the purpose, sequence, and timing for certain activities done each day. There is less whining and complaining when a child learns to follow a routine rather than just “doing what I’m told.” The child retains more control.

Warning: You can go too far with routines! Find the “sweet spot” where there is enough structure and expectation to teach good habits and help your child be productive, but not so much that there is no time or opportunity for individuality and fun.

2. Build and follow a daily/weekly academic

schedule. We all have a need to feel in control of our daily activities. It is no different for your child. Providing a visual schedule for the day helps the child to predict their tasks and the time it takes to do them. They will learn to structure, organize

their time, initiate tasks more quickly and efficiently, and reduce confusion and down time. It also helps your child realize there is a start and an end to their academic activities each day. Make sure you build in some breaks throughout the academic time too!¹⁴ These schedules do not need to be overly-detailed, but they do need to include all the “big” pieces of their day, and they need to be visual.

For younger children, it is effective to use pictures in the schedule, along with limited language. As children get older, written schedules are fine. There are many resources for making these schedules online. You can easily make them yourselves at home. Laminating a paper and attaching velcro can make arranging a daily schedule quick and easy. Your child may also enjoy helping to organize and schedule their day with you. The more control you give them, the better they will engage.

Our Weekly Homeschool Schedule

MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY
<p><i>Morning:</i> Read aloud Reading Handwriting Math</p>	<p><i>Morning:</i> Read aloud Reading Handwriting Science Experiment Spanish</p>	<p><i>Morning:</i> Read aloud Reading Handwriting Math</p>	<p><i>Morning:</i> Read aloud Reading Handwriting Science Experiment Spanish</p>	<p><i>Morning:</i> Art Pottery Class</p>
<p><i>Afternoon:</i> Play time</p>	<p><i>Afternoon:</i> Play time or Bi-weekly Playdate</p>	<p><i>Afternoon:</i> Play time</p>	<p><i>Afternoon:</i> Play time</p>	<p><i>Afternoon:</i> Play time</p>
<p><i>Evening:</i> Book and story time</p>	<p><i>Evening:</i> Book and story time</p>	<p><i>Evening:</i> Book and story time</p>	<p><i>Evening:</i> Book and story time</p>	<p><i>Evening:</i> Book and story time</p>

- 3. Do your best to reduce distractions.** Learning at home can be challenging with all the distractions and excitement found in a busy household. Crying babies, phone calls, television, music, unexpected visitors, other children demanding attention—all these facts of life create conditions that may make it hard for some children to focus on their schoolwork. Your job as a learning coach is to plan to limit those distractions as much as possible.

Make sure your child has a clutter-free work area. It will be nice to have a separate room or area for your child to work. However, if your work area is your kitchen table, make sure it is clear of clutter and your child has plenty of space to work. You may have multiple children working at the same time at different grade levels with different activities. Cardboard dividers or earphones may help reduce distractions for them. Make sure the television and radio are off during study time. Putting your phone on silent may also help. It is easier for learners to stay on task in an orderly and reasonably quiet environment.

- 4. Provide a lot of positive reinforcement!** In other words, catch your child being good. Positive reinforcement increases the probability of a behavior being repeated. So, if you see your child doing something good, and you would like to see it repeated, tell them! Research shows that children need a ratio of four positives to every correction. Think about all the redirection you offer your child each day, such as “Get back to work!” “I told you twice to make your bed and it’s still not done.” “Don’t talk to your sister that way.” And so on and so on. But when we look at the research and understand the 4:1 ratio, we start looking for positive things to reinforce. When our focus changes, we find ourselves saying, “Thanks for helping with the dishes without being asked!” “You have been working so hard on this assignment!” “I noticed you helped your brother with that problem, thanks!” Making an honest effort to positively reinforce your child can make a huge difference in their behavior.¹⁵
- 5. “I’m trying to do all this, but sometimes my child does not behave. There are times he resists me and doesn’t do what he is supposed to. What then?”** You have done all the right things—established routines, created daily schedules, reduced distractions in the learning environment, and offered ample positive reinforcement—but your child is still having behavior difficulties. What can you do? Here are some ideas.

First, try breaking school work into smaller, more manageable chunks. Sometimes seeing a whole page of work can be very frustrating. Start with something they can do, such as putting their name on the top of the page. Then say, “Do the first problem. Let me know when you are done and I will check it.” Then, “Do this row or this paragraph.” Set small, frequent, attainable goals. Often, children just need to know you are there to support their efforts.

Second, if your child is refusing to do a task, be calm and empathetic without being condescending. Say something like, “It looks like this is really frustrating for you.” Then clearly describe the situation: “Because you are refusing to do your work, we will set it aside and you can do it later this evening while the family is watching a show.” Offer a consequence that is reasonable and matches the severity of the offence. It may be useful to walk away after doing this to avoid emotional debate and excuses. Lastly, follow through.

This is the hardest part. Your child may try to bargain with you. Do not give in. We want them to realize that you are serious about the behavior and hopefully they will think twice about doing it again.

Third, many students respond positively when given more choices. Offering choices helps children feel in control and be more motivated. It helps them connect with their strengths and interests. Choices can be simple, like where to sit, what writing utensil to use, working alone or in a group, choosing the order in which they do the assignments, or listening to a story rather than reading it aloud. You can also give choice on how they show evidence of their learning. For example, rather than a traditional book report, a student could choose to do a power point, act out a scenario, create a chart, etc. This allows them to play to their own strengths.

Fourth, sometimes your child may be frustrated or angry and refuses to comply with reasonable requests. When this happens, say something like, “It looks like you could use a break.” Ask the child to go to a time-out area until they are ready to go back to work. If they refuse, say, “It looks like you need some time, so I will leave you alone.” Then you leave the situation. Be sure to acknowledge when a child is getting closer and closer to appropriate behavior, even if it’s not perfect. As the child calms down, take a minute to talk about what happened, and talk about alternatives that would have been more productive. For instance, “Just now when I asked you to start on your math, you said ‘No!’, pushed your paper off the table, and started yelling. Next time I ask you to do math I need you to say ‘OK’ and start in the next few seconds. If you need help, ask me and I will help you.” The most important part of this process is that when the situation has been resolved, and emotions are under control, the work is still there and must be done. Your child must learn that misbehaving will not get them out of doing the work.

Go to PBISworld.com to find excellent suggestions for helping with all kinds of behavior issues.

Parents and Learning Coaches have Feelings, Too! Dealing with Your Own Frustration and Anxiety¹⁶

“Remember, calm is contagious—and so is anxiety.” A parent’s anxiety about their child contributes significantly to the anxiety of their child. “Think of it this way: if you can’t get calm and in control then you’re creating the exact atmosphere you’re trying to avoid. Your emotions are a combination of frustrated, annoyed, and disappointed.” You somehow feel responsible to teach your child, and he/she just won’t cooperate. You don’t *have* to react to your child.

1. Expect your child to push your buttons.

We get upset when our kids don’t do what we want them to do. They don’t listen or they don’t comply. The best solution is to expect and accept that your child is going to push your buttons and to not take it personally. In a sense, your child is doing her job—she’s testing limits. It’s your job to remain calm and make sure that your child knows where the limits are and, when she exceeds those limits, that she is held accountable.

2. **Know what you are and are NOT responsible for as a parent.**

Some parents are confused about what they are and are not responsible for, and when they take responsibility for things that belong to their child, they inevitably get frustrated.

Stay aware of what belongs to you and what belongs to your child.

You are responsible for your thoughts, feelings, and responsibilities. Your child is responsible for his thoughts, feelings, and responsibilities. You influence your child but you don't control him. If you always think you're responsible for how things turn out, then you're going to be in your child's way and that's going to create more stress and anxiety.

"I'm responsible for helping you figure out how to solve the problem. But I'm not responsible for solving the problem for you." Your child has responsibilities that he needs to meet in life.

3. **Don't worry about the future.**

Sometimes, we fast forward to the future and wonder if this is how our kids will be the rest of their lives. We wonder how they will make it in the real world if they won't even do their homework.

4. **Focus on what you can do in the present. The future is up to your child, and you don't have control over it no matter how hard you try. Prepare for your anxiety.**

Notice what triggers your anxiety and try to prepare for it. Let yourself be guided by the way you want to see yourself as a parent instead of by your emotional feelings.

2. **Use positive self-talk.**

Talk to yourself. In your head, you can say something like, "I'm not going to react to my child's behavior. I'm going to step back. I'm going to take a deep breath."

3. **Take a deep breath.**

Take a deep breath when you feel yourself escalating—and take a moment to think things through. There is a big difference between responding and reacting.

4. **Visualize a positive relationship with your child.**

Picture your ideal relationship with your child in the future. Try to figure out how you will reach that goal.

In Conclusion...

Your child is not like anyone else, and your home is not like any other place!

Use common sense to adapt these ideas to who you are, who your child is, and how your home works. Your role is vital in setting the tone for successful learning. Doing the small things discussed here will make your child more successful as they learn to be a more independent learner. Please know that you are not alone. If you have questions or concerns about your child, contact your child's teacher. All of us at IHLA want you and your child to be successful working together.



In summary, the
Big Ideas

Module 8

Positive behavior, both parent and child, leads to positive learning

Most children—and adults, for that matter—have good days and bad, good moods and bad, days when they feel cooperative and days when they may not. Most children have subjects they like and subjects they really don't. Keeping a child on task when there may be a combination of these factors can be stressful!

Some things to think about to help create a positive learning environment include:

1. Carefully teach and follow daily routines.
2. Build and follow a daily/weekly academic schedule.
3. Do your best to reduce distractions.
4. Provide a lot of positive reinforcement!

When a child's behavior starts interfering with learning, consider the following:

1. Try breaking school work into smaller, more manageable chunks.
2. If your child is refusing to do a task, be calm and empathetic without being condescending.
3. Many students respond positively when given more choices.
4. Know what you are going to do when your child refuses to follow instructions.

Parents and teachers are human and have feelings, including frustration and anger. Here are some suggestions to help with your own feelings and behavior:

1. Expect your child to push your buttons.
2. Know what you are and are NOT responsible for as a parent.
3. Don't worry about the distant future.
4. Focus on what you can do in the present. The future is up to your child, and you don't have control over it no matter how hard you try. Prepare for your anxiety.
5. Use positive self-talk.
6. Take a deep breath.
7. Visualize a positive relationship with your child.