

Living With Special Needs Children

Listed below are concerns from parents of special needs children:

1. Do special needs children understand cause and effect and also rewards versus punishments? Do they comprehend the same way as other children?

Strangely enough, it doesn't matter! Every living creature has an awareness of reward and punishment at some level. Take as lowly a creature as a cockroach. Roaches hate light and love darkness. Being in light is unpleasant, being in darkness is pleasant. Of course they don't use words like that - they are probably not even "conscious" of liking or not liking. But the result is the same:

Turn on the lights and the roach goes scuttling for darkness. In a very basic sense, light = punishment and darkness = reward. The behavior of escaping from light to dark is rewarded, and so is repeated.

Roaches don't have a memory and can't be trained like humans can. Canines can be instructed because they have a great memory. They know, for example, if they hear the word "sit" they will sit down in order to receive a treat or reward.

The more you go up on the ladder of life creatures, the higher memory functioning. Improvement of awareness and analytical skills surfaces. When these attributes increase, you need to vary the intensity of the rewards and punishments to have any effect.

What reward and punishments should you dole out? Easy. Try first by experimenting with different rewards and punishments based on your own experience. Have a system of rewards and punishments that will affect your child's behavior. Make sure that you are consistent. If their behavior changes then you have accomplished your goal. If it does not then take these two things into consideration:

- a) your rewards and punishments systems did not have big enough meaning in your child's life or
- b) your child could not create a link between the behavior and the reward or punishment. If you wait too long to respond to a behavior then your reward or punishment may have little or no meaning. This is especially true when dealing with younger children.

If your plan doesn't seem to work at all then you need to stop and look at what you are doing. Make improvements and modifications. Try the system another time. Keep changing the system until you find one that works. If you are unable to find a system that works then think about the following:

You have tried all of the tips you can think of and your child's behavior hasn't changed. For example, maybe your child had PDD. You are required to complete a few hours of physical therapy with your child every day. However, your child doesn't want to do the physical therapy.

You try everything in your bag of tricks and read the book thoroughly. You try different reward and punishment systems to no avail. You have struggled to make physical therapy appear like a fun time. No matter what you do, you are not accomplishing the physical therapy session every day.

So what is one to do? Well you have two options here:

- a. You could become all upset and flustered about it. You get mad at yourself for your apparent failure. You feel like you are no service to your child. You want to find the magic trick that will make your child want to do his physical therapy session.
- b. He can step back, look at the situation, and take a calmer, more pragmatic approach, accepting that maybe 50% of the time is all he is going to get, and that that is better than the 30% that Tim was doing a year ago.

Is (a.) or (b.) the more productive option?

The problem with (a) is that it produces STRESS. And stress is unhealthy and unproductive. It means you are less effective, more irritable, and less fun. But it doesn't produce any better results!

Sometimes you just have to understand the fact that your child may never be fully motivated to complete the physical therapy. It's sad, but true. It is better to work with what you have than cry about not achieving perfection.

It is critical that you pay attention to your child's specific needs. Strive to define success off of what you are provided with and not an ideal. When you do this, you will ward off stress and the results you want will occur. If things still don't improve would you want to have: a) limited performance and we are all angry? b) limited performance and we are all happy?

Don't try to fight battles you cannot win!

About the Author

Wish you kids would behave?? Then you should really take a look at Dr. Noel Swanson's fascinating website packed full of [parenting advice](#). There are also articles on children's [special educational needs](#) that are worth looking at.

Source: <http://www.howidefeated.com>