JAMES COPLAN, M.D.
Neurodevelopmental Pediatrician · Author · Speaker

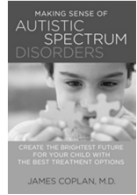Making Sense of Autistic Spectrum Disorders

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"Normal Behavior Problems" in Childhood
James Coplan, MD

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BACK TO SCHOOL
BEHAVIOR BLITZ
TWO DAYS DEDICATED TO EFFECTIVE, POSITIVE & PROACTIVE STRATEGIES!
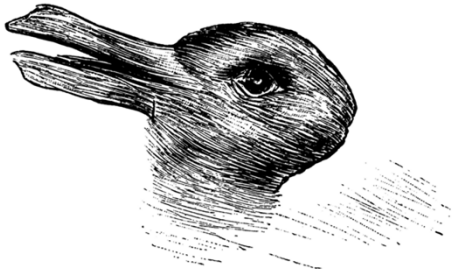
August 3, 2015

Disclosures

- Dr. Coplan is author of *Making Sense of Autistic Spectrum Disorders: Create the brightest future for your child with the best treatment options* (Bantam-Dell, 2010), and receives royalties on its sale

MAKING SENSE OF
AUTISTIC SPECTRUM DISORDERS
CREATE THE BRIGHTEST FUTURE FOR YOUR CHILD WITH THE BEST TREATMENT OPTIONS
JAMES COPLAN, M.D.

- **This presentation will include a discussion of off-label drug use**
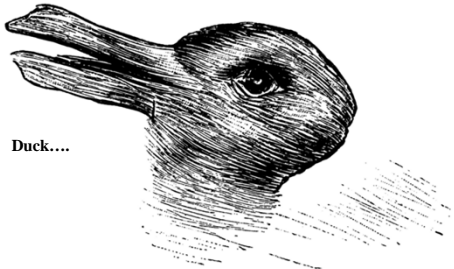
www.drcoplan.com

What do you see?

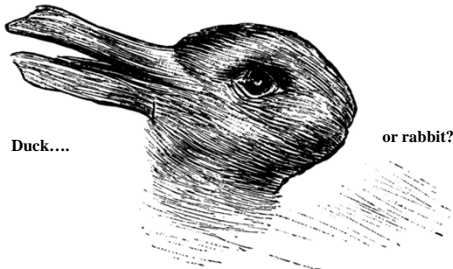https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rabbit%E2%80%93duck_illusion

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What do you see?

Duck….

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rabbit%E2%80%93duck_illusion

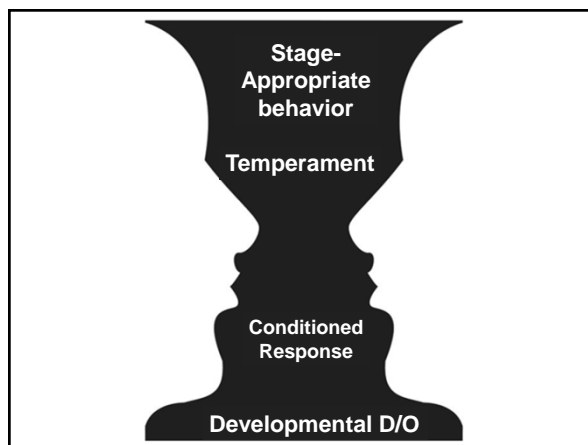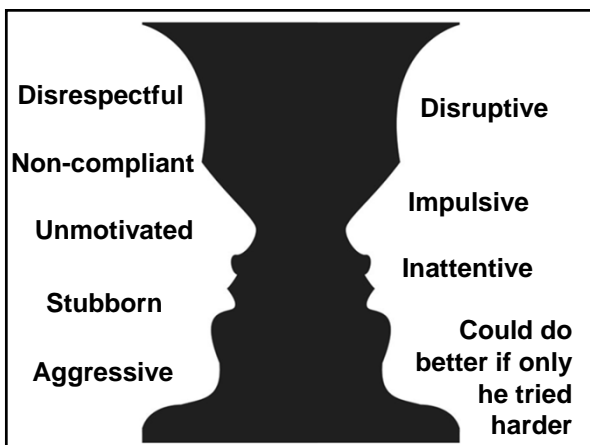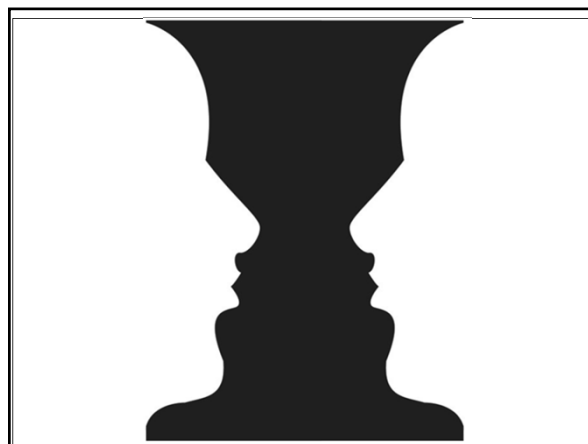## What do you see?

Duck….   **or rabbit?**

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rabbit%E2%80%93duck_illusion

Basic principles

- **Many things can be seen in more than one way**

Basic principles

- **How we "see" a behavior conditions how we respond**

Disrespectful

Non-compliant

Unmotivated

Stubborn

Aggressive

Disruptive

Impulsive

Inattentive

Could do better if only he tried harder

Stage-Appropriate behavior

Temperament

Conditioned Response

Developmental D/O

Basic principles

- **"Behavior" is what organisms do to stay alive and pass on their DNA**
  - Forage, eat, sleep, mate, prey / avoid danger, etc.

Basic principles

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- **Mother Nature doesn't waste energy**

Basic principles

- **"Behavior" is what organisms do to stay alive and pass on their DNA**
  - Forage, eat, sleep, mate, prey / avoid danger, etc.
- **Mother Nature doesn't waste energy**
- **"Normal behaviors" (including "problem behaviors") always *serve a function***

Basic Principles

- **"Normal Behavior Problems"**
  - Behaviors that are seen in most children, at predictable ages, and do not signify an underlying neurodevelopmental or emotional disorder.

"Normal" Problem Behaviors

- **Noncompliance**
- **Tantrums**
- **Sibling Rivalry / Peer Rivalry**
- **Mild verbal & physical aggression**
- **Lying**
- **Stealing**

Basic Principles

- **What looks like "misbehavior" to an adult may be developmentally normal (rather than "bad")**
  - This doesn't mean the adult should "give in."
  - Rather, the adult's job is to redirect the behavior, and/or help child reach the next developmental level.
  - "Behavior management" is not the same as "punishment"

Basic Principles

- ➢ **Developmental level matters***
  - Emotional level?
  - Cognitive level?
  - Ability to sustain / regulate attention?
  - Ability to regulate level of arousal?
- **Are my expectations developmentally appropriate?**

  *Piaget, Gesell, Erickson, etc.

Emotional Development

- **Birth – 6 mo:**
  - Child is focused on self, and self-parent relationship for nurture, comfort, security

Sense of Self
(Adapted from Erikson)

- **Identity**
- **Self-confidence: Childhood**
- ➢**Trust: Infancy**
  - – **I cry, and my mother meets my needs**
  - – *The world is a safe place.*
  - – *I can go to people for help when I need it.*

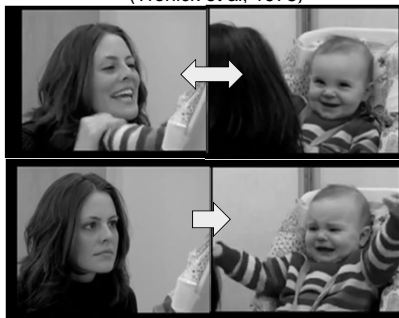© James Coplan, 2013.   www.drcoplan.com

Mary Cassat, 1906

Harry Harlow (1905-1981)

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=weXEaTKckzY

Still Face Experiment
(Tronick et al, 1978)

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=apzXGEbZht0

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Emotional Development

- **7-12 mo:**
  - – **Begins to differentiate self from others**
    - • **Peek-a-boo**
    - • **Stranger anxiety**

Emotional Development

- **12-24 months:**
  - **Differentiation of self from others continues**
    - **Hide-and-seek**
    - **"Striving for autonomy"**
    - **Very egocentric. Limited ability to take other person's point of view**
    - **"Every child wants not just the love of its parents, but the *exclusive* love of its parents" – Selma Fraiberg**

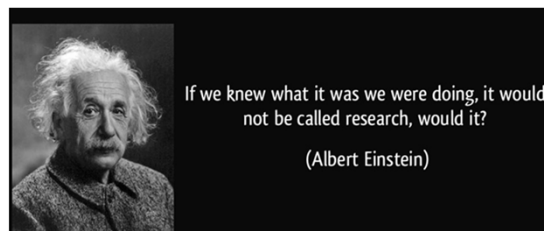**The Magic Years: Understanding and Handling the Problems of Early Childhood**

Emotional Development

- **24-36 months**
  - **Emerging ability to take another person's point of view**
  - **Emerging ability to reflect / introspect on own point of view / emotions ("I feel…")**

Sense of Self

- **Identity**
- ➤ **Self-confidence: Childhood**
  - **The sum total of all of one's successes +**
  - **Successful recovery from life's bumps**
  - *I can do it!*
  - *(And if I don't quite succeed, it will not kill me!)*
- **Trust**

If we knew what it was we were doing, it would not be called research, would it?

(Albert Einstein)

Emotional Development

- **3-5**
  - **Better able to take other person's point of view (empathy)**
  - **Better able to identify and regulate own emotional state**

Sense of Self

➢ **Identity**
  - **Adolescence**
    - **Who am I and where do I fit into the world?**
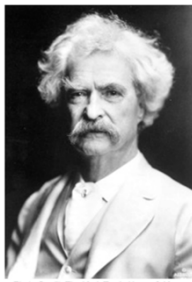   - ***I am a person of worth***
- **Self-confidence**
- **Trust**

Photo Credit: The Mark Twain House & Museum

"When I was sixteen, my father was so ignorant I could hardly stand to have the old man around. I was astonished at how much the old man had learned by the time I turned 21."

Developmental Considerations

Age	0-1	1-2	2-3	3-4	4-5
Emotional	No sense of self v. other	Self v. other; Autonomy	Gradual ♠ ability to take other person's POV		Able to infer & predict others' feelings
Cognitive	Object permanence	Tools (spoon & fork), simple cause & effect	More complex cause & effect	Things have rules	and rules have exceptions!
Attention	Brief / Stimulus-driven		Improving ability to delay responses, and predict outcomes		
Play	Midline hand play, Banging & mouthing	Crayons, stacking & dumping	Simple imitative play; parallel	Make-believe play; interactive	Rule-based play; team play
Language	Coo, babble, Mama/Dada	SW's, 2-wd phrases	3-5 wd phrases, simple "wh" questions	Verbal humor, Fibbing, "Why?" q's	"What if…?"

Theory of Mind

- **Realization that other people have an internal mental & emotional state, different from one's own**
- **Ability to gauge the internal mental & emotional state of others**
  - **Able to infer motives & predict behavior of others**
  - **Empathy**
  - **Humor**

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Theory of Mind (ToM)

Muff

Muff is a little yellow kitten.
She drinks milk.
She sleeps on a chair.
She does not like to get wet.

Q: How would Muff feel, if you gave her a bath?

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Theory of Mind

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Basic Principles

- **Developmental level matters:**
  - **"Non-compliance"**
    - **0-12 months: Not a consideration**
    - **12-48 months: A normal, healthy behavior**
    - **>48 Months: "He should be over this by now"**
      - Developmental delay?
      - Other neurodevelopmental disorder?
        - ASD (impaired Theory of Mind; rigid)
        - ADHD (lack of impulse control)
        - Anxiety D/O (perfectionism / need for completion)
        - Mood D/O (hypervigilant / hyperreactive)

The Art of War
Sun Tsu

The supreme art of war is to subdue the enemy without fighting

Avoiding Non-Compliance in preschoolers (~24-48 mo)

- **Premack Principle*: First X, *then* Y**
- **Active Listening: You would *like* to do Y… but right now we can't. (Acknowledge and validate child's feelings, w/o giving in to their demands)**
- **Give 3 advance warnings before ending / switching tasks**
- **Use Visual Schedules**

* Where X is the less-preferred activity, and Y is the more-preferred activity.
Named for David Premack, PhD., 1925-2015

The Art of War
Sun Tsu

Know your enemy and know yourself, and in 100 battles you will never be defeated

Know yourself

If you…	….then you should:
Need to be in control at all times	avoid *unnecessary* confrontations, while still filling your role as "the adult" in the room.
Want your students to "understand" why they need to act a certain way, and/or feel a need to "punish" misbehavior	avoid inadvertently reinforcing unwanted behavior by engaging in excessive "explanations" and/or reprimands (all = attention)
Tend to plan ahead	be prepared to be flexible
Tend NOT to plan ahead	use visuals to help yourself as well as your students to stay on track

Basic Principles

• **Environment also matters***
  – **What is the function of the behavior?**
  – **Has this child been getting reinforcement for this behavior at home?**
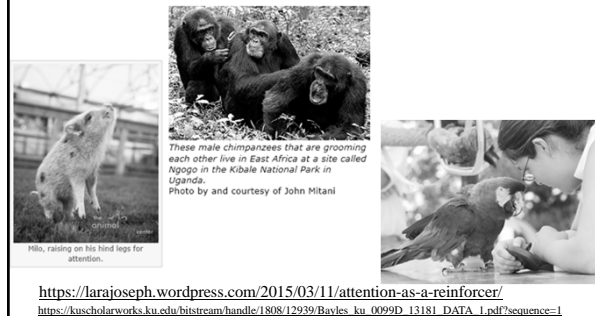
* Watson, Thorndike, Skinner, Lovaas, etc.

Basic principles

• *Functions of behavior:*
  – *Survival* ◆➤ *Psychological or Physical Gratification*
    • *Attention*
    • *Access*   Typical focus of Behaviorism (measurable)
    • *Escape*
    • *Security*
    • *Mastery*   Equally important but often overlooked!
    • *Pleasure*

"Attention" serves many functions

• **Mother or Mother Surrogate**
  – **Survival / Security / Trust**
• **Mother & Other adults**
  – **Self-validation / Self-esteem**
• **Peers**
  – **Play / Grooming**
  – **Dominance & Submission rituals**
  – **Hierarchy / Group behavior / Survival**

"Attention" as a reinforcer

These male chimpanzees that are grooming each other live in East Africa at a site called Ngogo in the Kibale National Park in Uganda.
Photo by and courtesy of John Mitani

Milo, raising on his hind legs for attention.

https://larajoseph.wordpress.com/2015/03/11/attention-as-a-reinforcer/
https://kuscholarworks.ku.edu/bitstream/handle/1808/12939/Bayles_ku_0099D_13181_DATA_1.pdf?sequence=1

Attention-Seeking

• **Children learn how to get attention according to how they are reinforced**
  – **If a child is ignored when behaving well, and only attended to when behaving badly, he/she will learn that they need to misbehave in order to get attention**
  – **Tragedy: Children who are abused may continue to seek parental attention (in the form of abuse), because it's the only kind of attention they know**

Ostracism: The ultimate punishment

Attention is necessary for survival

- "He's just doing that for attention."

Attention is necessary for human survival

- "He's just doing that for attention. How sad he doesn't know a better way."
- It's usually better to teach what *to* do rather than what *not* to do

"Access"

- Emotional Needs
- Physical Needs
  - Food
  - Shelter
- Desired objects / activities
  - Toys

Escape

- From physical situations
  - Cage / electric shock
  - Other aversive physical stimuli
- From psychological distress
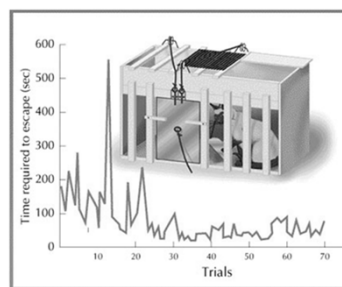 - Blame / Self-blame
  - Loneliness
  - Etc.

Edward Thorndike
(1874 –1949)

Animal Intelligence: An Experimental Study of the Associative Processes in Animals (Columbia University, Doctoral Dissertation, 1898)

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Edward_Thorndike

Thorndike 1905

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Puzzle_box.jpg

Law of Effect
Animal Intelligence. Edward Thorndike, 1911

" Of several [possible] responses…to the same situation, those which are…closely followed by satisfaction to the animal will…be more likely to recur. Those which are…followed by discomfort to the animal will…be less likely to occur. The greater the satisfaction or discomfort, the great the strengthening or weakening of the bond"

Skinner, ca. 1950

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SUwCgFSb6Nk&NR=1&feature=endscreen

Operant Conditioning
Skinner

• ***Experimental manipulation of the consequences for a given behavior (by the subject) alters probability that that behavior will recur.***

The ABC's of Behavior Analysis

Antecedent

⇓

Behavior

⇓

Consequence

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Antecedents

• **External:**
  – **Imposition of a task**
  – **Change in routine**
  – **Denial of access to object or activity**
  – **Other….**
  – **Or: No apparent external antecedent**

Antecedents

• **Internal:**
  – **Hunger / Thirst**
  – **Arousal**
  – **Anxiety / Perfectionism**
  – **Other….**

Behavior

- "Topography"
  - "What does the behavior look like?"
    - Verbal "defiance"
    - Task refusal (Better: Non-performance)
    - Flopping
    - Property destruction
    - SIB (describe)
    - Eloping
    - Etc…

Behavior

- What is the child's developmental level?
- Is the behavior normal for the child's developmental level?
  - Tantrums / Noncompliance
  - "Impulsivity" / "Inattention"

Behavior

- What is the child's ability to communicate?
  - Does "disruptive" behavior serve a communicative function?

Behavior

- Acute change or chronic?
- General health?
  - Vital signs, I&O, Level of consciousness
  - Pain?
- Anything new in child's life?
  - Recent change of meds

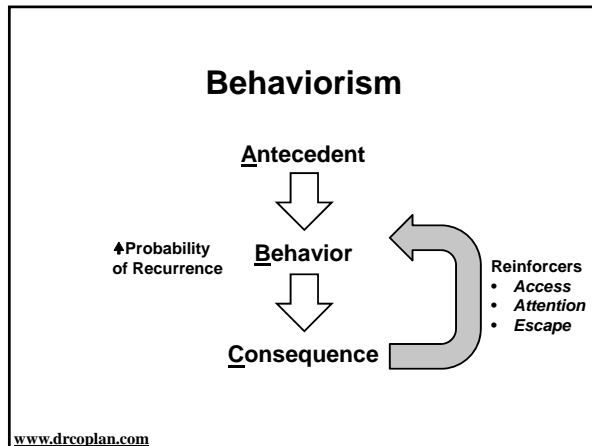### Consequences

1. Reinforcers
   a) Positive
   b) Negative
2. Aversives ("Punishments")

Consequences 1: Reinforcers

- Reinforcers: ↑Recurrence of antecedent behavior
  - Positive Reinforcement (adds something)
    - Access (to food, desired objects)
    - Attention
  - Negative Reinforcement (removes something)
    - Excused from task
    - Removal of non-preferred food
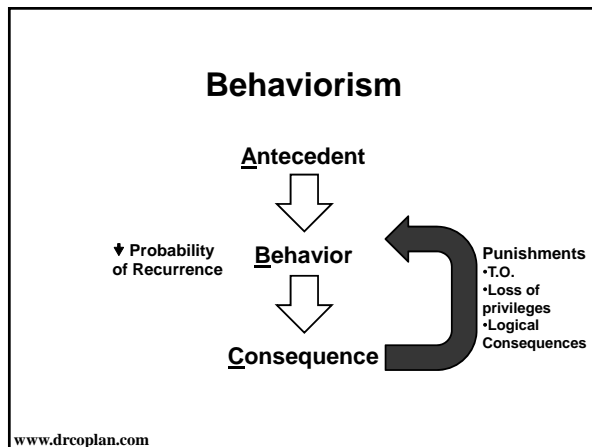   - *Negative Reinforcement is not "punishment"*

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                                                                  Page 11

Behaviorism

Antecedent

⬇

Behavior

⬇

Consequence

⬆**Probability of Recurrence**

Reinforcers
• *Access*
• *Attention*
• *Escape*

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Consequences 2: Aversives

- **Aversives: ⬇Recurrence of antecedent behavior**
  - **Loss of attention (Time Out)**
  - **Logical Consequences ➜ Overcorrection**
    - **If child refuses to use toilet, child must wear backpack with spare clothes when in public**
    - **If the child spills milk on purpose, child must mop the entire kitchen floor**
  - **Punishment**
    - **Loss of privileges**
    - **Verbal**
    - **Physical**   **Besides being ethically questionable and possibly detrimental, these both constitute attention – a r*einforce* !**

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Behaviorism

Antecedent

⬇

Behavior

⬇

Consequence

⬇ **Probability of Recurrence**

Punishments
•T.O.
•Loss of privileges
•Logical Consequences

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Food Selectivity
Negative and Positive Reinforcement of unwanted behavior

- **Parent removes non-preferred food ([-] reinforcement)**
- **Parent provides child with his/her preferred food ([+] reinforcement)**
- **Alternatives**
  - *First …..Then*
  - **Put refusal on extinction**
  - **The kitchen is *closed* between meals**
  - **Desensitization (non-preferred food is on table, on plate, touch, lick, mouth, eat)**

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⚠ WARNING!

Never rock or tilt. Machine can fall over and cause serious injury or death.

Extinction and the Extinction Burst

- **Extinction: "The process of no longer providing the reinforcement that has been maintaining a behavior."**
- **Extinction burst: "A sudden and temporary increase in the response's frequency, followed by the eventual decline and extinction of the behavior targeted for elimination."**

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Extinction_(psychology)

Disruptive Behavior: Function & Best Response

- **Attention**
  - 1-2-3 ➡ "Time Out" (T.O.)
- **Access**
  - *Never* grant access to desired object in response to disruptive behavior
- **Escape**
  - *Never* permit the child to escape from a task via disruptive behavior.
    - Walk child through task first, *then* ➡ T.O.
    - OR: Send child to T.O., and as soon as T.O. is complete, resume the task where you left off.
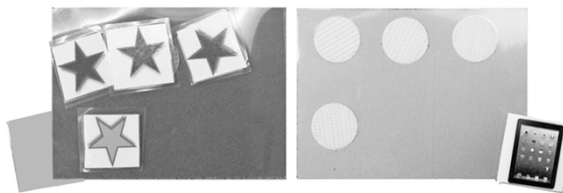
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Token Economy: The next step beyond Time Out

- **Concretely specified behaviors**
- **Earn and Lose Points**
- **Points ➡ Access to preferred items**
  - Preferred toys, Computer time, etc.
  - *NO access to preferred item at other times*
  - "Extra" treats not as effective
- **Works with children who understand rule-based play (CandyLand, Uno, etc.)**

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Token Economy

Age: 4 1/2

BK
11-0741

Camp David
Trading Post Rules

Rewards		Fees	
Good Day	+30	Bad Day	0
Doing Chore - Each	+10	Cursing - Each Time	-20
Doing a Good Deed	+10	Disrespect Parents	-10
Compliment About You	+10	Lies - Each	-20
Do Morning Work (NO Whining)	+10	Don't Do Morning Work (Whining)	-10
Do Pre-Bedtime Checklist	+5	Don't Do Pre-Bedtime Checklist	-5
		Ask More Than Once	-5
		Touch Another Kid or Being Mean	-10

Red = 5   White = 10   Blue = 50
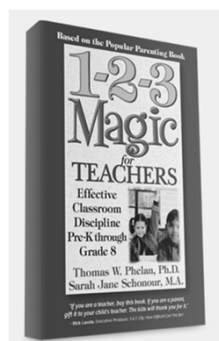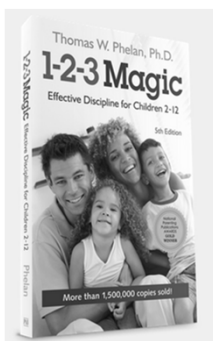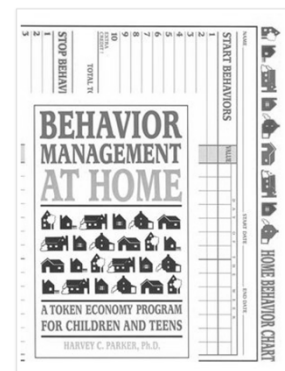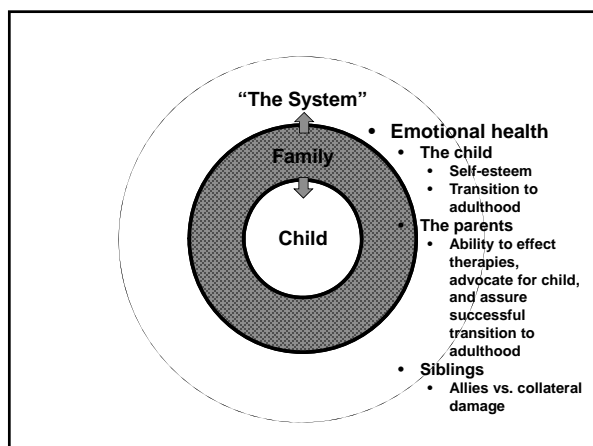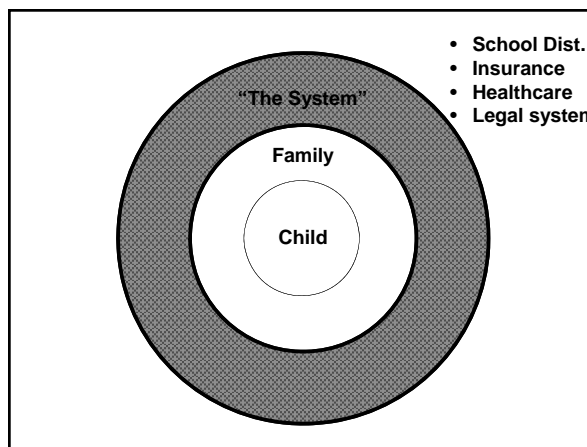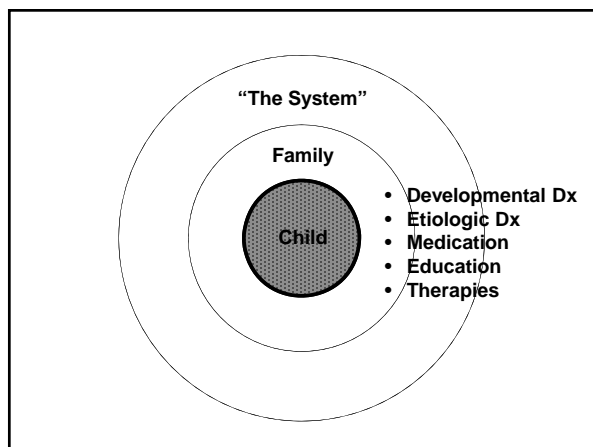

http://www.123magic.com/

THE 10 DEMANDMENTS OF BEHAVIOR MANAGEMENT
1. Always treat youngsters with respect and preserve their dignity.
2. Always do what is in the students' best interests.
3. Seek solutions, not blame.
4. Model tolerant, patient, dignified, and respectful behavior.
5. Use the least intrusive intervention possible.
6. Connect with your students and build strong personal bonds with them.
7. Instill hope for success (otherwise there is no reason for kids to behave in your class).
8. NEVER do anything disrespectful, illegal, immoral, ineffective, bad for health/safety, or you wouldn't want done to you.
9. NEVER give up on a student. Be perturbed with the actions of a student, but keep believing in his/her ability to change for the better.
10. CATCH KIDS BEING GOOD . . . A LOT!!

http://www.behavioradvisor.com/Primer.html

Sometimes

The Unit of Treatment is the Family

"The System"

Family

Child

- Developmental Dx
- Etiologic Dx
- Medication
- Education
- Therapies

"The System"

Family

Child

- School Dist.
- Insurance
- Healthcare
- Legal system

"The System"

Family

Child

- **Emotional health**
  - **The child**
    - Self-esteem
    - Transition to adulthood
  - **The parents**
    - Ability to effect therapies, advocate for child, and assure successful transition to adulthood
  - **Siblings**
    - Allies vs. collateral damage

Signs of Family Mental Health

- **Systemic support for emotional development of all members**
- **Flexibility**
  - Shifting alliances (adults vs. kids, "boys vs. girls," etc.)
  - Shifting roles (role of "hero" or "in the doghouse")
  - Shifting solutions (one size does not fit all; "equitable" vs. "equal")
  - Shifting combinations for activities. All legitimate combinations should come up once in a while.
- **Sense of humor / playfulness**

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Danger Signs

- **Inflexibility**
  - Fixed roles
  - Fixed solutions
- **Hypervigilance**
  - Lack of trust in care providers
- **Social Isolation**
  - "Circle the wagons"
  - "Nobody helps us!"

Where is the problem?

- The person with the identified "problem" may not be the actual source of the difficulty
- The family system itself is often out of balance

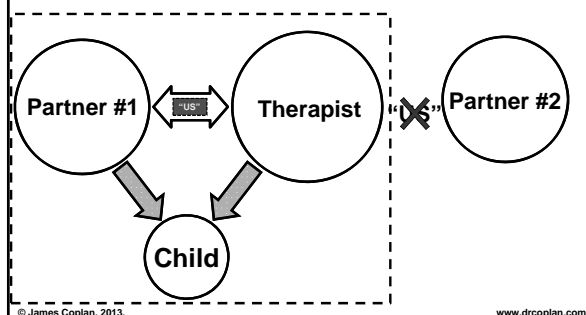© James Coplan, 2013. www.drcoplan.com

My secret weapon

"House Rules"

- **Both parents must be present for evaluation & counseling**
- **Exceptions:**
  - One parent is:
    - Incarcerated
    - Deceased
    - In the armed forces stationed overseas
    - Unknown (anonymous sperm/egg donor)

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How professionals do unintended harm
(Parent-Therapist bond replaces marital bond)

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Probe Questions

- **What do you think about *X*?**
- **What do you think about what your partner just said?**
  - It's OK to comment on what your partner says, but not on your partner directly (no personal attacks)
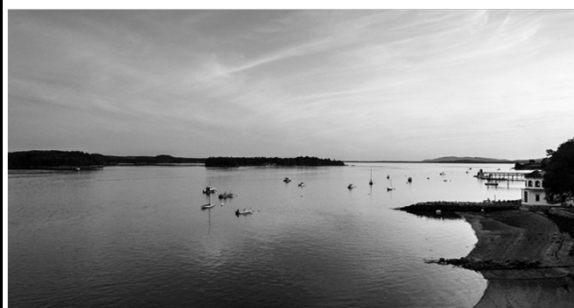- **OR (if partner is absent): If your partner were here, what would he/she have to say?**

http://www.aamft.org

AAMFT
American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy

Find a Marriage and Family Therapist

Summary

- **"Normal" problem behaviors are seen in most children at predictable ages**
- **Apply Positive Reinforcement for desired behaviors**
  - It's always better to teach a child what *to* do, rather than what *not* to do!
  - Self-esteem comes from mastery of new skills, successful completion of tasks, and recovery from minor setbacks. Most children want to succeed (or can be taught to want to).
- **Persistent behavioral issues beyond their expected peak ages should raise questions of developmental or family dysfunction**

Additional resources

- http://www.zerotothree.org/
- http://familychildcareacademy.com/basic-theories-and-principles-of-child-development/
- http://lrrpublic.cli.det.nsw.edu.au/lrrSecure/Sites/LRRView/7401/documents/theories_outline.pdf
- https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Child_development
- http://challengingbehavior.fmhi.usf.edu/explore/presentation_docs/9.04_addressing_challenging.pdf
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Thank you!