

Help at Home:

Strategies to Improve Eating & Sleeping Habits
for Children with Autism

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Melissa completed her training in Applied Behavior Analysis at the Munroe Meyer Institute's Center for Autism Spectrum Disorders.

There, she gained valuable experience in the application of Behavior Analytic principles in the assessment and treatment of severe problem behaviors and the application of early intensive behavioral intervention (EIBI) in the treatment of Autism Spectrum Disorders.

During this time, she also earned a Master's of Arts degree from University of Nebraska at Omaha in Psychology.

Today's Agenda

- **Understanding Behaviors**
- **Become a Behavior Detective**
- **Managing Certain Behaviors**
 - **Mealtime**
 - **Bedtime**



Understanding Behaviors

To understand a behavior, it's important to identify why the behavior is occurring

ABCs of Behavior



Antecedent

What happened prior to the behavior occurring?



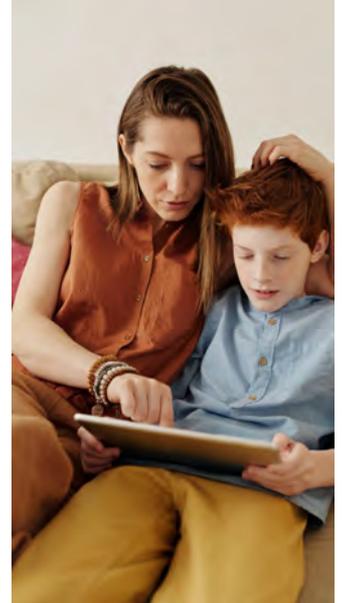
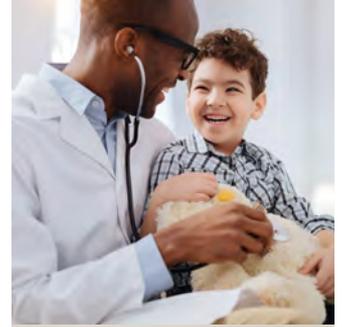
Behavior

What is the behavior?



Consequence

What happened after the behavior occurred?



ABC

- Typical Antecedents:
 - Demands
 - Diverted Attention
 - Restricted Access
 - Transitions
 - Waiting



ABC

- Behavior of Concern:
 - Behavior is learned
 - Define the behavior



ABC

- Consequences:
 - Positive Reinforcement
 - Negative Reinforcement
 - Extinction
 - Punishment
- Differential Reinforcement



ABC observation can help you determine **why** a behavior is occurring, and, ultimately, help you work with your child on a new response.



Behavior happens for a reason – some detective work is required

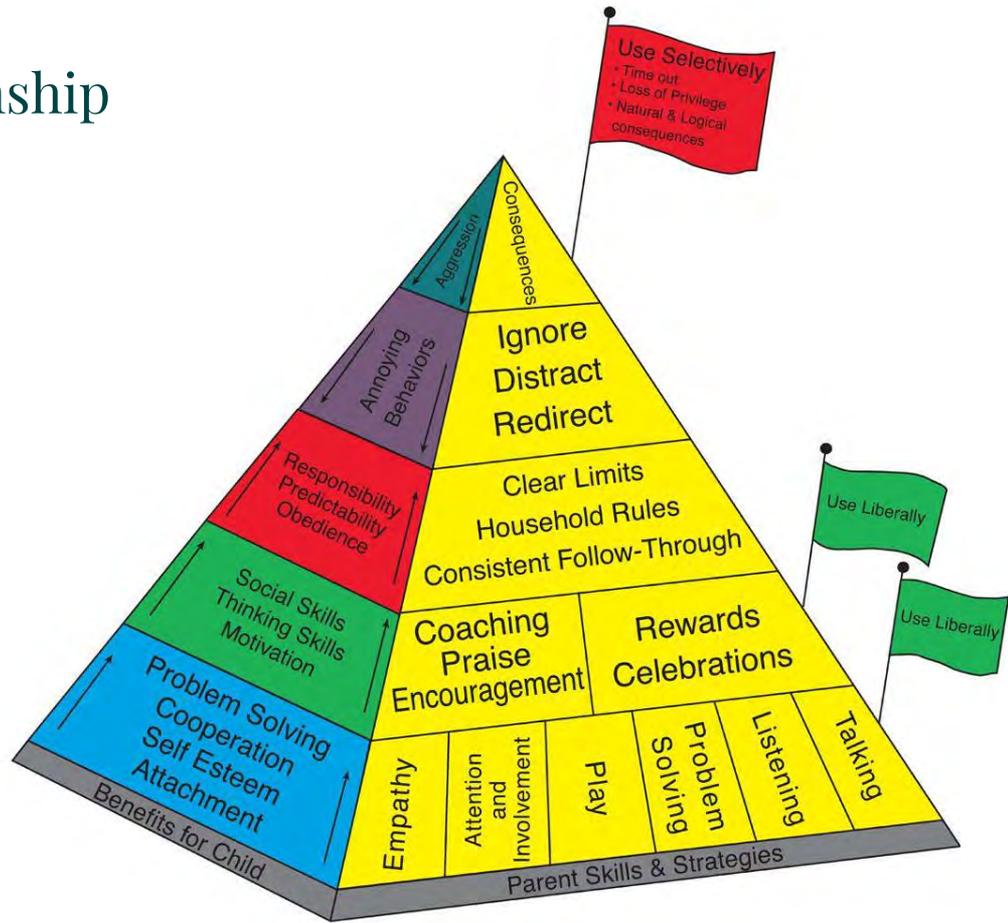
Sample ABC Chart

Antecedent	Behavior	How long did it last?	How intense?	Consequence
What Happened just before? What time of day? Where?			Low to High	What happened just after?
7:30 before bedtime I told David to clean up his toys	He threw his toys at his brother	15 seconds	High	I raised my voice and David picked up his toys



Managing Certain Behaviors

The Parent-Child Relationship



Source: The Incredible Years, 2022

“Catch them when they are good”

Differential reinforcement



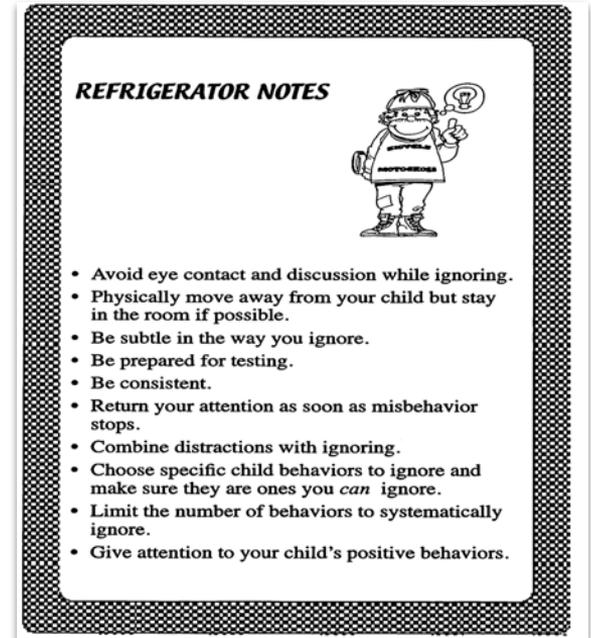
When you see positive behavior, praise it!

- **Nonverbal praise** – positive facial expressions and gestures (**smiling**)
- **Verbal praise** – statements indicating approval (**“Nice job!”**)
- **Specific praise** – a praise statement with a description of the appropriate behavior and skill labeling (**“Awesome job picking up your toys and following my directions!”**)
- **Effective praise** – a praise statement, description of appropriate behavior, skill labeling, and consequence (**“Awesome job picking up your toys and following my directions! Now we can take a break!”**)

When you see negative behavior, ignore it!

- **Behaviors to ignore** – behaviors such as pouting, sulking, screaming, swearing, and arguing are good candidates for ignoring
- **Selective ignoring** – a child might show positive and negative behaviors during the same activity; selective ignoring is when a parent praises or rewards positive behavior and ignores negative behavior

If a behavior could lead to physical harm, property destruction, or intolerable disruption of an ongoing activity, then the ignoring technique **should not be used**.



Source: *The Incredible Years*, 2022

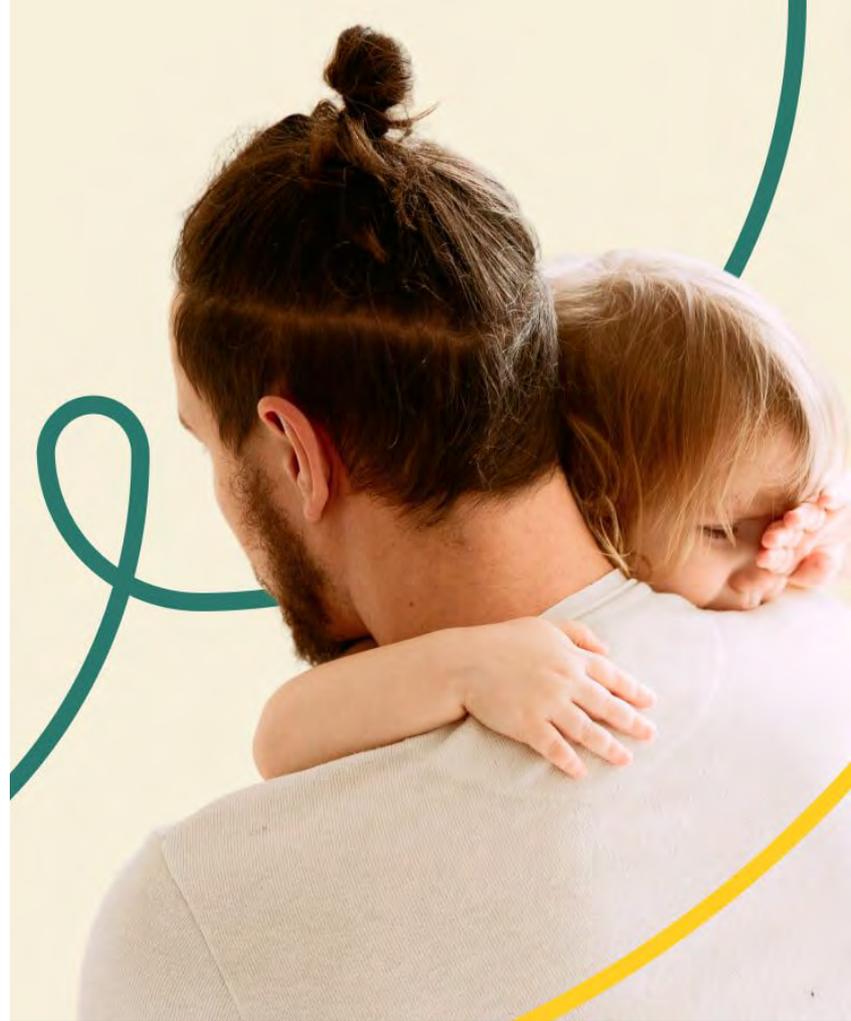
How to communicate effective commands:

- Be Clear
- Be Brief
- Be Positive
- Be Action-Oriented
- Be Consistent



Behavior management can be a compromise

There has to be some room for compromise; if the child cleaned up some of their room, but not all, maybe that's good enough to deliver positive reinforcement.



Managing Certain Behaviors

Mealtime

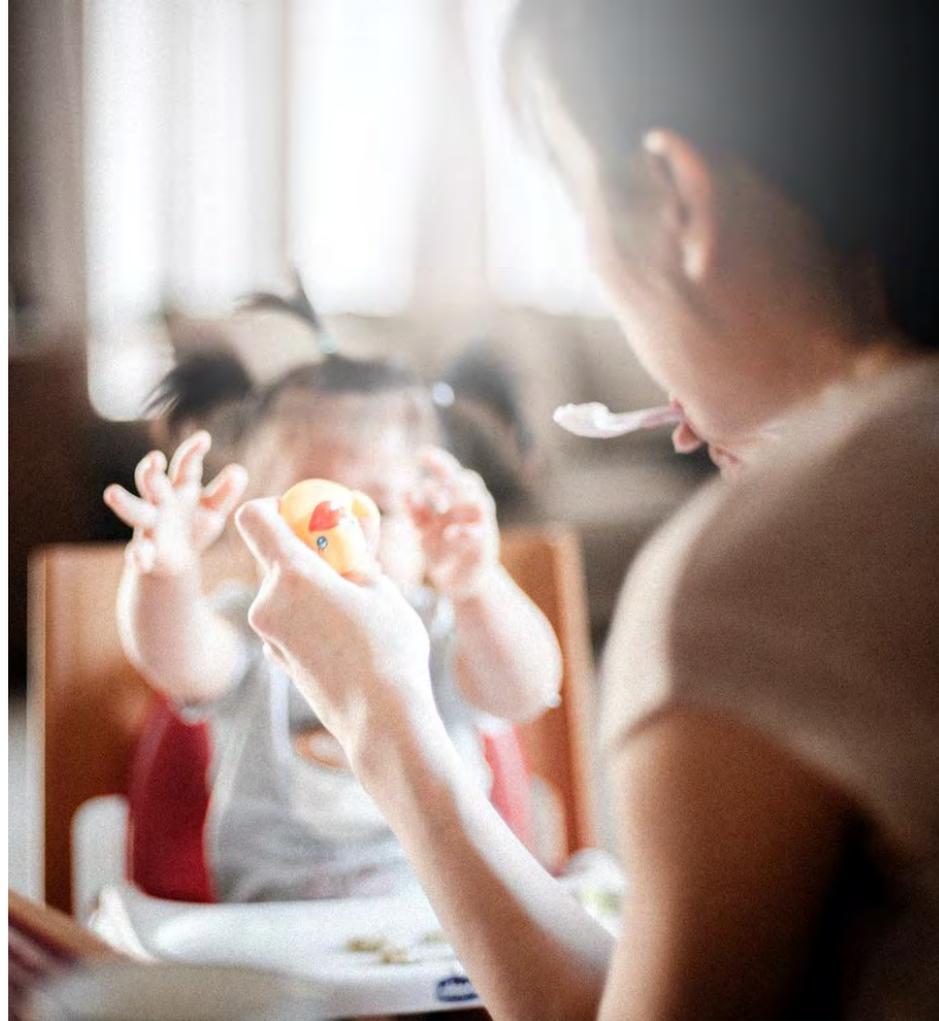
Keep mealtime consistent by structuring the meal

- Serve meals close to the same time each day, in designated eating areas
- Consider a time-based or portion-based structure
 - Length of time or # of bites
- Encourage good mealtime behaviors
 - “Great job trying that new food”
- Identify food and liquid type
 - Bolus size



Proactive mealtime considerations

- Can you establish pre-meal rules?
- Do you have a predictable routine in place?
- Do you model positive behavior?
- Can you minimize table/area distractions?
- Can you prepare the food according to preference?
 - Portion/bite size
 - Texture



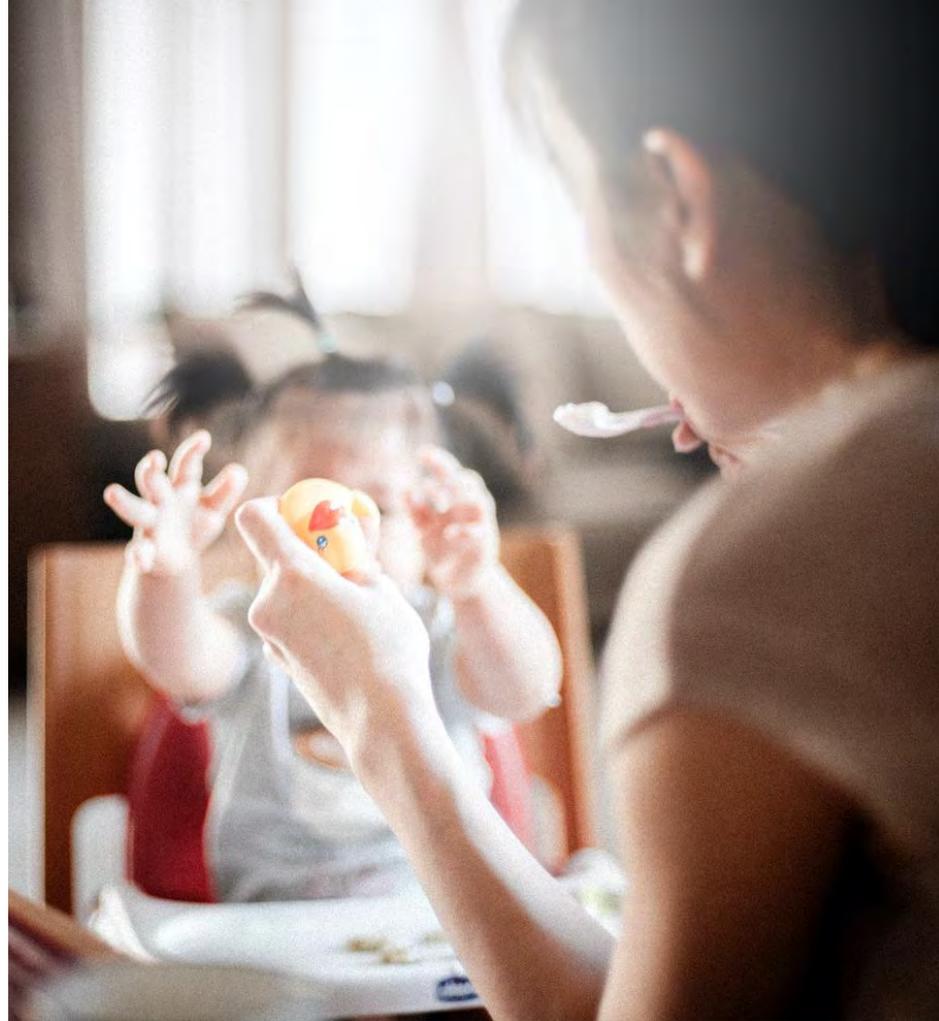
Premack Principle: pairing preferred with non-preferred foods

Principle states that a child will be more likely to perform a non-preferred task if it's followed up with a preferred task.



Managing food selectivity

- Block reaching
- Ignore head turning
- Hold bite or drink at midline
- Reintroduce expelled food
- Pair meal with reinforcement
- Decrease avoidant behaviors by:
 - Monitoring texture, utensil size, and bolus size



When to introduce new foods?

After a meal time routine has been established is ideal.

- Considerations:
 - History
 - Texture
 - Food group
- Consistency is key!



Shaping - little steps

- Gradually reinforcing “successive approximations” of a target behavior.
 - Behavioral hierarchy
 - Reward tastes vs. bites

- Gradually shape acceptance of larger quantities of food by type and/or texture.
 - Texture fading

Managing Certain Behaviors

Bedtime

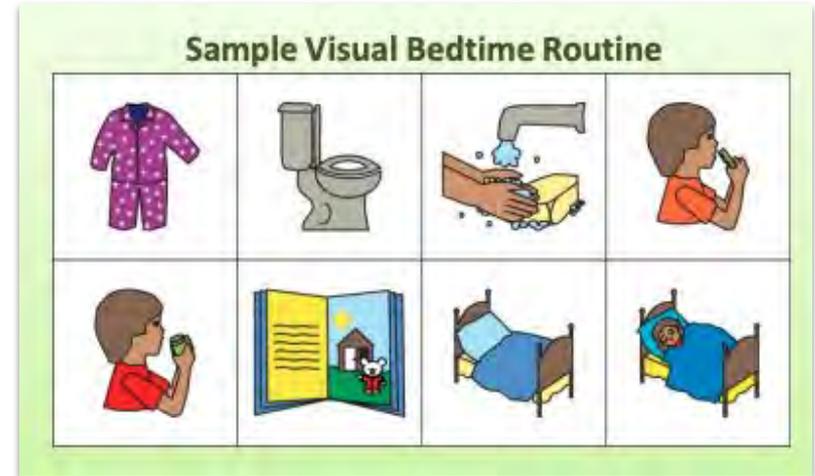
Why do kids need a good night's sleep?

Poor sleep has a negative impact on a child's:

- Mood
- Fatigue
- Compliance
- Accidents
- Learning
- Problem behavior (aggression, self-injurious behavior)
- Associated health problems (obesity, anxiety)
- Long-term development

Setting a bedtime routine can help

- 30 – 90 minutes before bedtime
- Sleep Hygiene
 - Removal of Distracting Items
 - Dim Lights
 - Comfortable
 - Low noise
 - Avoid high stimulation activities
 - Deep breathing
 - Security blanket/ stuffed animal
 - Go to bed when tired
- Consistency is key!



Source: Autism Treatment Network, 2022

Ignoring inappropriate bedtime behavior is key

- Time-based check-ins
- Returning to bed
- Early Wakening
 - no naps

Bedtime fading

Night	Bedtime
Nights 1 and 2	10.30pm
Nights 3 and 4	10.15pm
Nights 5 and 6	10.00pm
Nights 7 and 8	9:45pm
Nights 9 and 10	9.30pm
Nights 11 and 12	9.15pm
Nights 13 and 14	9.00pm

“Camping Out” proximity fading



Bedtime pass to help a child stay in bed

For children who have difficulty staying in bed, a bedtime pass can help.

- Given to child at bedtime
- May be exchanged for one “free” trip out of bed or one parent visit after bedtime
- If child does not use card, they can exchange the card for a special reward the next morning



Source: Boys Town, 2022



Thank you!

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