Family Favorite 2020 WINNER

Avoid Heatstroke

Behavior Problems at Home? We Have the Solutions
We are all feeling a bit overwhelmed these days as we adjust to the "new normal" created by the COVID-19 crisis. Parents who are working from home while also caring for and helping to educate their children may feel they do not have enough time or patience to successfully manage all of their demanding roles—especially if the children are misbehaving.

Many parents may have noticed their children acting out more during these long days at home. They may fight with siblings, neglect their studies, and refuse to help around the house. Children with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) or other special needs may engage in more serious aggressive (e.g., hitting, pinching, kicking), disruptive (e.g., throwing things, breaking items), and self-injurious (e.g., self-biting, head-banging) behaviors.

One reason for an increase in challenging behavior could be that regular routines and schedules have fallen by the wayside. Parents may think that allowing children to have more free time will help them cope with staying home. However, it is important for kids to keep busy and have a regular daily routine with fixed times for self-care, work, play and exercise, eating, resting, etc.

Another reason children with ASD may engage in more significant challenging behavior could be that they are struggling to communicate and perhaps not getting something they want or need. In many cases, this may be your attention. If you are busy on a work call or helping a sibling, a burst of challenging behavior such as throwing an iPad or a quick pinch can certainly draw focus!

In addition to encouraging communication, I would recommend checking in with your child often, even when she seems engaged. For example, set a timer to go off every two-to-five minutes to remind you to praise her for keeping busy. Being proactive in providing attention can help eliminate her need to act out.
In addition to providing tokens and tangible rewards when your child stays on task or gets the right answer, it is also important to give him or her lots of praise, tickles, hugs, and high fives.

I would also recommend the following:

Make changes to your environment if needed to keep yourself and your child safe. You may have to block off rooms, set up a safe area, or remove items from a room.

Try not to comment on challenging behavior. Try not to say, “don’t do that,” or “why are you doing that?”, or “stop or you’ll hurt yourself.” Give the problem behavior as little attention as possible.

If you are helping facilitate your child’s learning from home, try not to ask too much too quickly. Make sure his work sessions are short and provide regular breaks. You can gradually increase the length of those sessions.

It can be helpful to have some kind of a visual support that your child can look at to see what he or she needs to do before earning a “reward” such as a special snack or time with an iPad. For example, your child can earn tokens to take a break on the computer.

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We hope that these tips help your family to get through this challenging time as we wait for guidance and continue to plan for our eventual return to school. Please do not hesitate to reach out to your child’s team if you need additional support.

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Center-based services for toddlers and young children
Early intervention services
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During this time of COVID-19, May Institute is operating programs at a reduced capacity as needed and with all recommended safety precautions in place. We are also providing telehealth services as appropriate.

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