

POSITIVE OPPOSITES and PLANNED IGNORING

Reinforce positive behavior by focusing on **positive opposites** or **catching them being good**. You do this by identifying the positive opposite of a challenging behavior and praising that behavior. For example, if you want your child not to throw toys, praise them and provide lots of positive attention whenever they play nicely with their toys. This way, you attend to (and reinforce) positive behaviors instead of giving attention to the problem behavior. You may need to praise even very short instances of the positive opposite at first! By using positive opposites, you help your child replace a less preferred behavior with a more preferred behavior.

You can praise behavior by saying “thank you for _____” or “I love how you’re _____” or even use the “thank you” jingle from SERENADE music class. You can also reinforce the positive behavior by helping your child get what they want more quickly when they engage in the positive behavior (e.g., ignoring them while they yell but providing what they want as soon as they use words or a gesture or a visual cue). Smiles and hugs also provide positive attention.

It’s also helpful to **give positive directions** – if a child is engaging in a problem behavior, it may be because they don’t know what else they could be doing. Instead of telling a child what *not* to do (e.g., “Don’t jump on the couch!” or “Don’t yell!”), tell them what they can do (e.g., “You can jump on the floor” or “Now it’s time to play with blocks” or “Please use your quiet voice!”). You may need to use prompts to help your child transition to the new activity. This way, you are again giving attention to what you want your child to be doing rather than to the problem behavior that you want to replace.

Some examples of potential problem behaviors and their positive opposites:

Problem Behavior	Positive Opposite
Yelling	Quiet voice, nice voice, using picture
Throwing/Breaking toys	Playing with toys (e.g., driving car; building blocks)
Hitting	Gentle hands; using your words
Ignoring/stalling	Following directions; listening ears
Leaving toys out	Cleaning up toys
Slamming door	Quietly closing door
Climbing on furniture	Playing on floor
Running in house	Walking
Whining	Using big kid voice

You can combine positive opposites with **planned ignoring**, where you don’t attend to minor problematic behaviors. When ignoring, it is important to stay calm and not provide any attention to your child – don’t look at or talk to them. You may need to leave the room or find another activity to do so you do not accidentally give attention to the problem behavior. As soon as your child stops the problem behavior and acts appropriately, provide them with lots of positive attention. Remember to only use ignoring for minor behaviors, not for behaviors that may be harmful (e.g., hitting).



Provide positive attention to reinforce preferred behavior!