

PARENT HANDOUT: PLANNING AHEAD



WHAT IS PLANNING AHEAD?

- ▶ Planning Ahead is a skill that helps you anticipate when your child may act up and then take steps to decrease the chances that will occur. Planning Ahead involves:
 1. **Identifying the times, places, and/or situations** where your child is likely to misbehave
 2. **Putting strategies in place** to decrease the chances your child will act up (e.g., rewards they can earn for good behavior)
 3. Deciding on **reasonable consequences** your child will face if they exhibit poor behavior (e.g., loses access to electronics for a short period of time)
 4. **Reviewing the plan** with your child ahead of time
- ▶ Planning Ahead focuses your attention on potentially challenging situations, decreases the chances you will feel angry or embarrassed, and supports you in responding to any misbehavior quickly and carefully. Making a plan reduces the chances your child will behave poorly and sets you and your child up for success.
- ▶ This skill is most effective with younger children.

HERE'S HOW TO PLAN AHEAD AT HOME

1

Identify situations that are difficult for your child. Think of the times, places, and/or situations where your child tends to act up. Do they have a harder time when they are hungry, tired, doing a task they dislike, or transitioning between activities? How do they act in public places, such as grocery stores, parks, restaurants, or shopping centers? Do they whine after being in the car for more than 20 minutes? Do they tend to be more difficult to manage right before or after school?

2

When one of these situations is coming up, use the **Planning Ahead worksheet** to create your plan. We have included an example for you.

3

Brainstorm ways you can make the situation easier for your child. For example, will your child be...

- a. **Tired?** Ensure adequate sleep before an event or reschedule if needed (e.g., if your child tends to be well-rested and happy in the morning, schedule doctor's appointments early in the day).
- b. **Hungry?** Schedule activities after meal times or bring snacks along (e.g., take your child to the shopping center after lunch and pack snacks for the trip).
- c. **Bored?** Provide distractions (e.g., give your child a "to do list", like calculating how many different types of cereal there are at the grocery store or playing "I spy" at the post office; bring books or toys to a meal out or on a long drive).
- d. **Overstimulated?** Try to reduce noise, crowds, and factors that make the situation worse (e.g., if your child tends to fight with their siblings over toys, bring a calming toy for each of your children when you visit your neighbor's home and visit at a time when there are less people at home).

4

Pick up to 3 rules you'd like your child to follow. Focus on the rules most important to you during your activity, and don't give more than 3. This maximizes the chances your child will remember and follow them.

5

Choose a reward your child can earn for following these rules. Review the steps in Rewarding Good Behavior (Disruptive Behavior Skill 5). Remember that many rewards can be free, simple, and easy to provide (e.g., stickers, screen time, time outside). Refer to our list of reward ideas for suggestions.

6

Choose a reasonable consequence your child will face if they do not follow these rules. Review the steps in Reasonable Consequences (Disruptive Behavior Skill 6) and refer to our list of examples. Be sure to follow through on delivering consequences if your child does not behave.

7

Discuss the plan with your child before entering the challenging situation. Let your child know what is expected of them (the rules), what they can earn for behaving well (the reward), and what will happen if they misbehave (the consequence). Ask your child to repeat the plan back to you to make sure they understand.

8

Execute your plan, then tweak it for next time. Remember that children who misbehave may act out more when you implement new rules and limits. This may be challenging at first, but as they adapt to new routines and learn that you mean what you say, their behavior will improve. Keep at it. And when your child does well, be sure to praise them for their great behavior! Review Praising Good Behavior (Disruptive Behavior Skill 2) for tips.

Planning Ahead for Ella

Challenging Situation:

Going out to eat

I will prepare for this situation by:

Scheduling meal at her regular dinnertime;
bringing books and a toy from home to keep her busy

I expect my child to follow these rules:

- 1 Sit quietly at the table
- 2 Keep her hands to herself
- 3 Eat with utensils

If my child follows the rules, they can earn this Reward:

15 minutes on computer or tablet

If my child does not follow the rules, they will get this Reasonable Consequence:

Leave the restaurant early and no dessert

Planning Ahead

Challenging Situation (e.g., time, place, event):

I will prepare for this situation (e.g. provide distraction, give a snack, reduce stimulation, do task at different time) by:

I expect my child to follow these rules:

- 1
- 2
- 3

If my child follows the rules, they can earn this Reward:

If my child does not follow the rules, they will get this Reasonable Consequence:

PARENT HANDOUT: PLANNING AHEAD TIPS



HOW CAN PLANNING AHEAD HELP MY FAMILY?

- ▶ One of the most effective ways to reduce children's misbehavior is to anticipate when behavior problems are likely to occur and try to prevent them from happening in the first place.
- ▶ Thinking ahead about when your child's behavior may be particularly challenging allows you to 1) make a plan to decrease the likelihood of misbehavior occurring in those situations, and 2) be ready to respond effectively if your child does misbehave.
- ▶ Without having a plan in place, parents can find themselves responding to bad behavior "on the fly". It can feel stressful, embarrassing, or frustrating to manage children's disruptive behavior in front of other people. This can lead parents to use ineffective discipline strategies that reinforce bad behavior or are too harsh.
- ▶ By Planning Ahead, you have a strategy in place for managing your child in challenging situations. This increases your confidence in handling misbehavior and helps set you and your child up for success.

COMMON PARENT CONCERNS

It's embarrassing when my child acts out in public. I always give in. Sometimes I even end up giving them privileges I don't normally allow!

This is normal! Parents often feel uncomfortable when their child misbehaves in front of others. They usually respond by giving their child what they want so they stop acting out (e.g., allowing candy or electronics to stop tantruming in a store). The problem is, this teaches the child that bad behavior leads to good outcomes, making it more likely they will misbehave in the future. Try to remember that all parents have likely faced this situation, and stick to your plan. If you follow the steps in Planning Ahead, your child will learn it is not okay to act out in those situations and will be less likely to embarrass you in the future.

Behavior problems also occur less often when parents use other effective parenting skills in the Disruptive Behavior guide, such as Praising Good Behavior (Skill 2), Shifting Attention (Skill 3), and Effective Directions (Skill 4). Over time, using skills in this packet will help your child exhibit fewer bad behaviors and more appropriate behaviors. At the same time, you will learn to respond to misbehavior more quickly and effectively.

When my child acts up and I use my plan, they talk back to me or continue misbehaving.

Follow through on your plan. Remind your child what the rules are in a clear and calm manner, what the reward is for good behavior, and what the consequence is for bad behavior. Do your best not to give your child more attention if they are talking back. Try to shift your attention (Shifting Attention, Skill 3).

What should I do if my child acts up and I don't have a plan in place?

This happens to the best of us! Sometimes you don't have time to make a plan, you forget that you're going into a challenging situation, or something happens that you couldn't anticipate. If this happens, use your skills as best as you can. Don't forget that you have other skills in this guide that you can use when your child misbehaves (e.g., Skill 3, Shifting Attention, or Skill 6, Reasonable Consequences).