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the  
**Timely Topics**

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**Changing Your Child's Behavior**

Is your child not able to do something that you would like them to do? Or maybe they can do it but they only do part of the complex behavior? Or, is possible that they can do it, but they just don't do it frequently or consistently enough! If any of these sound familiar (one of those should pretty much apply to every child) then, changing the behavior through what is called shaping is the right technique for you! Shaping is the process of teaching your child new behaviors by reinforcing small steps. Shaping breaks up a complex behavior or chore into smaller steps and then you provide reinforcement for those smaller steps towards the end desired behavior. As mentioned above, shaping works for brand new behaviors, partially learned behaviors, or already learned behaviors that are not completed with consistency.

You may have learned previously how important reinforcement is to increase your child's positive behaviors. It is difficult to provide reinforcement though, if the desired behavior never happens. For this reason, we use shaping to help reinforce the child's approximations of the behavior. Children are reinforced when they try to resemble the final response or components of that final response while gradually progressing. Often the reason why behavioral reinforcement programs do not work is because the parents are requiring too much before providing reinforcement.  
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## Play Activities

Try some of these activities as a way to teach your child how to follow directions this month while working on fine motor skills, gross motor, social skills, or problem solving skills.



Try finger painting with shaving cream on a cookie sheet. Add some food coloring to the shaving cream to spice it up. Have your child draw different shapes, letters, or designs with their fingers. Add some toys for a sensory experience.

Create a tent with an old blanket by draping it over a table. You can pack a "picnic" lunch to eat under there. You could also read some stories and bring flashlights to add an element of fun!

Make a necklace you and your child can eat by stringing cereal on a piece of yarn or string. Wrap a short piece of tape around the end of the string to make it easier for your child to get the string or yarn through the cereal.



Make bubbles. Use 1/4 cup dishwashing liquid (Dawn or Joy works best) and 2 2/3 cups water. Use straws to blow bubbles on a cookie sheet. Or make a wand by stringing two pieces of a drinking straw onto a string or piece of yarn. Tie the ends of the string together to make a circle.



# Changing Behavior (Continued)

Changing behavior through shaping is used all the time and we may not be aware! Shaping is also used to teach animals to do new tricks! Do you think a lion at the circus just automatically jumps through a burning hoop when asked the first time or was its behavior shaped overtime with reinforcement? You might have even used shaping yourself before! Did your baby start saying mommy and daddy right away or did you first provide reinforcement (smiles, hugs, attention) when your child first said ma or da-da? Then as they progressively got closer and closer to saying mommy and daddy you kept changing the targeted sounds that got reinforcement through your smiles and excitement! Another example is that usually children learn to crawl before they learn to walk so the walking behavior is shaped over time.

Shaping is kind of like the game of “hot and cold”. In that game, you reward your child for any steps closer to the prize and not reinforce movements away from the prize. So, if something is hidden in the refrigerator, you are reinforcing any movements in the direction of the refrigerator by yelling “hotter” and removing reinforcement for any movements away from the refrigerator by yelling “colder”.

## Steps for Shaping

1. Select a desired behavior to teach.
2. Select the initial behavior that your child currently performs and that resembles the target behavior in some way.
3. Select powerful rewards with which to reinforce the initial behavior, the small steps towards the desired behavior, and the desired behavior.
4. Reward the initial behavior until it occurs frequently.
5. Reward approximations of the behavior each time they occur.
6. Reward the behavior each time it occurs.
7. Reinforce the behavior on a random schedule of reinforcement once it has been performed consistently.

# Providing Directions To Children

Sometimes as your giving your children directions and want to change their behavior through shaping, you will find that your child may not always comply right away or maybe they still can't physically do the behavior independently yet. That is when this prompting sequence will be useful.

## #2 – Show (Gestures / Model)

The next prompt is to show them what to do or model for them while repeating the instruction or demand. You could say, “clean up the toys like this!” while you model putting away a few toys. If your child complies, provide reinforcement but to a lesser degree than if they complied after the first prompt! If they do not comply within 5-10 seconds, then move on to the next level of prompting.

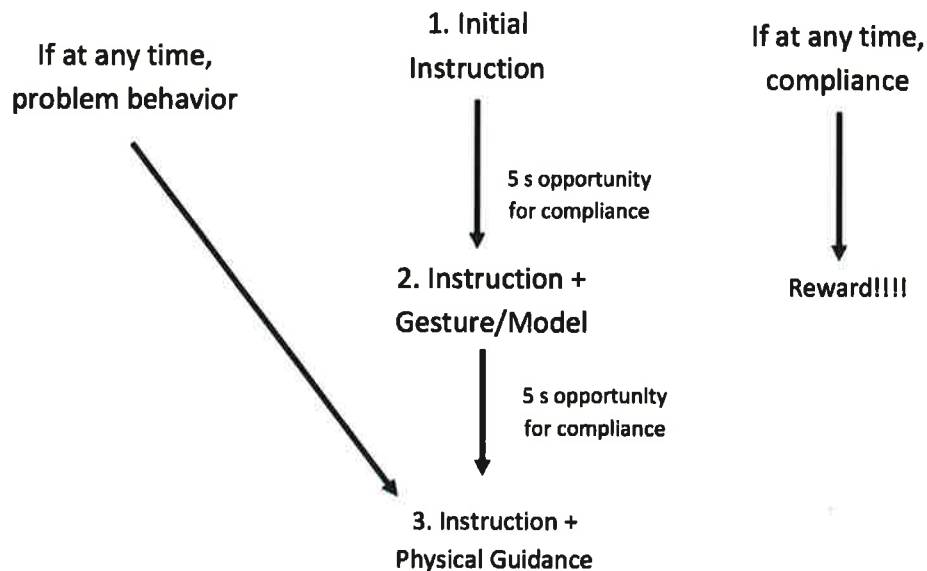
## #1 - Tell (Initial Instruction)

This first step is to give your child a verbal prompt. Tell them what you would like them to do. In other words, give them an instruction or command. If they don't comply within 5-10 seconds, move on to the second level of prompting. If they do comply, give them lots of reinforcement!

## #3 – Do (Physical Guidance)

The final prompt is to help them physically complete the requested behavior while you repeat the demand verbally. For example, go over to your child and physically help them clean up the toys with minimal language and eye contact. Do not stop providing physical assistance until the task is completed. Do not provide praise when the task is done.

3-Step Prompting Chart



# Parent Training!

## TEACHING CHILDREN HOW TO FOLLOW DIRECTIONS!

\*Come to the FREE parent workshop for an interactive experience!

**ADULTS ONLY / NO CHILDREN PLEASE!**

Training: Teaching Children How to Follow Directions

Date: Wednesday, October 24, 2018

Time: 9:45 – 10:45 OR 12:45 – 1:45

Location: Kauri Sue Hamilton School - Child Development Center

2827 West 13400 South Riverton, Utah

RSVP: Please register for the class by email or phone

Email: [Rachelle.blair@jordandistrict.org](mailto:Rachelle.blair@jordandistrict.org)

Phone: (801) 567-8510

**Resources provided by:**

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