

Planned Activities Routines

The local pizzeria is filled with families and friends enjoying a delicious meal when a child starts crying, a parent starts yelling, silverware and glasses come crashing down, other patrons start staring. Everyone looks for the exit...

Many of us have witnessed this scenario. Even more of us have been the main players in this situation. We teach children to count, to read, to write, but we do not think of behavior as something we need to teach. Behavior is definitely something that needs to be taught. The scenario above is known as a “High-Risk Situation”. Taking the family out for pizza at a local restaurant is considered high-risk because there is a higher likelihood of challenging behaviors to occur here than at home. Why is this? One reason is that we have not taught our children HOW to behave during these new activities prior to exposing them to a new situation. Other examples of high-risk situations include going on an airplane, going to the store, having visitors over, or going to an appointment at the doctor.

There are six steps to promote desirable behavior during high risk situations. The steps are provided in the following example:

High-Risk Activity: Going to the Zoo

1. Prepare in Advance: Preparing in advance gives you the chance to think through the upcoming activity and plan ways to avoid meltdowns, conflicts, and distractions.

- » Hold a practice session at home before you leave for the zoo
- » Talk about where you are going. Show a map of the zoo to introduce types of exhibits, animals, layout of the zoo
- » Discuss expectations during your visit
- » Follow the child’s interest regarding exhibits and activities she is excited about and answer any questions
- » Pack snacks
- » Avoid nap times if possible

2. Discuss Rules: Rules provide structure and give the child an understanding of what is expected of their behavior in this specific situation.

- » Make 3 rules
 - The child must stay by an adult at all times
 - The child should ask an adult before touching anything
 - If you get separated from each other, the child should be instructed to go to designated location

High-Risk Activity: Going to the Zoo

3. Select Engaging Activities: When children are engaged they are less likely to misbehave. Engaging activities promote learning as well as keep the child on-task.

- » Make a passport for zoo exhibits
- » Give the child a camera
- » Give the child a map of the zoo and let her lead/decide where she want to visit
- » Plan a picnic

4. Use Rewards for Desirable Behavior: Rewards provide positive reinforcement for following the rules and demonstrating desirable behavior.

- » A souvenir at the gift shop
- » Carousel, train, or other rides
- » Time to play on the playground
- » Verbal praise
- » Use of the camera throughout the zoo visit

5. Use Consequences for Challenging Behavior: Consequences reinforce cause and effect relationship with the child's behavior and her environment.

- » Hold hand or ride in stroller if child is wandering off
- » Quiet time and/or time out
- » No reward

6. Have a Follow-Up Discussion: A discussion following the activity provides an opportunity to ensure the child understands which behaviors you wish to see again in the future and what aspects of behavior need to be improved upon next time.

- » Remind child of reward and why she received that type of reward
- » Explain what went well
- » Discuss what still needs to be improved upon next time
- » Brainstorm ideas for another trip back to the zoo



If you have interest in future opportunities to learn about managing challenging behaviors, please send your contact information to the following:

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Reference: Adapted from Triple P – Positive Parenting Program ®, www.triplep.org

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