

Behavior Tip #2: Three Ways to Avoid “Behave or Else” Parenting

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Recently, I read Turn This Ship Around by L. David Marquet, a former commander of a nuclear submarine who turned one of the poorest operating submarines in the fleet into one of the highest performing in a variety of different ways. Interestingly, he did so by enacting many procedures that were in direct conflict with the standard operating procedures of the military.

I think there are a lot of things parents can learn from his experiences.

One realization he had early on was, ***“The reward [for good performance] was no punishment”*** The way they handled performance was to punish the bad and reward good and even optimal performance by carrying on as if nothing happened—***basically hoping the avoidance of punishment was enough to maintain optimal performance.***

He found a variety of side effects of this strategy (with the obvious fact that it resulted in a very poor performing ship):

1. the men on board did not know what they did correctly when they did things well
 2. there was ZERO morale amongst the crew
 3. the men were so controlled by the “follow the rules or else” strategy that they did not make good common-sense decisions for the ship.
- This led to failures, which led to punishment, which led to deterioration of morale—you can see where this goes.

What does this have to do with parenting and teaching better behavior with children?

I think a lot of parents adopt a “behave or else” strategy—and it fails.

1. Think about your child’s behavior—is the reward avoidance of punishment?

If so, you need to *turn your ship around*. You may be in the nasty cycle of punishment and not able to get out of it. Think differently about this. Do not let good behavior go unnoticed just because “he should behave,” “she should sit quietly,” or “he should be nice to others.”

2. Specifically recognize the behaviors you want and tell your kid about it.

Tell them exactly what they did right when they do it. Be immediate. It costs you nothing. Pay attention. This is especially true if they do something well in a situation when they have previously struggled. For example, if your daughter consistently interrupts you while you are on the phone and, by some unimaginable reason, she is quiet one time when you take a call, *let her know that it was awesome that she waited and was quiet!* Do it in a positive way (“thanks for being so nice and quiet and letting me talk”). Don’t pass up the opportunity.

3. Be impulsively positive.

When the kids do something special or behave in a way you want them to, or have been exceptionally good, be impulsively positive by allowing extra time with the iPad, a chance to pick the movie or TV show, a popsicle on a hot summer day or pick a song for the ride to school. Anything. Just do it in the moment.

Please remember that good behavior is sometimes the hardest to notice...pay attention and you will not regret it.