

Child Behavior

[INTRODUCTION]

[0:00:06.7] ANNOUNCER: Next is Dr. Charlene Wrighton to discuss everything early education about your children or students in our new show, Ed. Talks with Dr. Char.

[EPISODE]

[0:00:21.4] CW: Hello, this is Dr. Char Wrighton and today, we are going to tackle the topic of child behavior and how to change it, modify it, improve it, help it along its way in the most kindest and gentlest of terms of manners. I'm going to give you quite a bit of information and a lot of fun activities but I want to also give you a little bit of theory because there are different ways of looking at this.

First of all, I'm going to use the word discipline and the word discipline is kind of a scary term because it sounds harsh but that's not what I mean here. Discipline just really simply in the way I'm presenting it, so when you hear me say it, I'm going to be defining it as watching a child's behavior, observing, and if it needs correcting, then I don't know a child alive at any point that hasn't needed some kind of correction 10 times a day.

Because children need guidance, they just need guidance, whether it's from a parent, grandparent or a teacher. You know, I always talk to that audience. Parent, grandparent, teacher because that seems to cover everybody.

Children do need to learn how to navigate life with other people, with things, with items, they have to learn how to take care of things. They have to learn how to do things properly. It's our job as the adults in their lives that love them with all our hearts to guide them through this process and there are times when the child wants to do it his or her way and it's not the appropriate way, including misbehaving.

[0:02:08.9] CW: I'm going to share probably 45 years of experience with you. My background was special education and so I did deal with children that had a lot of emotional and behavioral problems, a lot of attention deficits with hyper activity and without. Basically, kids are kids.

Between the special ed and the kids that are just kids, plus my own three children, plus seven grandchildren. We are in their lives as adults to guide and to help along the way because our goal is to make wonderful, productive adults someday. Giving back to society, giving back to their own families. As we're bringing children into the world or they're in their preschools and thus they're in our territory.

Our emotional circle, our sphere of influence, we are there to help bring them along to success. The psychology tells us that children need to have this guidance, even the most willful child and believe me, I really like willful children. I like strong willed people. The reason is because they are going to someday have the ability to say no.

When it's important to say no. I have a tendency to, even though they're challenging to work with, whether it's my own children at home, my own grand children or children in a classroom, that child, that inner strength on the flip side may cause you to get in a lot of gray hair.

[0:03:58.0] CW: It's also – that's the kid that is going to go further in life because they've got that strength of character, of that strength. What we need to do is channel it. Let's ascertain that no matter what the theories are out there, the prevalent theory is that children actually need and want to have that adult discipline where it's there to protect, it's there to guide.

We're not talking about negative discipline where it's too harsh or it's too heavy handed, not that at all, in fact, just the opposite. But, children need to know who the authority figures are in their lives because first of all, they need to be able to trust them.

Number two, they need to be able to love them, they need to be able to respect them and that respect thing is really important. They have to realize that that adult in their life are, that's the bottom line. That's a hard part to come to and I've said it, I have touched upon this in earlier shows but, bringing it to you again today in a more fuller version.

I want to paint a picture of that authority, that need for authority is really critical because children have to be able to feel safe with somebody. Knowing that that person is going to be there to take care of them. That comes part in parcel with being a teacher, being a parent and being a grandparent.

[0:05:33.2] CW: I have seen through my 45 years or more of experience is that a lot of times, parents don't have that established, that authority established. Again, I don't mean harsh, I just mean strong, I'm here to protect you, I'm here to guide you, I'm here to provide for you, I'm here to have fun with you, to love you, to feed you, to care for you in every possible way but in the long run, in the short run. I'm the boss.

That's the part that is sometimes very difficult to establish. We see young parents or even older ones and even sometimes, you know, older parents who have not had children until their 30s or 40s. Sometimes, it's even more challenging for them because that's the little precious child that they've waited for, for a very long time.

Sometimes, that's even more of a challenge. Anyway, it's not knowing how to establish your authority with that child because we love them so much, we want to give them everything. We don't want to say no to them. We're fearful of crushing their spirits or their psyches.

Their inner people. In the long run, it ends up hurting them if we do not do that. In the short run, it ends up hurting them if we do not set the parameters. I really want to emphasize that for anyone who is listening, if you have not set the parameters in your family, in your family circle, your family dynamic. It is not too late.

[0:07:09.1] CW: You can and you must. It is imperative. I have sat with parents for decade after decade and with children who have become very unruly and believe it or not, two and three year old children can be very unruly and very disrespectful and have no ability to determine whether the child was supposed to be the boss or whether adult was supposed to be the boss where there's parent, grandparent or teacher. That's not good.

Those children have to know who they are in the hierarchy, in the family, it is very important. In the good old days when I was growing up, I was not raised like this for some interesting reason, I don't know why because my parents were born in 1903 and 1904 which means, the old way of doing things would have definitely been a part of my life but I came much later in my – my mom had me at 43 so let's just put that in perspective.

I should have been like – I was a child of the early 50s, the late 40s and early 50s where children were to be seen and not heard and for some reason, neither my mother or my father felt that that was good or appropriate, they were not really big on spankings. What they really wanted me to do is mind, because I was loved and was part of the family.

For some reason, it really worked well with me and I have to say that I'm a very strong willed person, I'm a very strong willed person. I was a strong willed child. On the other hand, I really love my parents so much and saw that I was an integral part of the family that I really chose to behave for the most part. Not perfect because I know my brothers and sisters would say –

[0:08:56.7] CW: My mother and dad. Anyway. The point being is that we can have children who really partake – we want children to participate in the family and have a voice in the family, regardless how old or young they are. That is listened to and heard but the child needs to know the bottom line is, mom and dad are still the boss. That is really important.

That hierarchy, knowing who the parent is, who the adult is, it gives them a security, it gives them whether, you know, I picture the teenager who does not want to hear what the parent has to say or even junior high kids because they have a tendency to pull away from parents at that time and feel like they know everything. We all have been through it, we know.

They say that deep down inside, they really want that parent to be the one saying no. They want to have that parent be the governing force that protects them. Even if whether it's subconscious or unconscious, they need that, they want that. Again, that's established in science. After many years of study.

We want to give our children the security of knowing that they are going to be cared for, that they are part of the family, that their voice should be heard, needs to be heard, will be heard. But that there is a bottom line on who gets to be boss in the family. Now, the reason why the structure is so important is well, for safety reasons, our children do have to mind us so they don't run in the street, so they don't get into things that is it's not okay to get into.

[0:10:39.0] CW: They don't damage things, they need to be respectful of toys, of furniture, of adult possessions, they can't just go on mom's purse, they have to ask permission or whatever. Drawer. You know, there are times when there are places in the house that are not safe for

them to go into like a medicine cabinet or knife drawer, whatever it is, there has to be parameters for safety but there also has to be personal respect as well.

All these things you need to start when the child is at that toddler stage where they're just beginning to walk in there and there are some things that are dangerous like the fireplace, are just not okay for them to go towards like an open door or you know, there are things that we protect them from and they must learn that it's not okay.

Saying no to your child is very important when it comes to safety. We also must say no and set parameters with our children when it is time for them to – when they want to be – I'll just say, for instance, when to go to bed. That really is not up to them.

Or whether they take a bath or not. Whether they brush their teeth or not, whether they eat their vegetables and fruits and healthy food or not. That is not really within their purview of determining what is good for them or not because they're too little to make those choices.

Therefore, we need to be there as adults in that safe arena, helping them learn and this means literally, setting the parameters, giving them consequences and sticking with it. Now, these are the things that I find are very difficult for parents, especially young ones who are having their first child because it's a brand new experience.

[0:12:29.8] CW: Hear their adorable child, so cute and your heart goes out to them and you want to give them everything and so every single time you're in the store or Walmart or wherever you are, the child says, I want that and you say I love you, I want to give it to you. Then all of a sudden, the child is asking for something every single time you go in a store.

Not good for you the parent and not good for the child. What that translates into just as an example in the preschool setting is that the child who is given everything has that feeling of entitlement. Now comes to the preschool and there's no rules for that child. That child feels like the child can get up, move around, touch things, take things that aren't his or hers.

It doesn't have to listen to the teacher because you can't have no rules at home and rules at the preschool, it's very confusing to the child. Then what the preschool teachers and the directors have to do is basically help the child understand that there are all sorts of rules that have to be

abided by, by the child, regardless of how – I mean, we have 18 month old children in our safari learning academy right here in Senora that, they have to mind the rules.

They can't grab toys out of another child's hands, they can't take things that don't belong to them. If it's nap time, they have to lie quietly on their mat. They can't talk, they can't move around and quite honestly, kids are – when they're strong willed, they're hard, they're – you know, an adult can't strap them down, you can't use any kind of physical force.

That means, somehow, you as the adult have to get your point across and then the child actually has to yield to that because it's in their best interest. How does that happen? I'm picturing, I was saying, a child on a mat, how do you get a child to stop wiggling and go to sleep?

[0:14:47.7] CW: How do you get a child to stop making noise and talking to their neighbor or trying to crawl over to the neighbors' mats, et cetera. You have to get to the point where the child understands that this is what they have to do and they have to comply.

Another example is being in the grocery store and the child wants everything. So the child starts whining and then it gets louder and then it is demanding and then it's tantruming and I don't know a parent in life who isn't mortified over this experience in the grocery store and it just becomes a miserable experience and instead it could be such a fun experience. This is where I tell parents to do all sorts of fun phonemic awareness alphabetic game is playful.

Plus bring in the child into meal planning or even some math, easy math and looking at the colors on the store's packaging and so many different things you can do. So it could be a wonderful experience but if the child becomes demanding and having to have what they want, it becomes a very, very difficult situation and definitely humiliating because now all of these other people are looking at you. So we have to get our precious children somehow.

First of all understanding that number one, what the parent says the parent means, and that if the child doesn't comply that there are going to be consequences to not complying, not minding. Minding is really, really important and we have changed so much in our society. I remember it was in the 60's that the whole Dr. Spock changed our entire way of disciplining children

because before, we would give the child a swat on the bottom and put them in bed or separate them out.

And it was felt that that was too harsh and too tough so we became a very permissive society ever since Dr. Spock wrote his first book because we weren't firm enough with our children. We didn't set the boundaries with our children. We didn't go ahead with consequences that we promised our children and so our world has drastically changed because of that and I look at it. I have a foot in each – in the different generations spanning so many different ways of child rearing.

[0:17:19.2] That I can see Dr. Spock, he wanted us to protect the child's emotional state. He didn't want us to spank children into compliance. I am all for that but I feel like what we lost in that trade out, we lost having some control over the situation and believe me, I don't think we like to believe that we must control our children but we must. We absolutely must. A child cannot be out of control. That is our only way of protecting them.

That is our only way to help them eat the proper foods or not breaking things or not running in the street. Those are all things that – or not even be able to have a social discourse with other human beings. We have to be able to guide them so that they have the confidence to be able to even as little guys go out in life and be able to look someone in the eye, talk with them, participate nicely, listen to stories and participate in songs and work with friends.

Building blocks or playing games and so all of this has to do with learning how to be pleasant and compliant when it is appropriate. I certainly want children to grow up not being compliant if someone is trying to hurt them or someone is putting them in a position that is uncomfortable. I do not want to compliant child. I want a child who is going to make a lot of noise. If it is somebody that is bothering your child or there is somebody who is making it inappropriate advances, you want that child to yell.

And scream and be very, very defined at that point but that has to be clearly defined and that is not what I am talking about in our everyday interactions with our own children. Like I said whether they are the parent, the grandparent or the teacher. So getting to the point where children are becoming pleasant participants in the family or the classroom, that is our goal in

this one. So that they can grow up year after year being pleasant in the classroom or pleasant at the grandparents' house.

[0:19:32.6] Or pleasant at a playdate or pleasant at a birthday party or whatever it is that they can be basically helpful, civilized, giving back, fun to talk to, fun to be with, pleasurable and just enjoying each other's company. That is what we're going on this one. So there's two schools of thought. There are probably a lot more than this but I am going to make it simple by saying two schools of thought on how to help a child change their behavior.

There is the reward system where we reward them for doing the right thing and we do it – I am going to explain definitely in more detail and then there is a school of thought that believes that a child should learn should not get rewards because then they will only do things for rewards and they will not do things for the sake of doing a job well done or for the sake of doing – getting enjoyment out of whatever the task is. So therefore, you know it depends on what you read and who you listen to.

But I think it boils down to your comfort zone as well, and so as a special ed teacher I was trained to reward. I was working with special ed children who needed additional stimulation or encouragement to work, to sit still, to listen to participate and so again, I was raised in my era of teaching to be a behaviorist and behaviorists basically came from, picture Pavlov's dogs. The dog did the right thing, you gave it a quick small very tiny reward.

So that the dog could now start looking forward to the next reward and so what we would do is we would keep changing the dog's behavior little by little by rewarding them. They do this with dolphins and whales and birds and any animal that is asked to perform is trained this way that they have a certain, like for instance if you have ever been to sea world they are giving their animals fish all the time just to say thank you for doing that properly because they want that behavior.

[0:22:01.8] Whether it is jumping high in the air, the trainers want that dolphin for example to remember when you'd jump high in the air as has been trained, I am going to give you the treat. That treat is going to remind you that next time you jump high in the air you are going to get a treat. Every time I give you a treat, you are going to jump high in the air. So it all works hand and in hand. So this is animal training.

Well my personal opinion is, I feel like it is a real easy and smart way to work with children. And there are so many different ways you can do this. We are not treating them like dolphins or puppies but maybe a little bit but it is like I can't find too many adults who will turn down a paycheck and say, "No, no I am just going to work here for free" or bonus. No, I don't really need my bonus this year, you keep it or that vacation, the week paid vacation.

We love our benefits. We love our rewards, we love our pats on the back. We like notes of encouragement. We like someone giving a compliment and so where as we as adults appreciate someone and it should be like this. We appreciate someone in our home, our husband, our wife, our parents, our children to say thank you. It makes us feel good and no, we do not not take care of our families because someone didn't say thank you but it sure is nice.

And that is a reward in itself and so we cannot expect little children to need or to automatically have intrinsic value as their reward because they won't understand it and so I have a great deal of difficulty even though I have read so many different books on the research studies that have been done on intrinsic reward on its own, I don't buy it. I have to tell you I don't buy it. And so some of the things that I have done in my classroom that we are doing at Safari Learning.

[0:24:11.2] Every single day, it makes it joyful and fun and it gives children something to look forward to, some of our chronic behavior children who it is not easy, I'll tell you, and so we set up systems specifically for that particular child that meets that particular child's needs. So that tailored to them so that we can help turn that child around because that child needs to be a positive part of society even if the society is the preschool class or the kindergarten class or the home.

So some of the fun things that I would suggest and these are things that I have tried over and over again so they work wonderfully is doing something fun as a rewards system. First of all charts. Whether it is a potty chart, children need to see that they've done well, and so if it is a potty chart you put it right over the toilet. You get a star every time a child makes any close approximation when you are first starting out. Don't forget that, any close approximation.

They just go to the toilet, they get a star and then pretty soon they get to sit on it and then pretty soon they use it. So anyway, lots of positive rewards there. Behavior, cleaning up the room,

cleaning up the toys of the preschool, sharing with a friend. We have something called leadership awards where our Zig Zebra is dressed in a cape and he looks like Superman but he is super Zig and if our children, if we see them being kind and helpful to somebody else, or pushing in a chair cleaning up that nobody asks them to do, we make sure that they have a leadership reward.

Some other things that you can go and take hunks of gravel like the size of a quarter. Spray them gold and silver so they look like they've got some value and pretend that they have found gold and silver like a miner would. I use that in the classroom and we made a little cloth bags for them like pokes, gold pokes like the old fashion times.

[0:26:22.3] And we study the old fashion times at the same time and so we did that for a quarter as part of our rewards system. I have taken poker chips and sprayed them gold and silver or you could spray them all sorts of colors especially if you have your princesses in there who love the lavenders and pinks and pretty colors. So anything that is motivating to whatever child is, what they enjoy. There is something called dopamine that the brain secretes and it is a happy drug.

It is built into the body. It is the brain's reward system and so when the brain is happy it secretes a dopamine. Well research tells us that when a child even thinks that they are possibly going to get a reward, and adults same thing, a teenager same thing, if they even think that they are going to get a reward or they're just saying to you, "If I do this I am going to" the brain actually secretes a dopamine even before the reward is given.

That is something to remember. That shows how significant that is. Some other fun things is something that my daughter did with her children, I just love the idea. She went to Jo-Ann's and got a whole bunch of gems and had a pretty container and every single time she saw wonderful behavior within the house where the child is doing the right thing, she would put a beautiful gem in there and it just sparked the child's imagination for one thing, got them excited and made them feel good.

But at the end of that reward that jar filling was a reward, a promised trip, an extra playdate, extra time with parents, staying up a little bit late or watching something together on video. A trip somewhere, a Froyo. It can be anything. Going to the park, going to the library. Your reward

systems have to be built in and they have to be short term and they have to be right within the child's reach. They can't be too long. You can't say something to a young child, "We are going to do this in two weeks."

[0:28:28.6] Two weeks is too far away. Children don't have that sense of time. You have to reward quickly and then you can have longer term rewards also but you have to build them up to that. So coins, whether they are toy coins or real coins are fun for them to collect. Popcorn, have a popcorn party and I love doing this with my kids. A tablespoon of popcorn that I put in the jar so that when it is at a certain point then we all have a popcorn party.

So there are so many fun things that you can do that not make but encourage, I hate the word make because it sounds again like coercion and that is not what we are doing. We are changing behavior is by encouraging them to want to participate with whatever the project or the activity, whether it is teeth brushing or getting ready for bed or whatever it is, is that they want to do it and they realize that this is being part of the family or part of the classroom.

It becomes a positive and wonderful place to be. So I hope that this has given you some fun ideas. As always, we ask for your feedback. If you have any suggestions for things that you do with your children at home or in the classroom we'd love to hear it and thank you.

[END OF DISCUSSION]

[0:29:48.7] ANNOUNCER: That was Ed Talks with Dr. Char. You've been listening on KAAD-LP Radio live on 103.5 FM or streaming online at kaad-lp.org. If you would like to have Dr. Char answer any of your questions, please email your question to dr_char@zoo-phonics.com.

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