



## Getting Behavior in Shape at Home

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Positive behavior support, often called PBS, is not just for schools. Parents can use the same ideas to create a better environment for the entire family. First, let's look at what PBS is: Positive behavior support does not mean changing the child; rather, it means creating a new environment that supports the positive behavior you want to achieve. It means creating a plan that determines who will help and what you will do differently. So how do you do this?

### Younger children:

Let's take a hypothetical child: Let's call the child Taylor.

- Taylor refuses to eat dinner almost every night.
- Let's think about what behavior we want:

We want Taylor to eat a healthy, balanced dinner. Let's brainstorm reasons that Taylor may be refusing to eat:

- Taylor doesn't like the food.
- Taylor fills up on other things before dinner.
- Parents give lots of attention when dinner is refused.

Let's test the reasons that Taylor won't eat dinner:

- Ask Taylor to help plan the menu with favorite foods.
- Limit Taylor on any snacks prior to dinner
- Give Taylor lots of attention by helping cook dinner, set the table, etc.

As each reason is tested, note which one causes Taylor to eat more dinner. Praise positive results. Let's assume more is eaten when Taylor plans the menu.

- For the first few times, you may have to fix macaroni and cheese and peanut butter and jelly sandwiches with jellybeans; however, Taylor eats the entire meal.
- Praise Taylor for eating the entire meal.

After several successful meals, as Taylor is planning the meal tell Taylor that you are going to fix 3 things.

Taylor gets to choose all three but they must be from the choices you present.

- Give Taylor five choices and have Taylor choose three
  - Macaroni and cheese
  - Peanut butter and jelly
  - Hamburgers shaped like hearts
  - Celery filled with peanut butter and raisin ants (call them "ants on a log")
  - Pears decorated to look like a funny animal

Notice how two of the choices were things Taylor has already proven likelihood to eat. Tell Taylor if the plate is clean, it will be Taylor's choice the next evening. As Taylor eats more and more, give increasing praise for eating dinner and for doing a good job of planning a good meal. Keep changing the choices to healthy choices until you are actually replacing the macaroni and cheese and peanut butter and jelly with more healthy choices.

- Eventually, Taylor will be willing to try new things as taste buds evolve.
- Taylor feels powerful because there was choice in the meals and now has acceptance of varied foods.

We changed the environment and it produced more positive results than demanding Taylor to eat dinner. How many of us remember sitting at the table until it was bedtime because we refused to eat our vegetables? I doubt it really made us want to eat them again the next time.

#### Tips for older children:

This is a personal experience that worked well for my own children:

We quickly became indebted to fast food restaurants, video stores and the popular teen clothing establishments. We investigated the reason for this loss of money and determined: 1) we let it happen because we kept giving our children more money and 2) our children didn't understand the concept of budgeting. We decided to remedy this by creating a budget box. We bought a plastic recipe box and put in envelopes and labeled them:

- Pizza
- Movies
- Videos
- Fast food
- Gas money
- Gifts for friends
- New clothing

Each month we put in a certain amount of money in each envelope. If our children wanted to order pizza, they had to check the budget box and pay for it from the appropriate envelope. Suddenly, coupons were very important to them when coupons were a dirty word when mom and dad footed the bill. Suddenly, those extra cokes at the drive through were not quite as important. They considered every purchase and weighed the options. If we had to drive our children somewhere, each child had to pay us one dollar out of the budget box. We wanted our children to understand that when they had their own cars, they would need to budget trips instead of driving all over town wasting gas.

We did not have to say "no" when asked about purchases. All we had to say was "check your envelope." We allowed no trading from one "account" to the other. The children were responsible for their own box. They quickly realized decisions regarding the whole month were more important than living for the moment. This created an environment where everyone was happy. Our children learned to think before they acted, and it was good practice for when they became independent young adults.

This method was far superior to ranting and raving about money, which was an abstract idea to them. They saw we had a checkbook, credit cards, and cash but did not understand we would not have those items if we spent money every time we saw something we wanted. If they wanted something, our children learned to save from one month to the next to make major purchases. We did not give them extra money; when we said "no" we meant "no," and our reason was our budget.

We praised our children:

- when we checked their boxes at the end of the month
- when they paid for their own purchases
- when they saved up for something big

In the world of PBS, we changed the environment (basically we changed our behavior, we didn't dole out money any longer). We taught our children a new skill, and we provided positive feedback when they performed their new skills. Our hypothesis was that our children didn't understand the concept of budgeting. We proved that hypothesis when they learned to budget for themselves.