

# Increasing Positive Behavior and Building Coping Skills in Kids

**Positive reinforcement has been shown to be more effective than punishment in changing behavior over the long term.**

The most effective praise is:

Specific to the behavior you are focused on changing

Said at the time of the behavior, in close proximity, and, ideally, includes a physical touch

Incorporate rewards systems that encourages and rewards kids to change targeted behavior

Provided for any effort towards the behavior (doesn't need to be perfect).

**Encourage collaborative problem solving when issues come up. Problem solving can not only lead to solutions the child is more likely to try, it also builds executive functioning skills.**

Collaborative problem solving involves:

Clearly identifying what the problem is (try to be specific)

Listening to the child and why they think it is a problem

Identifying your concern (only after the child has expressed their concern)

Brainstorm possible solutions together

**Support kids to manage anxiety, not avoid it. Anxiety is a normal emotion that can be protective in truly dangerous situations. The feeling of anxiety makes us want to avoid situations; however, this avoidance results in more anxiety in the long run and leads to “a cycle of anxiety”.**

As parents of kids with high levels of anxiety, it is most effective to:

Provide kids with the message of support and confidence. For example, “I know this is super hard for you and I am 100% confident you can handle it”.

Limit any “accommodation” of the anxiety. In other words, try not to shield your child from experiencing anxiety .

Incorporate daily or weekly check in's with your child about their anxiety so they feel you are a support

**Teach and role model the use of coping skills for challenging emotions:**

Identify several coping skills the child can use so that they have “a number of tools in their toolbox”

Ideally at least one of these coping skills would be something the child could do in the moment and in most situations. Diaphragmatic breathing is an excellent tool (e.g., square breathing)

Encourage the child to practice at least one coping skill on a daily basis and practice with the child when possible.

Role model using coping skills when you are experiencing challenging emotions