

Behaviour management for boys

By Ian Lillico



The behaviour of boys should be modified through praise - never through sanction or punishment. Punishment may contain a boy's behaviour but not modify it. Punishment can actually be a reward for a boy as this can secure his prestige in the eyes of his peers. We must endeavour to catch our son doing something right and praise him for it and (generally) try to ignore when he does things wrongly.

Continually punishing or sanctioning boys can contain poor behaviour but won't change the behaviour. If you really want your son to do things better you must contrive situations which enable him to do the right thing. This is the time to praise and encourage him. This brings long-term improvement. Many parents fall into the trap of continually chastising boys and punishing them when they misbehave. However, in order to have a less stressful family life, and to change his behaviour, we should concentrate on positive reinforcement when he excels at being good.

Home rules written as negatives such as "No this or No that or Don't this or Don't that" should change to positives. For example rules such as "No chewing gum in the house" should become "Please place gum in the bin when you enter the house". You can reinforce the second version by praising your son for putting his gum in the bin. Rules are of no value unless they can be reinforced through praise and a simple re-wording into positives can bring major change in a family of boys as their behaviour can then be modified. For example "We treat everyone in this family with respect - we do this by waiting our turn at mealtimes" etc etc. When your son does this well you reinforce the rule and modify his behaviour.

Boys who misbehave can often become heroes in front of his immediate peers. Boys who are publically chastised both at home, in the neighborhood or at school, often have a high peer esteem and their poor behaviour often continues to give them feedback - even if we see it as negative. Boys should never be publically scolded as this tends to raise their peer esteem and, hence, their poor behaviour continues. Public reprimand also severs relationships between the scolder and scolded as boys are shame-phobic and (if we inadvertently shame boys in front of their friends) we frequently do more harm than good. Let's be mindful of boys' feelings and chastise them without breaking their sensitive and delicate spirits.

