

## **Tip sheet: Teaching Strategies for Improving Co-operation**

### STRATEGY 1 CONSISTENT TEAM RESPONSES TO CHILD

Ongoing development of a positive, trusting rapport. Each teacher demonstrates:

- confidence, caring and value of the child and his efforts,
- a kind, patient, encouraging and supportive presence,
- close attention to the child's successful interactions of all kinds, so he associates you with hearing 'yes' ( at least twice as often as 'no'),
- realistic expectations for the child's cooperation in specific situations and activities at any point in time.

Each team member understands and is in agreement on:

- the target activities where cooperation is being worked on at various stages of the intervention plan,
- what specific limits are being set and how,
- the recognized signs of escalation towards non-cooperation,
- rewards/ reinforcers for successful level of cooperation,
- consequence for non-cooperation.

### STRATEGY 2 TEACHING PREREQUISITE DEVELOPMENTAL SKILLS

When promoting and teaching cooperation, teachers must be sure that the child has the skills to understand the expectations. To do so, teachers must ensure:

- verbal instructions being given match with the child's current receptive vocabulary and language, and the number of steps he can follow,
- the child can participate / or has the support to participate in the activity with the gross motor, fine motor and self-help skills he has currently developed,
- the cognitive and social skills required to cooperate in the activity match with the child's levels of acquisition.

### STRATEGY 3 PROVIDING OPTIMAL CONDITIONS

A child will be most likely to improve cooperative responses when teachers do their best to maintain the following conditions:

- materials and support are easily accessible (frustration minimized),
- adequate structure is provided (steps are clearly stated or provided visually),
- problematic possessions, objects or equipment are removed or adapted to promote cooperative play,
- comfort is maintained so activity does not become competitive, tense or anxiety provoking,
- high levels of interest, novelty, appeal exist (use of favourite toys, intriguing or surprising presentations),
- the number of teachers making requests of this child is reduced to one or two,
- conditions surrounding the activity are not distracting, upsetting, or irritating (sound, light, visuals),
- unpopular requests are made when the child is engaged in favourite activities, and his cooperation is 'on a roll'. After 3-5 'easy' requests (which the child has often cooperated with before), praise, then give the more unpopular one.

### STRATEGY 4 LABELLING

*Systematic Commenting:* with this technique, the adult follows the child's lead in choice of activity. The adult describes and comments both on the actions of the child and herself. Adult cooperates, imitates, copies, plays parallel to the child, asks child "what should we do now...". Adult labels her cooperation with the child. Whether or not the child responds is not the goal of this approach. The emphasis is on providing the child with meaningful examples of cooperation, following through on a request of another, doing the same activity of another, and playing cooperatively. These experiences can be used in the future as an example of cooperation, asking the child to recall "what happened when...".

*Incidental Teaching:* this technique involves *arranging or engineering activities* that will promote cooperation. When the child initiates cooperation, the adult labels the child's successful response. Adult imitates or repeats the child's level of cooperation and praises or rewards him. Also, within the pre-arranged activity, the child can be given choice about which items he wishes the teacher to play with/ or tidy up, and which he will use or put away.

*Trial and Error with Differential Feedback*: when the child is required to cooperate, and he attempts to do so, the adult follows his attempt by modelling the complete response. When the child is uncooperative, the adult *does not say no, wrong or use a harsh tone of voice*. Rather, provides the desired cooperative response, personalizing it by using the child's name and/or stressing what is important *to the child* (e.g. we need to go to the table, *so you can have your yummy snack*).

## STRATEGY 5 INSTRUCTING

Classroom expectations and rules for cooperation are established, reiterated and reviewed with the whole group more often than would usually be done (before free-play, before entering challenging activities, or before unfamiliar activities). All children are reinforced for cooperation. Consequences for non-cooperation are stated and consistently carried out for all children.

For the parts of the program where cooperation has proved a challenge in the past, the teacher provides everyone with ample warning and information about the task. She states specifically what the child will be expected to do, and what roles participating children have.

*"When we walk down to the gym, we will all walk. Everyone will find a friend and hold hands, and help each other walk nicely. Eric and Brian will help each other walk nicely. Sinead and Morgan will help each other. Who will help Matthew walk nicely...?"*

Success will be increased when the teacher is close, gets the child's attention through eye contact, allows time for the child to respond (especially for those children with developmental disabilities), and stays close for follow-through and to praise the child.

The use of novel ideas and methods of instructing also encourages cooperation. Unpopular requests might be made by whispering, singing, or using humour. Be weird or funny. Wearing a pair of goggles or other silly attire will put the child in a 'good mood', and more willing to respond to requests. Having the children pretend to be an animal or cartoon character puts the emphasis on cooperating, not on the mundane task. For example, children can be asked to tidy up like a monkey, or a robot.

## STRATEGY 6 OPEN-ENDED QUESTIONING

The following types of questioning captivates interest and highlights the appeal and value in cooperation:

*Forgetfulness*: this technique is the reverse of instructing. It is intended to have the child elicit cooperation from the adult. It reveals what the child does or does not know to enable cooperation. This involves asking a question, pretending not to know how to cooperate.

*"What should I do when Miss Donna calls me on the intercom?"*  
*"What should I do when Bradley asks for help?"*

*Silliness or Sabotage:* this technique is intended to maintain attention and elicit curiosity about cooperation. It involves the teacher doing something unexpected or unusual that focuses the children's attention on being cooperative.

*Teacher prepares children to hold hands walking down the hall (as in above prior example). When children are all paired up and ready at the door, the teacher goes and does something completely opposite to what everyone was instructed ( e.g. puts her coat on and sits at her desk). She waits for a moment until all the children have turned and are looking at her curiously. She then asks "What am I supposed to do? Why are you all waiting at the door? How am I supposed to walk down the hall?"*

### STRATEGY 7 SCAFFOLDING OR EXPANDING

This teaching technique has the teacher expand or build upon the *initial actions of the children* towards successful cooperation.

*Once again, using the example above, the teacher instructs children to find a partner to hold hands, so they will help each other walk nicely down the hall to the gym. Once children begin to pair up, teacher asks pairs, "Lisa and Courtney, you are holding hands... what are you helping each other do when we get out in the hall?"*

### STRATEGY 8 ADULT MODELLING

This technique is similar to expanding (above) but has the teacher actively participating and modelling what is expected of children. The adult gives a lot of support initially and withdraws gradually (e.g. do most of tidying yourself, then ask the child to finish putting away the last pieces). As the child responds more regularly, the adult continues modelling cooperation, but *gradually* asks child to do more.

### STRATEGY 9 PEER MODELLING AND PEER INITIATION

*One-to-One:* The appeal of peer modelling cooperation is the social value of being "one of the group" or doing a good job like popular friends. This approach involves asking a peer your child likes to go to him and demonstrate cooperation.

*"Can you tell Nathan that I have asked everyone to hold hands, and show him what to do, and how to walk nicely down the hall?"*

*Group:* If your child does not respond to individual peer prompting, try different child groupings of more than one peer, to determine in which peer context the child is most likely to imitate appropriate follow-through.

### STRATEGY 10 REHEARSING

*Correspondence Training:* In structured teaching such as circle, peers are taught cooperation through stories, puppets, dress up, felt board stories. A wide range of scenarios where cooperation is needed are presented (e.g. at home, out on the playground, out on a walk, visiting the mall, etc.). Children get a chance to try out different responses. They then talk about what might happen in a given situation if you don't cooperate, and why it's best to do so.

*Say-Do Technique.* In this technique, rehearsal of cooperation (above) is taken further

by generalizing the concept into common classroom situations. Prior to entering play situations where cooperation is needed, children are asked what they will do, why it's best, and how they will have more fun when cooperating.

### STRATEGY 11 FACILITATING POSITIVE TRANSITIONS

The intent of this technique is to aid the child's completion of activities while he is still being positive and cooperative. It requires that teachers:

- anticipate escalating behaviour,
- provide child with options when he is not doing well,
- prevent idleness; quickly engage the child if he is just looking around, not interested,
- redirect to another activity where child has demonstrated successful cooperation in the past.

### STRATEGY 12 PROMPTING

*System of Least Prompts:* This technique involves the gradual increase of support levels from adult prompting :

- (i) *verbal prompt first.* If there is no cooperation with verbal direction, the verbal direction is repeated, tailored to child's level of understanding,
- (ii) *modelling.* If the child still is not able to respond cooperatively, the adult goes over to the child and physically demonstrates cooperation with the direction,
- (iii) *physical prompt.* If modelling is unsuccessful, physical assistance is provided to follow through until the child begins to complete the sequence of actions required. Physical assistance is then pulled back to allow child independent cooperation... and an opportunity for reward/ reinforcement. This does not mean physically moving, pulling, or forcing child's movements.

### STRATEGY 13 PHYSICAL GUIDING

*Graduated Guidance:* As this technique is the most intrusive, it is recommended that it be left as a last option. It has the adult providing physical prompts and fading them as soon as the child begins to respond. The key is completing the sequence of actions involved in cooperating. The adult "shadows" the independent actions of the child by following his movements with her hand, but not touching the child unless the movement stops before complete follow-through (applying gentle direction primarily as a reminder of what is expected next, *not the use of hand-over-hand*). As cooperation is a social skill, this technique should be left to teaching gross motor, fine motor, dressing or self-care skills where the child welcomes physical support with the task.

# Using rewards to increase cooperation

## TYPES OF REINFORCERS

### 1. Social: Providing attention, recognition, acknowledgement and/or approval

- Verbal statements or opportunities of recognition must be brief, specific, descriptive, and genuine. Empty and *overly frequent* praise can actually become a problem, and become a reinforcer of negative behaviour.
- Includes examples such as: '...was well done'/ 'thanks for doing'.../ 'wow good choices when you...'/ 'I like the way you...'/ 'wow, you're learning', clapping/ smile/ touse hair,/ 'show your friend how you did...'/ winking or thumbs up while you mention their name aloud for all to hear.

### 2. Tangible: Providing objects or symbols of recognition

For some children, attention/ approval is not enough. It is then useful to pair it with other kinds of reinforcers such as objects or symbols.

- Concrete objects are most powerful at first for all ages (toy from classroom, special object from home to play with for a brief time). Concrete objects should always be used for toddlers.
- Objects should then gradually be replaced with symbolic rewards such as sticker stamps/ check marks on a wall chart. Other examples include 'rays of sunshine' drawn on a badge / happy face stickers worn on their clothes till the end of the day / foam disks or tokens which are displayed in a container with child's name / beads which are moved from one position to another.
- Symbols may be reinforcing in themselves, or could be 'traded in' for other items e.g. from a treasure chest (with small items from dollar store).

### 3. Activity: Providing a prized role or activity as recognition

Examples of *roles* include allowing child to make the choice of stories to be read, songs to be sung in circle, being a helper to teacher, setting up circle with mats, holding the door open, helping the cook, passing out lunch napkins, stacking chairs, holding the class soft toy, choosing next class activity from 'surprise box' (slips of paper with different activities i.e. draw a picture, get a drink).

Examples of *activities* are allowing child to do a favourite activity after a positive behaviour: sitting in the bean bag chair, getting a break, visiting supervisor etc..

## SUGGESTED GUIDELINES IN THE USE OF REINFORCERS

### Choose reinforcers that:

- Are mostly chosen by the child.

- Are readily available and fit in easily with your program and routine.
- Can be given immediately after the positive behaviour/ period of time.
- Are NOT freely available to children at other times. They must be special to the child.

Help child to create a 'menu' of favourite things or activities.

- Update and change as child's interests change or expand.
- Also ask parents or other teachers about the rewards they have used.
- Try out rewards on the menu, and see how motivating and encouraging they are. If a reward does not impact the child's behaviour, it ISN'T a reinforcer for that child. Remove those rewards from the menu.
- Use some of the rewards on the child's menu as rewards for *other* children. When your child sees other children enjoying the reward, it will increase its value or appeal to your child.
- Reward the other children who are involved when your child demonstrates appropriate behaviour. This will build support from peers, encouraging them to consistently help your child to respond positively.
- Do not eliminate or take away reinforcers for problem behaviour. Consequences should be completely different and unrelated to reinforcers.
- Always label the appropriate behaviour your child is demonstrating as *you provide* the reward ('You *put your toy away* when I asked you').

Gradually adjust the conditions for the use of reinforcers.

- (i) At first, give the reinforcement immediately after appropriate behaviour.
- (ii) As the desired behaviour is demonstrated with some regularity, tell the child he will receive reward after he completes current activity.
- (iii) As periods of time *without* the problem behaviour get longer, reward child for *maintaining positive behaviour*. Gradually increase length of time before rewarding.
- (iv) Child may now be taught to monitor (let you know he responded positively) and reward himself. The excitement of monitoring may be a reward in itself.
- (v) If the child gets angry when you praise him or acts out directly after a reward, pair praise with something else he likes.
- (vi) Experiment with different delivery styles (e.g. simple, verbal, touse hair/ pat on back). Be persistent. Some children may have to *learn* to tolerate

and enjoy praise.

## **A story from the front line: *cooperation***

Juan was having a lot of problems following through with teacher requests. When asked to tidy up, dress, or go through a transition he would attempt to escape the room or would protest and refuse.

When we conducted more observations, we noticed that Juan's attention span was very short which made us realise it was actually very hard for him to change routines or to concentrate on mundane tasks. Once we understood his sincere need for assistance, we could, in a compassionate way, provide him with a more realistic plan.

Juan was helped by an adult at tidy up time. We also gave him a choice regarding which items he would tidy and which he wanted the teacher to tidy. Suddenly a daunting task became manageable. Juan loves outdoor time. We made up some augmentative pictures of his favourite outdoor activities. When it came time to dress for outdoors, he was given a choice as to which activity he would choose. He would then select an augmentative picture which correlated to his choice. Rather than expect Juan to dress independently, he was assisted and encouraged with much animated discussion of his favourite outdoor activity. Again, what was once a difficult routine became a positive experience.

For transitions, Juan was given favourite toys to keep him occupied and enthusiastic. These items were rotated to hold his interest. Sticker books were started for all the children for cooperation. Juan looked forward to filling his pages with favourite stickers. His resistance at these challenging times decreased dramatically. Juan is no longer tense or nervous about transitions or mundane tasks.