

POSITIVE BEHAVIOURAL MANAGEMENT

Toxic Shame | Positive strategies | Reflection

Case Study

Sam is a three year old boy who LOVES to collect rocks while playing outside. His Mom plays with him while his Dad completes a business call on the Deck. Sam finds a sparkly rock while digging in his sandbox. Unknown to him his Mom had hidden a few special rocks for him to find. Sam jumps up excitedly and runs to show his Dad. He grabs his Dad's arm excitedly to show off his "treasure".

Positive Caregiver Reaction

Sam's Mom quickly kneels before Sam with her hand on his lips to say "shhh". She looks up at Sam's Dad with a smile and suggests he finish his call inside. Sam's Mom then explains to Sam that his dad is busy with an important phone call. It would be best if he showed his Dad the "treasure" later. Sam although disheartened that he has to wait happily goes back to playing with his Mom.



Children Deserve Our Best

As caregivers it is our role to be an example of positive behavioural management. We need to control our own feelings/ reactions so that we do not negatively impact the emotional development of our children. We've all had that, "don't cry over spilled milk" moment. The one where you're tired and something happens to trigger a strong feeling of frustration. We can choose in that moment how we react. If we burst out our initial thoughts we are likely to display negative behaviour. However if we take a moment to breathe and collect our thoughts we can react in a controlled and positive way. Children are still held to developmentally appropriate expectations (if you make a mess



Negative Caregiver Reaction

Sam's Dad is frustrated that his son is pulling at him and yelling while he is talking on the phone. He covers the mouth piece of his phone and yells "go back and play with your Mom, I'm busy right now". Sam's Mom quickly grabs his arm and yanks him away from his father saying, "you know not to bother your Dad when he's on the phone". Together they walk back to the sandbox. Sam who was excited is now sad and confused.

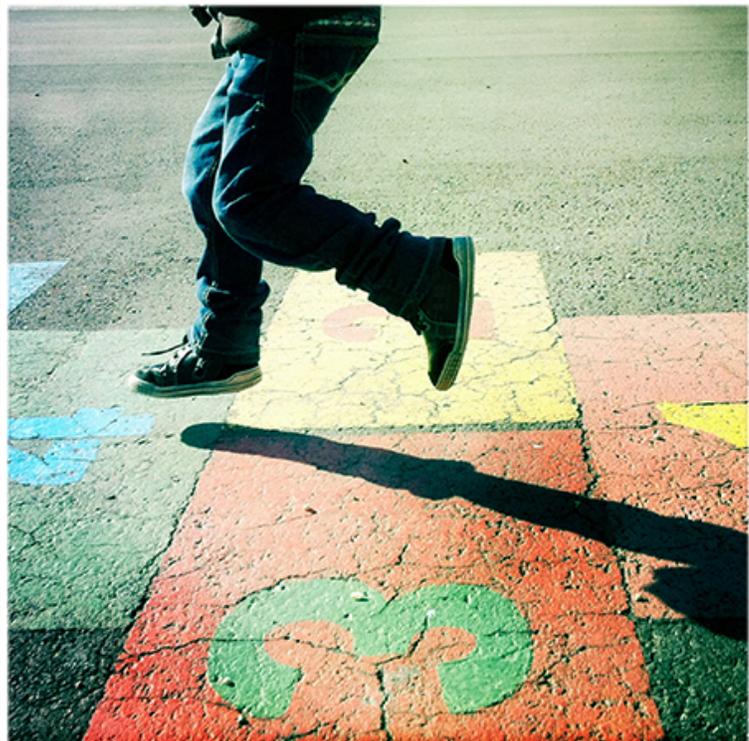
What is Toxic Shame?

Humans are hard wired to feel a wide array of emotions. With repeated process learning our emotional responses develop patterns. Shame is a completely normal feeling and one that helps us to learn right from wrong. However shaming a child into feeling like a bad person will set in motion a cycle of negative self worth and confidence. In the case study above Sam would of felt shame for a minute when his Mom redirected him from his father. However this was done in a positive way. With repeated exposure to caring and supportive responses Sam will learn to behave as his parents wish. HOWEVER, in the second behaviour response Sam's shame would have been long lasting. He would have also felt anger, of not being understood and a lack of self worth. Repeated exposure to consequences of this manner will cause Sam to feel shame more easily and be triggered whenever he "hits a bump in the road". Due to his development of toxic shame Sam may present a pattern of negative behaviour attributed to his feelings of self worth.

clean it up etc) but we have shown the child that they are respected. Respect is a fundamental aspect of relationship building. By reacting in constructive and respectful ways we are teaching children how to be decent human beings. This is a skill they will use their whole life.

Positive Behavioural Approaches,

- Redirection:** super simple and effective. In this approach the caregiver notices a trigger for negative behaviour and redirects the attention of the child before an incident occurs.
- Consistency:** when your boundaries and expectations do not change children are able to learn what is expected of them. And... if they do have a moment of negative behaviour they will not doubt your relationship
- Person centred approach:** Speak to the child, not at the child. Express how you understand their feelings and ask them questions about what happened. Use developmentally appropriate language and follow through with a "next time" plan.





Here are a few behavioural approaches that caregivers should never apply. They are not only ineffective but have negative psychological impacts.

- Don't yell, raising your voice will not help the situation
- Don't talk too much. Keep things simple. Rationalizing with a young child when they are upset won't do very much. If they are upset they won't have the cognitive ability to focus on anything beyond their immediate feelings. Wait for them to calm down.
- Do not document negative behaviour by taking pictures or video taping the incident. This is extremely inappropriate for a multitude of reasons. #1 it does nothing to help the well being of the child. #2 it can have a negative effect on their self worth. #3 if you are video taping or taking pictures of the behaviour you are doing nothing to actively help the child. #4 just don't do it.
- No threats! Reacting to a negative with a negative will not create a positive.

REFLECT

1. When was the last time you reacted carelessly?
2. What could you of done differently?
3. When was a time you really helped a child through a negative behavioural incident? What did you do that had the biggest impact?
4. Think of your childhood... Did your caregivers (could be parents) react in a constructive or negative way? How does this effect your abilities today?