

TFCO-A

Treatment Foster Care Oregon for Adolescents

Family Therapy Manual

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Overview

A main premise of the Treatment Foster Care Oregon (TFCO) program is that a youth's behavior problems are not isolated solely within the individual. Rather, they are associated with interactions between the youth and the environments in which he lives, including the family, school, peers, and community. Rarely are a youth's problems isolated in only one of these environments, but more typically prevail in multiple environments. Consequently, treatment that focuses on the youth's individual characteristics or behavior in a single environment limits its success. Effective intervention should include all behavioral environments and, ideally, be simultaneously conducted directly in the environments targeted for change.

In the TFCO program, the youth's family environment, or other aftercare resource, is an important target for change. Typically, youth make significant gains while in the program under the supportive and watchful eye of the foster parents and program staff. To achieve long-term success, however, youth need to be able to maintain those gains in their post-treatment environment, whether that is back in the family home or another identified aftercare situation. It is important that the family environment changes to support the youth's gains and make further progress.

The goal of family treatment is to prepare the family for their youth's return home by putting them in a better position to help their youth succeed. There is evidence to support that to the extent that parents provide consistent and fair discipline for misbehavior, reinforce appropriate and positive behavior, and don't allow unsupervised time in the community or with delinquent peers, the youth will engage in less delinquent behavior after treatment and maintain the gains made during treatment. Therefore, teaching parents how to effectively supervise, discipline, and encourage their youth is a critical element of the TFCO program. It is important for parents to know who their youth's friends are and to monitor the activities he engages in with friends.

The family therapist meets weekly with the parents or aftercare adults for the duration of the youth's placement in the program. After the youth moves from Level 1 to Level 2, home visits are arranged so the family can practice skills taught during family therapy sessions. Visits occur at least twice a month and start off lasting a few hours. The visits are lengthened as parents learn more skills. Provided things are going well, home visits eventually extend to overnight and then through the weekend. The family therapist gives the family practice "assignments" to work on during the youth's visit. In rare instances where the family is unable or unwilling to supervise the youth, visits take place at the treatment center or in another supervised setting. Throughout the placement, the family therapist and Team Lead are available to the parents 24 hours a day, 7 days a week to assist them with concerns, questions, problems, or crises. At the time of reunification, the family therapist maintains contact with the family and offers support for three or more months, as needed.

Getting Started

There are usually multiple steps for therapists to take with new families before they move into teaching parents new skills. Most families in TFCO have had several experiences with service providers. Their experiences with social service agencies may have been neutral at best, but are more likely to have been negative involving blame, confrontation, and avoidance. Parents often feel alienated and disempowered by the system. They are understandably apprehensive and anxious about having contact with another therapist who may blame them for their youth's misbehavior. Indeed, proposing 'family therapy' suggests to many families that this program will be like all of the others and will blame the parents for what is typically a complex, long-term problem. In addition, most parents are discouraged about their youth's behavior and feel as though they have tried everything to help and nothing has worked. They are often frustrated by their inability to manage their youth's behavior and are negative about her chances for success. The thought of devoting time to weekly sessions is unpleasant and perceived as one more source of stress in their lives. Some are emotionally distraught about having their youth removed from their home, even though the placement may actually provide some relief from the chaos in the family.

The first step toward overcoming these obstacles and parents' reticence to engage in treatment is to establish a positive working relationship with parents built on support and trust. The Team Lead introduces the therapist to the family as a "consultant" who will help them overcome the negative experiences of the past and prepare for their youth's return home. During the first few sessions, the therapist should focus on nurturing an alliance with parents that will then serve as the foundation for a successful client-therapist relationship. The amount of time the family therapist spends with the parents at this stage will depend on a number of factors; and the task of forming a positive, working relationship with parents should be seen as one that extends through the entire course of treatment.

Building an Alliance

To address the anxiety many parents have about their youth's placement, the therapist should begin by giving parents a picture of a "day in the life" of their youth. Tell them a little about the foster family, including their interests, how many youth are in the family, how they were trained, how many other foster youth they have had, etc. Give the parents some detail about the behavior plan so they get an idea about how their youth's day is structured and how closely they are supervised.

Describe how the program works, including who does what.

- Youth live with foster parents who receive special training to work with youth with emotional and behavioral problems.
- Foster parents receive regular guidance and support to help keep youth on track with the program.
- Youth have individual therapists who help them learn new skills and better ways to solve problems.
- Skills coaches work with youth to help them use new skills in appropriate settings such as at school and with peers.
- The Team Lead coordinates the youth's program and oversees everyone working with the youth. The Team Lead is the ultimate authority and decision maker and answers directly to the judge and parole or probation officer. The Team Lead is available to the parents to answer their questions and to address their concerns.
- Everyone works together to help parents prepare for their youth to return home and succeed there. Let them know that as their therapist you are on call for them and give them your number(s). Encourage them to call if they have any questions or concerns.
- Give parents an explanation about how this program works with the courts, service agencies, and schools.

Explain that the goal of the program is to improve their youth's behavior by teaching new skills that will enable the youth to get along better with others, make better choices, and solve problems more effectively. Let the parents know that this is accomplished by minimizing contact with deviant peers, reinforcing their youth's strengths, setting clear limits, and consistently following through with consequences for misbehavior.

Give parents credit for the positive things they have done to raise their youth. The treatment team should be noticing the youth's strengths, and the family therapist should give the parents credit for those strengths.

"I just spoke with the Team Lead and she mentioned that your son..."

"The foster parents are already noticing..."

"Teachers have commented..."

Finding Out About the Parents' Perspective

Parents are the most knowledgeable source of information about their youth and what they have experienced. This information should be respected as an important perspective on the youth and the history that resulted in the youth being removed from the home. The family therapist should solicit background information from parents to better understand how they view their youth's situation. This may help the therapist identify barriers that have prevented effective parenting in the past and include them as targets in the treatment. At this stage, the therapist should focus on validating the parents' feelings and empathizing with their situation rather than trying to suggest change or offer alternative perspectives.

Ask parents to talk about their youth's history and their perspective on her development. Ask them about what they've tried in the past, what has worked and not worked for them, and what the sources of stress are in their family. There are several benefits to having this conversation at the start of the treatment process. Most parents want to talk about their youth's past and their experiences with her, and unless the therapist makes a point of discussing it, they will probably bring it up in bits and pieces along the way, which may be distracting. More importantly, by asking for their perspective the therapist lets parents know that their views and opinions are valued, which will help them feel more positive about the treatment. Background information from parents will provide information about their strengths and allow the therapist to highlight those strengths. Likewise, the therapist will learn about areas that need improvement and can teach to those deficits. In addition to helping assess the parents, the information parents provide will typically establish a context for information known about the youth from official records.

Potential questions to learn about parent's perspective

"What kinds of things have you tried in the past with Maria? What has worked, what hasn't worked?"

"What problems did you have at home while Maria was living there?"

"What is your theory about why Maria behaves this way?"

"What are Maria's friends like?"

Identifying Parents' Goals

Before starting to work with parents on their family management skills, the therapist should talk with them about their goals. Ask them to talk about what changes they would like to see.

"If this program ended the way you wanted it to – what would happen? How would things be different?"

In the past, parents may not have been asked about changes they wanted; they may have simply been told what needed to happen. Parents are more likely to feel more cooperative or enthusiastic about treatment if their goals are included in the plan. Addressing their goals will support the concept that they are working together with the therapist who is a "consultant" helping them achieve their goals rather than an expert who is going to tell them what to do. When talking about the parents' goals, it is important to make the link between what they want and the program's objectives. If appropriate, use statements such as "that makes sense," "that fits well with the basic program goals, too," or "that's great that we're thinking about the same things."

Given that parents can identify the broader long-term goals, move on to talk about the steps that will get them there, which will naturally lead to identifying some short-term goals. Try to orient parents toward describing their goals in behavioral terms, so it is easier to identify exactly what needs to change in order to accomplish their goals. For example, a mother may say that she wants her son to have a better attitude around the house. What does that mean to her? Does she want him not to yell at her, to be more polite, to interact more, etc.? Agreeing about the goals in behavioral terms provides a common understanding between the therapist and the parents and acts as a contract about the goals of therapy. Having an operational definition of the goals enables the therapist and parents to better measure change and helps to determine when goals have been realized.

Questions to focus parents on behavioral definitions

Family Therapist: *"If I came over to your house and he was having a bad attitude, what would I see?"*

Parent: *"He swears at me when I ask him to do things and slams his door."*

Family Therapist: *"How about if he was having the good attitude you want him to have, what would I see then?"*

Parent: *"He would do what he was asked to do, and he would talk in a normal voice."*

Family Therapist: *"OK, a bad attitude means swearing, slamming stuff around, etc., and a good attitude means minding when you ask him to do things and using an appropriate tone of voice."*

Throughout the discussion about goals, continue to point out how the program is designed to meet them. Making the connection between the parents' goals and program objectives is a perfect time to transition into the next phase of the therapy, which is focused on teaching and refining parenting strategies.

Each family situation is unique, so the number of sessions needed to cover background information and orient parents to the treatment will vary, but typically it takes two to three sessions. Throughout these initial sessions, remember to check with the parents frequently to see if they have questions. Even if they don't, encouraging them to ask questions will help them feel included in what is going to happen. The most difficult families to treat are those that withhold information or report that everything is fine and that there are no problems. Start early to make them understand that their input is important to the outcome.

Also, in these early sessions be sure to reinforce the parents for their efforts so far. Many parents in this situation are very insecure and self-conscious about their parenting. If you align with them right away by acknowledging their strengths, you may alleviate some of their apprehension and encourage their cooperation. Emphasize their concern for their youth and their ability to be her provider. It is a good idea to acknowledge what is being accomplished with their help in these first few sessions. For example, at the end of the first few sessions, they will have provided valuable background information that will help the team individualize a program for their child, and they will have identified short- and long-term goals.

Acknowledging parents' efforts and existing skills

"It's a real strength that you can identify the kids who are not a good influence on Lakisha."

"Your input about Lakisha is valuable and will help us customize her treatment."

"Your coming here every week shows that you are very committed to Lakisha's success."

Overcoming Resistance

At the beginning of services, it is common for parents to be quite difficult to contact and there may be some confusion or uncertainty about their willingness to be the aftercare resource for their child. Some families will need to be sought out and pushed strongly for the therapy to get underway. When this happens, the family therapist will coordinate efforts with the Team Lead. In some cases, it is more effective for the Team Lead to push strongly for the therapy to begin, as this puts the family and family therapist in the same boat—being told that they have to do this. It may undermine the family therapist's ability to form a relationship with the family if the therapist is perceived as a pest before their first meeting.

Despite the therapist's best efforts to develop a positive working relationship, parents' resistance to treatment can be considerable. Parents may continue to present logistical obstacles such as scheduling problems or failing to show up for appointments. This may be especially true for parents who have had a lot of negative experiences with other service agencies. In a typically underfunded service agency, a therapist's caseload may be too heavy to allow spending much time pursuing resistant parents. Parents who have experienced this may be very cooperative about scheduling appointments knowing that the therapist will not follow-up in a persistent manner. In TFCO, the therapist assumes responsibility for solving these problems. It will be necessary to be flexible with appointment times and/or locations, arrange for childcare, go to the family's home for meetings, or offer reimbursement for bus fare or gas. The therapist is able to deal with these logistical barriers by working to identify barriers and providing several options. A therapist's friendly persistence communicates a commitment to working with the family and a willingness to spend as much time as it takes to overcome obstacles. Frequently, once parents realize that the therapist is not going to be easily avoided, they become more engaged and reliable.

Parents may also be resistant and hostile to the treatment itself, as they may have become so hopeless about their youth's situation that they think nothing can be done. They may challenge the therapist or be consistently contrary. Parents may also feel directly challenged when the youth with whom they have struggled for years appears to settle down quickly in the foster home. In these situations, it may be important to again emphasize the training received by the foster parents and the support the program offers. It is important to avoid confrontations over these and other forms of resistance and not become sidetracked from the mission of these early sessions in order to establish a good working relationship. Supervision of the therapist provides a forum for the therapist to get advice and problem solve around barriers the family presents. Family sessions should be videotaped (or audiotaped if video is not available) so the therapist and Team Lead can review and discuss difficult situations.

Family Management Skills

After the initial engagement phase of therapy, the remaining sessions focus on teaching and refining parenting skills. The initial discussion about goals provides a good opportunity to give an overview of the key strategies that are the focus of the program, as these strategies will help parents realize their goals. It is also an ideal time to provide background information on the research behind the program. If parents have an idea of the bigger picture and how these strategies work together, it should help them make the link between what they will be asked to work on and how it will help. It is not important to go into a lot of detail. Explaining highlights of key points in general terms should help parents relate better to the treatment plan. A couple of points to include that will help build a foundation to work from are:

- Studies have shown that youths' problem behavior can be altered with the strategies used in the TFCO program. The strategies that will be used are based on research that shows they are the most effective. It may help parents who feel hopeless to know that the program they are involved in has been studied and recommended because many families in their situation have succeeded in the program.
- Parents will play a critical role in their youth's success. Most youths' behavior improves while they are in TFCO. In order for youth to continue their progress when they return home, parents will need to continue to use the same strategies that were used to start the improvement.

The therapist should introduce and briefly define each of the three key parenting strategies. As each is presented, illustrate how the strategy will help parents realize one of their goals, or help parents recognize how the absence of the strategy may have contributed to their youth's difficulties.

1. **Supervision.** In this program, supervision starts with knowing where the youth is at all times to make sure that he is in a supervised setting with a responsible adult. When youth get in trouble they are generally in unsupervised situations. For example, studies show that over 90% of delinquency happens when kids are with other kids. This is not the case for adults. Adults commit crimes when they are alone. To keep youth on track, parents will have to know where their youth is and who he is with at all times. Peers are a very powerful influence on most youth. When they hang out with peers who have a bad influence on them, there is plenty of opportunity to get into trouble. Learning to supervise is a key to keeping youth away from peers who may have a negative influence.
2. **Encouragement.** Youth need lots of encouragement and reinforcement to learn new ways to behave and to build up the appropriate behaviors they already have going for them. Parents will learn to identify their youth's strengths and effectively encourage and reinforce the things they want him to do. Most parents will be able to relate to how difficult it can be to change something that has become a habit. Making an analogy between the youth changing his behavior

and a person changing something that is a habit provides an opportunity to illustrate the need for support and encouragement to make changes. It is often difficult to get parents who have been engaged in a long-term struggle with difficult behavior to focus on encouragement, and it may take some time early on to get parents to understand that while limit setting can reduce the occurrence of some behaviors, getting the youth to learn and practice new skills and attitudes will require the liberal use of reinforcement.

3. **Discipline.** Youth also need to know what the limits are and that there will be consequences for misbehavior. This is often the hardest for parents to learn to do effectively. While in foster care, the youth will be on a behavior plan that lays out expectations and consequences clearly. Parents will learn to use the same system in their home. Relate how parents have (or haven't) used limits and consequences in the past to their youth's problems. In this program we use small consequences for small things like being one minute late or saying one swear word. Research shows that it is important to intervene early, before problems get big, and to intervene consistently. In order to use negative consequences at the rate needed for early intervention, parents must learn to focus on smaller consequences than they may be accustomed to using. One can only ground a youth to the house for "the rest of his life" one time, but a CD can be taken for an hour much more frequently.

In addition to tying these strategies to specific information collected from family members while building an alliance and goal setting, it is important to also tie the strategies together. Let parents know that doing just one of these things will not be enough, but that using all of them together will make the most difference. After introducing the strategies, it is time to work more intensively on each area. While the strategies are presented separately below, it is not intended that they be taught as isolated skills, but rather integrated together throughout the remainder of treatment according to the family's needs.

Supervision

Supervision is critical to continued success when the youth returns home. Without adequate supervision, it is easy for youth to reestablish their connections with deviant peers and resume their bad habits. Parents of youth with problem behaviors often do not have an understanding of the level of supervision it will take to support their youth's continued progress. By the time youth come home, their behavior may be so much better that parents feel they can handle a lower level of supervision or that they have earned their "freedom." There may be multiple logistical barriers for parents to supervise at the level required. It is important to start early to work out a home supervision plan. It will be important that parents understand what is required when their child begins home visits. (See Appendix A for a handout on supervision rules during home visits.) Throughout treatment, the therapist should continue to teach and refine supervision skills. By the time youth are in this program, parents may have lost all control over their whereabouts. Changing that dynamic is not easy, so start with the basics and work gradually up to more complicated tactics. Ultimately, parents should understand and have practice in the following:

- **Making rules about supervision.** The family should have clear rules about where the youth can be, who she can be with, what time she has to be home, when she needs to call and check in, etc. The more clearly these expectations are articulated, the easier it is for the youth to comply, and the easier it is for parents to reward compliance and give a consequence for violations.
- **Knowing where the youth is at all times.** Follow-up and check to see that he is where he is supposed to be and/or that there is a responsible adult present. There should be some method in place to verify this without relying on the youth's report. Sometimes parents feel it shows a lack of trust to check-up on their youth. Help them understand that it is their job to enforce the rules and by checking up on their youth they are only doing their job and protecting him. It is sometimes helpful to demonstrate for parents that not taking these steps actually sets their youth up and does not protect him from what might be difficult social situations.
- **Knowing and approving of the youth's friends.** Parents should always meet their youth's friends and their caretakers. Peers who parents feel may have a negative influence on their youth are "off limits." Teach parents what to look for when determining who is and isn't off limits. Is the peer required to keep her parents informed of her whereabouts? Is there any association with this peer and alcohol or drugs, truancy, crime, etc.? Teach parents how to get information from teachers about which peers might be a bad influence on their youth. Teach them how to interact with other parents about their "rules." For example, if their youth is going to spend time at a friend's house, teach them how to talk with the friend's parents about their rule that an adult be there. Parents need to be clear about who is off limits and be prepared to provide consequences for associating with "off-limit" peers.
- **Being involved in school progress.** Being aware of and involved in a youth's life at school is a form of supervision. Many parents are intimidated by the school

system, and have had negative experiences with it themselves. Teach parents how to effectively track their youth's progress at school and how to interact with school personnel in a productive manner. It is often helpful to go with parents to a school meeting. Talking with parents about the school cards the youth is carrying to school every day and how these are dealt with in the foster home can be very helpful here.

- **Addressing and overcoming logistical constraints.** Help parents come up with ways to address the logistical obstacles their individual situation may present. For example, a parent who works until 6:00 p.m. needs help figuring out how to arrange for their youth to be in a supervised situation from the time he is out of school until the parent gets home.

As the therapist works through supervision-related issues with parents, additional problems are likely to surface that the parents were not forthcoming about at first. Don't be discouraged as this is normal. Parents will reveal more problems as their trust in the process and family therapist increases.

Encouragement

Parents play a pivotal role in the socialization of their youth. That role may lead to a lack of socialization or to the development of appropriate social skills, but whatever the outcome, parents are a powerful influence on their youth's development. Often, parents in this program are so focused on their youth's negative behavior that they do not notice and encourage prosocial behaviors. They may be solely tuned into their youth's problem behaviors, which are, indeed, hard to ignore. Paying attention to situations where problem behavior is **not** occurring, and reinforcing the youth at these times is a new experience for many parents. To help parents begin rebalancing their attention, teach them how to encourage their youth before spending too much time on discipline and limit-setting.

Given the severity of their youth's problem behavior, parents may be resistant to focusing on encouragement and naturally drift toward talking about discipline issues. It may be necessary to teach parents more about the value of encouragement and support and provide a rationale for why they need to work on encouragement.

The rationale for focusing on encouragement:

Developing prosocial skills is especially important for youth with behavior and mental health problems as they are often less skilled than their typical peers in a number of areas important to their development. For this reason, they tend to have lower academic achievement, poorer peer and adult relationship skills, and less involvement in positive activities such as hobbies or sports. Youth with problem behaviors tend to rely on aggressive or coercive tactics to get what they want, and these tactics may be an effective short-term strategy in that coercion often "works" to get immediate gains. However, this puts these youth at risk for further rejection and progression into a negative lifestyle. Positive peers and adults tend to disassociate from youth who are aggressive and coercive. When that happens there is even less opportunity for the positive socialization and skill development that naturally occurs through interactions with adults and positive peers. It is critical that parents focus on encouragement. With diminished opportunity, youth progressively lag further behind peers in the development of needed skills, and their behavior becomes more extreme. These youth are then likely to increase their association with problem peers and be reinforced by that group for being uncooperative and antisocial. Over time, they may completely fail to develop the ability to use positive, "normal" social skills and strategies to achieve their goals. The treatment goal is to assist youth in learning to engage and interact appropriately with adults and prosocial peers. Meeting this goal involves teaching and reinforcing age-typical behaviors that are expected of youth.

In addition to teaching prosocial skills, a second and related goal is to reinforce the appropriate behaviors that already exist. Even the most high-rate, negative, uncooperative youth have times in the day when they are not causing trouble and are doing what is expected of them. Simple daily tasks, such as getting out of bed on time or putting dishes in the sink, can become the focus for parents' reinforcement of appropriate youth behavior.

As a strategy, reinforcement of appropriate behavior has many advantages:

- Strengthens the bond between adult and youth,
- Increases the probability that the reinforced behavior will reoccur,
- Decreases (but does not eliminate) the probability that negative behavior will occur, and
- Gives the adults a tool for controlling how they focus their own attention, which can have positive effects on the overall emotional tone of the relationship.

Recent studies have found that the amount of reinforcement that parents use has an independent effect on youth outcomes (behavioral, affective, and social) over and above what could be accounted for by discipline methods. That means that you can make more progress by using *reinforcement + discipline* than you can with discipline alone. Strong behavior plans incorporate methods for implementing daily reinforcement and daily consequences for problem or negative behavior. Tangible reinforcers that are offered to and earned by the youth should also be incorporated in the plan when possible. Focusing on the positive involves both increasing the amount of reinforcement that parents are regularly giving and varying the type of reinforcements offered.

Working with parents to increase the level of encouragement they provide to their youth:

Generally, the focus of parents' encouragement in the early stages of family therapy should be on increasing their youth's rate of cooperation. Youth need to learn to be cooperative in order to function better in society. Being cooperative will help them be accepted and get along better with their peers, teachers, and other adults. This will lead them to more positive interactions, which encourages them to feel more confident and better prepared to meet new demands. Assure parents that problem behaviors will be tackled later, and that the youth is receiving consequences for negative behavior in the foster home, but first it is necessary to "set the stage" for improvement at home by creating a more positive and cooperative atmosphere.

One way to increase the level of encouragement that parents provide to their youth is to pay more attention to ways he is already being cooperative and to things he is already doing well.

Reintroduce parents to the behavior plan and explain how it is being used in the foster home. Explain that the system is used to help parents be consistent in noticing and providing incentives for positive behavior and setting limits and giving consequences for negative behavior. Show parents how using the incentive system helps to motivate youth and increases how often they respond in the way parents want them to (i.e., comply with requests, complete chores, interact in a pleasant manner, etc.).

The TFCO program intentionally focuses on teaching parents to reinforce their youth before attempting to improve their discipline skills. Most therapists concur that one of the most difficult aspects of treatment is getting parents to change their discipline methods. The therapist will be in a better position to work on discipline skills if parents have realized some success implementing an incentive system. That success encourages

a collaborative relationship with the therapist and allows parents to gain confidence in their ability to change.

In addition to teaching parents to use an incentive system to effectively increase the frequency of desired behaviors, throughout the family therapy teach parents to pay attention to “the balance.” Help them pay attention to how much positive feedback they give in relation to corrective feedback. Use ratios like “5 to 1” to help them keep track of how they are doing.

As treatment progresses, support and encourage parents to teach their child new behaviors and to “shape” behaviors using encouragement and incentives. Help them to identify small strengths and use reinforcement/incentives to encourage their growth and expansion. Show them how to break new tasks into manageable components to maximize the chance of success and how to provide appropriate incentives for learning and performing new behaviors.

Example of Shaping

The parents report to the family therapist that their son James embarrasses them at church and around family because he glares and isn't polite.

Family Therapist: *“Tell me what you want James to do when you are around other people.”*

Parents: *“We want him to be pleasant to be around.”*

Family Therapist: *“Ok, let's break that down into smaller skills. Do you want him to make eye contact?”*

Parents: *“Yes! We want him to make eye contact, shake hands, greet, and show interest in the person.”*

Family Therapist: *“Great. Making eye contact and shaking hands can be step one, greeting them by saying ‘hi’ or ‘good to meet you’ can be step two, and asking the person something about themselves like ‘how are you?’ can be step three. Now, we can role-play this with James and give him points for doing each step. We will start with just making eye contact and shaking hands. Once he gets that, we will move on to giving a greeting and then on to ‘how are you?’”*

The family therapist role-plays this with the parents in the session, focusing the parents on reinforcing James for engaging in each component of the overall skill.

Sometimes parents don't like the idea of using incentives because they think of them as bribing their child to behave well. The therapist should explain that later, when their youth is behaving well more consistently, they may not need to use as many incentives, but that to get things started incentives are very effective. Studies have shown that youth with problem behaviors respond well to incentives. Make sure parents understand that incentives are used contingent upon their youth actually performing the desired behavior and that the youth only gets the incentive after the behavior occurs. It may help parents to think of a bribe as giving an incentive (or reward) before the desired behavior occurs—to be avoided because there is no *incentive* left for the youth to actually follow through. With incentives, it is the youth's responsibility to actually perform the behavior in the first place—the incentive encourages him to make that same

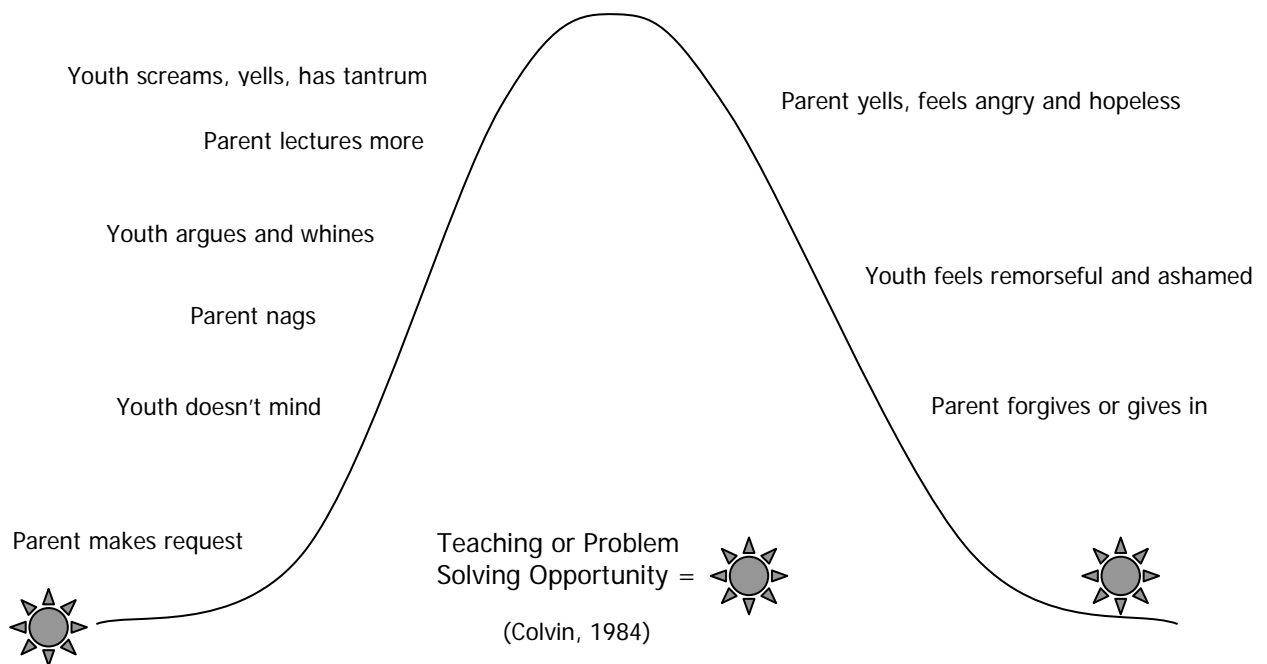
choice the next time. Frustrated, overworked parents may also respond to the notion that just teaching youth what we do not want them to do is only half of the job, the other half is teaching them what behaviors we do want and how to perform these behaviors correctly.

The behavior plan used by TFCO foster parents gets youth “used to” having daily privileges and small incentives be contingent upon their appropriate behavior. We were careful to design the behavior plan so that it can be transferred to the youth’s family once the TFCO placement has ended. For example, points earned in the foster home for routine behaviors such as being on time, compliance with household rules, performance of chores, and completing homework are traded in for privileges such as a later bed time, telephone use, and free time in the community. Many parents in this program have histories of allowing their youth free access to a wide array of non-contingent privileges and, in fact, have lost control of what their youth is allowed to do and not do. A goal of family therapy is to put parents back in control of regulating their youth’s access to both routine and “extra” privileges. The family therapist works to teach parents to assess what privileges or rewards they have available and want to use with their youth and then teaches them how to use these contingently.

Discipline

Once parents have learned to reinforce their youth and feel comfortable using the daily point charts, the therapist can begin to focus more intensively on their discipline skills. The goal is to teach parents effective non-violent methods for giving corrective feedback or providing consequences for misbehavior. Parents should learn that effective discipline involves consistent use of natural or negative consequences. In the TFCO program, this involves taking away points as a negative consequence for pre-specified target behaviors (e.g., arguing, noncompliance). This is a big change for parents who have previously responded to misbehavior by yelling, threatening, or simply ignoring problems.

It will probably be necessary to spend a significant amount of time helping parents learn to control their negative emotions while disciplining. Talk about how easy it is to be led into power struggles with youth and also why it is important to avoid them. Power struggles imply that someone must “win” and win/lose situations always involve conflict. It may be helpful to show parents the escalation curve and explain how emotional outbursts in discipline situations typically follow this pattern.



Parents may be able to recognize the pattern in their own interactions and may even be able to identify the “triggers” that set them off. Point out the times when it is more effective to try and problem solve and the times when it is less helpful to attempt to solve a problem (i.e., during discipline situations). Role play ways to reduce the intensity of discipline confrontations by:

- Delivering consequences in a neutral or even sympathetic manner;
- Disengaging from arguments with the youth;

- Preventing the youth's misbehavior from escalating by identifying early signs of problem behavior and immediately taking away a few points to interrupt the chain of behavior, or giving points when the youth does something else; and
- Recognizing when they are angry and taking a 5-minute break to calm down before confronting the youth.

Help parents identify beliefs they may have about what “has to happen” when they become angry, and assist them in experimenting with alternative responses. Help parents understand that if they are able to model skills for anger control, it helps their youth also learn anger control.

Role Play Examples

When teaching new skills it is often useful to use “wrong way — right way” to draw attention to the most effective strategies.

Family Therapist: *“What is a house rule in your home?”*

Parent: *“No eating in the living room.”*

Family Therapist: *“Pretend I’m Kim and I’m eating a super drippy peanut butter and jelly sandwich on your new couch. Let’s try the wrong way first, what could you say that ensures an argument?”*

Parent: *“What are you doing?!”*

Family Therapist: *“I’m eating a sandwich.”*

Parent: *“I’ve told you not to eat in the living room!”*

Family Therapist: *“I’m not getting it on anything...”*

Family Therapist: *“Wow! I really see how that would lead right into an argument. Now let’s try doing it the right way and make a request in a neutral way. I’ll go first: No eating in the living room, please go in the kitchen.”*

Parent: *“But I’m watching my favorite show!”*

Family Therapist: *“Finish your sandwich in the kitchen and then you can watch your show. (Therapist walks away)”*

Parent: *“Fine!”*

Family Therapist: *“Great, now you pretend I’m Kim and give me the direction.”*

Parent: *“No eating in the living room, take that to the kitchen please.” (Parent walks away)”*

Family Therapist: *“Ok, whatever!”*

After practicing, the parent and family therapist should discuss the impact of giving a clear direction and disengaging with the youth’s attempts to argue.

Strategies for putting it all together:
Five principles that put parents in charge and teach youth the skills
they need to know to succeed

1. Have clear rules set up in advance.

Teach parents to clearly define the rules and limits that they feel fit their family and the needs of their youth.

Parents may have a clear idea of what they mean by simple rules like “be home on time,” “be good,” or “do what I tell you to do,” but their youth probably has a different (and more liberal) definition of what it is to be on time (within an hour or so) or compliant (I did most of what you asked). Youth can be experts at exploiting the “gray area” to their advantage, and youth with behavior problems typically push these boundaries into the unacceptable range. Youth with long histories of behavior problems are also less able than their non-problem peers to deal well with undefined situations where they are not well supervised or mentored by adults. Therefore, it is important that we help parents to set up behaviorally-defined house rules and supervision limits that are relevant to the developmental level of their child. This means helping them to be very specific and concrete about what they want, writing it down, and sharing their expectations with their youth. Clear behavioral definitions of rules and daily routines, such as expectations about where and with whom the youth should and should not be during the day, need to be developed by the parent. Behavioral definitions should include a brief description of the desired behavior and times for completion.

THIS:

Be in your room with the lights out by 10 PM

30 minutes of homework time, completed before TV

Go to the movie with Mark and come home immediately (9 PM)

Eat breakfast, brush hair and teeth, make bed, and be ready to leave for school by 7:30 PM

NOT THIS:

Bed on time

Do your homework

Be home by curfew

Get ready for school

2. Have clear consequences.

Parents should be guided toward offering clear, non-emotional consequences whenever their youth does not meet an expectation. It is difficult for either the caregiver or the youth to do this without argument or negotiation when the expectation has not been clearly defined. Even when expectations are clearly established, the youth will undoubtedly still try to argue (based on the past success of this strategy). Working with parents in advance to be sure that expectations are clear will greatly assist them in

focusing on reacting to the rule violation and not allowing the youth to side-track them with the moral ramifications of having a curfew at all, the parents' right to be telling him what to do, or how his friends' parents act.

For example, when a youth comes home late and intoxicated after having been out with friends, we can anticipate that the youth will be worried about the reaction of his parents. The parents are likely to be concerned about their youth's well-being and frustrated at the rule violations. The situation is ripe for a lengthy and counterproductive argument that can easily shift focus from the rule violation to any number of other topics.

With a clear delineation of household rules and limits, parents can check on youths' health, safety, and sobriety while disengaging from the potential argument. Parents, thereby, are free to give a clear message that the behavior was unacceptable while allowing room to offer support for whatever good decisions might have accompanied the mistakes (e.g., coming home late).

3. Use small high-frequency corrections.

After rules are clearly defined and put in place, misbehavior is easy to detect and rule violations should be relatively unambiguous. Clarity of household rules should also make compliance easier to track. It is extremely important to help parents be consistent in following through with consequences once rule violations/misbehaviors occur. Most parents know they should do this and it makes sense to them, but having suffered "a history of a thousand defeats," it can be difficult for some parents to consistently employ discipline plans.

Common barriers to the use of consistent discipline include:

- Direct youth noncompliance with consequences (youth refuses to complete the assigned consequence),
- Parental overreactions with harsh or unrealistic (to implement) discipline followed by parents giving in,
- Parents feeling too hopeless or stressed to follow through, and
- Youth arguing, charming, or negotiating her way out of consequences.

Consequences should be simple and straightforward to implement. If the youth is highly noncompliant, good consequences must be set up so that they require no or minimal youth cooperation to implement. Consequences should not inconvenience or disrupt family life for the parent more than they do for the youth (a month-long grounding will often result in caregivers giving in because of how limiting the consequence is to their own behavior and family life). Consequences need not be overly severe and should depend on the occurrence of a well-defined rule violation or youth behavior rather than on the anger level of the parent. Parents are often looking for a single reaction that will end a behavior and prevent its re-occurrence. This ignores the fact that problem behavior often develops over a long period of time and is maintained by multiple factors. Smaller "light duty" consequences that can be implemented fairly quickly

(within one day) are more effective than harsh, long-lasting ones. These smaller consequences also have an advantage in that they can be applied more frequently by the caregivers (you can remove the TV for a year only once a year, but it can be taken away for 15 minutes four times an hour), and minor consequences can be delivered with less hesitation because the caregiver does not have to worry about the negative effects of the consequence on themselves and the rest of the family (see Examples of Privileges to Remove in the Appendix).

The idea of using short, easily implemented consequences goes against the grain for many parents. They feel a consequence won't really work unless it really hurts. It is the family therapist's task to arm parents with a number of feasible, mild, short consequences that they are comfortable with and ready to use when their youth misbehaves. It is important to convince parents that it is the predictability rather than the severity of the consequence that will ultimately change youth behavior. There may, indeed, be certain behaviors that the caregivers will want to address with stronger consequences (e.g., substance use, criminal behavior), but these tend to be less frequent and can be planned for based on the youth's past behavior. Parents may also be looking for a moment of enlightenment from the youth following a very intense negative consequence, but the research shows that regular, small consequences are more likely to produce long-lasting behavior change. Conversely, big consequences tend to be delivered too sporadically to be effective, and they are more likely to be mixed with a lot of negative adult affect (yelling, lecturing), which actually serves to dilute the impact of the consequence on the youth's behavior.

The lion's share of the behavioral direction can be provided by small, regular incentives and consequences. Along these lines, parents and youth should be prepared for small consequences to happen daily or at least weekly. The therapist should prepare the parent to give both rewards and consequences frequently throughout the day and prepare the youth to receive them. It is important to actually practice the steps involved in giving consequences and rewards through role-plays; first between therapists working separately with the parents and youth, and next with the therapists directing the parents and youth in jointly doing the role-plays. Such interactions should be practiced at times when family members are not agitated or upset. Several repetitions of these interactions will prepare the family to successfully attempt these teaching interactions without falling back into less constructive patterns. While, if asked, most families report being resistant to such role-plays, they can often be engaged by simply starting the exercise without preamble.

Some parents have an internal model that equates discipline with having negative verbal exchanges or arguments, and reorienting these parents to a different model is often helpful. We often use the analogy of "teaching," which contains the idea that a discipline opportunity is part of a process of correcting youth and helping them learn new behaviors. Anytime we learn new things, mistakes are likely to be made, and in changing the family discipline plan both the youth and the parents are likely to need to allow themselves time to practice. Few people are perfect when first learning something new, and mistakes are an expected part of the process. The more ingrained a habit is, the harder it is to learn a new way of behaving, and knowing that a person should change is not the same as actually consistently doing things differently. A youth might

know not to mouth off when a teacher corrects him, but actually saying “yes, I’m sorry” or saying nothing could take some practice. Parents who can adopt a teaching model are going to be better equipped to reward efforts leading toward behavior change and to be less frustrated by the predictable pattern of progress and mistakes made along the way.

It is helpful to teach parents that it is not easy for youth to give a polite, non-argumentative response after receiving a consequence, and that this behavior should be encouraged and reinforced. Many of the consequences given to antisocial youth by adults are in reaction to youths’ not accepting limits well. To address this, the parents should not reduce or remove the consequence when a polite response follows, however, they can acknowledge and later reward the youth for mature behavior in the face of a difficult situation (“She took her consequence like a grown-up.”). In a situation where a youth is behaving badly or ignoring rules but later turns the behavior around and starts responding positively, the parent should notice this and reinforce the youth for accepting limits in an appropriate manner.

4. Give consequences early and often, especially at first.

When a behavioral program is initiated, both rewards and punishments should be delivered with high frequency. Adult reactions that come long after a behavior has occurred are difficult for youth to predict and have less influence on promoting behavioral change than do more frequent reactions that immediately follow positive or negative behaviors. This immediacy and consistency are especially important at first (during the first two weeks of using a behavior management system) because it is necessary to teach the youth exactly how the contingencies will work. The idea is that when teaching (trying to increase) or punishing (trying to decrease) a new behavior, it is important that as many possible opportunities for teaching are noted and positive or negative consequences used. Because we want these reactions to happen so often, it is only practical to keep them relatively small.

Small Rewards

Points
Hershey kisses
30 minutes to listen to music
25 to 50 cents
A half-hour of TV
Extra phone call

NOT

Large Rewards

A trip to Disneyland
A pony
A new stereo
A larger amount of money
A video game system
Private phone line

Small Consequences

30 minute extra chore
Loss of an item for 15 minutes
Out 10 minutes of practice
Loss of bicycle for a day

NOT

Large Consequences

Work all day Saturday
Giving the item to charity
Miss the big game
Loss of bicycle

5. Never negotiate during a discipline confrontation.

For a variety of reasons, many parents have a strong urge to talk way too much during discipline events. They may think this is the ideal time to lecture, or they may just get caught up in the moment. But, in fact, when the youth is receiving a consequence is one of the worst times to try to teach anything. Talking in these situations often leads to extended discussions with the youth that deteriorate into negotiations around the amount or type of the consequence the youth should receive or even whether the consequence is deserved at all. The youth is likely to try to explain why this problem never really happened in the first place or how the parents' lack of faith in him makes life in the family unbearable.

While these interactions likely happen to some degree in all families (few youth will just accept a punishment on the first pass), negotiating around discipline is more pronounced when parents believe they have previously failed the child in some way, when the youth is more verbal or intelligent than the parents, and when there is a great deal of marital discord. During the course of treatment, these systemic issues will probably need to be addressed with the parents, but we have found that therapists need to move ahead with parents by showing them how not to engage in these predictable verbal traps with their youth when they are disciplining, even before the systemic issues are resolved. It often takes several role-plays with parents where they practice firmly saying the consequence and nothing else.

For example, we are interested in parents saying:

THIS: You are 15 minutes late. Your work chore is to empty the dishwasher, and you will get phone privileges back as soon as the dishes are done.

NOT THIS: You know you're supposed to be home at 6:00. Where were you? How many times have I told you how much I worry? You have no consideration for this family. Empty the dishwasher.

THIS: Thanks for getting ready for school so quickly this morning, you did leave your towel on the bathroom floor, and as we discussed, I took your radio, and you will get it back this evening after dinner.

NOT THIS: I can't stand to live like this anymore. You are not even doing the most basic things around here. How are you ever going to get off of probation when you do not respect me enough to pick up your towel? Am I just supposed to step over it all day? I'm taking your radio.

Although we have all heard these types of reactions from parents, there are two clear problems with the "not this" responses. First, the parent opens up several areas for potential discussion that would distract from the more specific goal of holding the youth accountable for the problem behavior. Second, in both cases the parent's reaction lacks sufficient detail about the specifics of the consequence (What exactly is it and when will

it be over?), and almost demands that even the most compliant youth ask questions about when and for how long.

The therapist should role-play with parents how to give consequences, and after some practice and feedback, the role-play situations can be practiced with the parents and youth together. Such practice sessions are helpful to see where the youth and parents have difficulties. Care should be taken to insure that these exercises are framed well for the family and that they do not further undermine parental authority. If it is available, videotaping these role-plays is an excellent way to provide clear guidance on what the parents are doing well and on what they need to improve. If using tape feedback, it is important to emphasize the parents' strengths and correct moves. In the same manner that we discussed in shaping youth behavior by focusing on the positive, in trying to move parenting skills forward, the therapist should focus on what the parent is doing right and use a high rate of immediate positive reinforcement to teach additional skills. Outside of the in-session practices, regular telephone contact between the therapist and the parent helps to solidify these new parenting skills, support positive efforts, and troubleshoot problems.

In addition to helping parents to keep their talk to a minimum, it is helpful to guide them to be supportive and positive about the youth's completion of any assigned consequence. If parents think that a consequence needs to be changed, then this should be done outside of the immediate discipline event and not in front of the youth. Parents typically need assistance with walking the fine line between not talking about the discipline and not rejecting the youth while she is doing the consequence. For example, the family therapist can model an easy-going way of dealing with youth arguing or attempting to renegotiate a consequence. She delivers the consequence with minimal affect, listens briefly to the youth's reaction, and then responds by simply saying "huh" and walking away. This is done in such a way that it suggests to the youth that she has been heard but she does not receive any further adult reaction.

Family Dynamics

It can be complicated for therapists to deal with various family dynamics when working on changing parenting strategies, and these complications most often come into play when working on discipline strategies. In two-parent families, the parents may oppose each other's views on discipline. One may consider the other too harsh or too lenient. In single-parent families, the parent may be unwilling or afraid to set limits or impose consequences. There are endless possibilities for the reasons behind these views, which may or may not ever become apparent in family therapy. Usually, the therapist can use the behavior plan to find agreement or set minimum standards. In two-parent situations, this may take the form of mutual definition of the behaviors specified on the charts and agreement on the points taken for misbehavior. Then, parents have to be willing to stick to the plan and not deviate according to their individual differences. The chart can also be helpful to parents who are too lenient. If parents agree to the behaviors and consequences specified on the chart, the therapist can work with them to simply follow the chart and not give in to their impulse to ignore or dismiss misbehavior. Once parents get the hang of using this system and cooperating with each other, philosophical differences and other barriers such as fear often diminish.

Point Economy

Using the point economy effectively will help parents manage their emotions while disciplining. The therapist helps them understand the need to use relatively more point values for positive than for negative behaviors. Some parents have a tendency to take many more points for misbehavior than they are willing to give for positive behavior, thereby devaluing the contribution of positive behavior to the overall economy system. Ideally, more points will be given for positive behaviors than are taken for negative behaviors. After a negative consequence has been imposed, teach parents to “move on” and provide opportunities for the youth to get back on track quickly in order to avoid becoming overwhelmed or lose motivation because of a mistake.

As therapy progresses, the point and level chart used during home visits should be modified to accommodate parents' and youth's skill development. Family goals should be incorporated into the treatment plan, and the therapist should regularly review progress and barriers toward those goals. The therapist and parents will need to create a structured way to monitor and communicate the youth's progress.

Visits

Visits begin as soon as the youth reaches Level 2, which is usually three weeks after placement. Visits are usually scheduled twice a month throughout the placement. The first visit is short, typically 1 to 2 hours, slowly increasing to day-long visits, and eventually working up to weekend visits. If the treatment team feels that the parents are not ready to supervise the youth to the degree necessary, the initial visit(s) can take place at the office or in some other structured environment. Families will start and progress in developing their skills at varying rates, so there is no typical rate of advancement to longer visits. The overall goal is to provide an opportunity for parents to practice and refine their skills in preparation for their youth's return home. The Team Leader is on call for the family during each visit. Parents are encouraged to call when they are unsure about how to handle something or at the first hint of a problem in hopes of avoiding it. During the first visit(s), it is often necessary to schedule a contact so parents get used to having this access and become comfortable with calling during the visits, which are typically in the evenings and on weekends. A scheduled "check-in" call may help parents who have frequently been discouraged from calling professionals at these times, and the program will need to be patient with parents who are learning that this program works differently. If there is a *significant* behavior problem (the youth breaks supervision rules or refuses to comply), the Team Leader should be called. The Team Leader may decide that the visit should be ended early.

Prior to the first visit, the family therapist should review the following supervision expectations with the parents (and make sure they take a printed copy home with them). It may be helpful to explain that in addition to limiting the opportunity to get into trouble away from home, the program's agreement with child welfare, the juvenile department, and the judge is that the youth will be closely supervised while in the TFCO home and while on visits. The rules may be difficult for parents who aren't accustomed to this level of supervision. Work with parents to identify and address barriers to supervising in the manner required. The attached sample Visit Planning Guide can assist. Our experience has been that parents have a particularly hard time not allowing their youth's friends over or other privileges during visits. It is a good idea to pay specific attention to this expectation and explain the rationale. Remind parents that their youth is coming home to give the family an opportunity to prepare for his eventual return, and the focus of the visit needs to be on the family establishing new ways of interacting with each other and not on the youth's social life. Also, remind parents of the potential negative influence peers can have on youth and that this is a critical time for their youth to succeed, which will be easier without the influence of peers. Even if the youth has some positive peers, in the beginning it would be distracting to have them there during home visits. Later, if things progress well, the Team Leader may decide that some peer interactions during home visits are appropriate. This process will take varying amounts of time for different families, and it is important to know that learning these skills will be a process for the parents just as the new behaviors involve skills development for the youth.

Expectations for Family Visits Through the TFCO Program (see Appendix)

During visits youth need to be supervised at all times by a parent or other adult living in the home. It is most helpful if you as a parent can stick to the schedule that your daughter or son is following in the TFCO home. Your Team Leader is available to brief you on the details of that schedule.

Telephone use: Visits are not a time for your youth to contact friends. Therefore, his/her use of the telephone to talk to friends is not allowed unless the Team Leader and the parent approve it. Approved telephone contact with friends is to be supervised during visits.

Going places: When it is time for visits to occur in the home, families are encouraged to do things together. You are free to take your youth anywhere that you are going. The key is that your youth is to be supervised at all times. Wandering around stores presents a risk for some youth. If your youth has had problems with stealing, be sure to carefully supervise him/her in settings where stealing might occur.

Having visits with friends: This is done only with the prior permission of the Team Leader. If the Team Leader and you have approved contact with friends, your youth and his/her friends need to be supervised by an adult during home visits.

Bringing things back to the foster home after the visit: Your youth may want to bring some possessions back to the TFCO home. This can be done only with the prior approval of the Team Leader. Please call your Team Leader before a visit if you know in advance that you will want to send things back with your youth. If, during the visit, you discover that you want to send something back, call your Team Leader to get approval first.

Buying things for your youth during the visit: Buying your youth food or treats during the visit is fine, but buying items such as clothing, shoes, or other things must be pre-approved by the Team Leader.

What to do if things aren't going well: Many youth will try to test limits and rules during visits. Parents are key players in their youth's treatment. It is important for your youth to see you as cooperating with TFCO program rules. If your youth acts up during a visit, call the Team Leader to talk about the situation. It is much better if you can call early in the process when your youth is just starting to misbehave, rather than waiting until there is a full-blown conflict. The most important thing to remember is to call if there is a conflict or any type of rule breaking on your youth's part. It is not a failure or a bad reflection on you as a parent if you call. By calling you are playing an active and positive role in your youth's treatment.

Will this level of supervision last forever? No. As your youth becomes better at making responsible choices and decisions s/he will receive increased privileges. Your Team Leader will talk to you about when and how this will happen.

Another key objective of visits is to provide an opportunity to convey to the youth that her parents are working as a part of the treatment team and that there will be changes when she goes home. To clearly illustrate this, parents start right away with the first visit using a version of the behavior plan. The family therapist will develop a simple, modified version of the point system for parents to use during visits. As treatment progresses and parents become more skilled, the system can be adapted accordingly. An initial point chart should primarily be focused on giving points for normative or appropriate behaviors, but also should include an opportunity for taking away points as the parents gain skills. An example of some behaviors is shown below.

Identifying Positive Behaviors to Reinforce

Problem Behavior	Positive Behavior	Description
Arguing about points	Accepts feedback without comment	Taking news about point loss well
Not minding	Cooperation/ Doing Chores	Doing what is asked of you without arguing or talking back and getting chores done in a reasonable amount of time
Sulking	Attitude/Maturity	Being pleasant, responsible, and hearing <i>no</i> without arguing
Rude	Consideration	Showing respect for other members of the family by having a pleasant attitude toward them
Lazy, doesn't contribute	Volunteering	Seeing what needs to be done and doing it without being asked

Example Point Chart for Initial Visits

Home Visit Point Chart			
Name:		Date:	
POINTS	THINGS TO DO TO EARN POINTS	EARNED	TOTAL
10	Cooperation		
10	Attitude & Maturity		
10	Volunteering		

Daily Total: _____

COMMENTS

It is important for parents to practice both giving and taking points, but the first point chart should be weighted to provide parents with more opportunities to notice and reinforce prosocial behavior. Often, parents need encouragement to take away points for things like arguing or noncompliance. They may see so much improvement in their youth's behavior that they overlook these behaviors.

At first, the visit point program should only involve giving then taking points. Follow-up with consequences or privileges will happen in the TFCO home. As parents become more comfortable with the program and more skilled at giving and taking points, and as the visits increase in length, the family therapist should have parents start giving and taking privileges. Then, as things progress, parents should be taught how to appropriately give consequences such as work chores. Ideally, by the time the youth returns home, the daily point system in the TFCO home and the family's home should be the same. Use of the same or a very similar system is intended to help the youth to smoothly transition back into the family and to generalize progress across settings. Getting parents on the same economy will also help this transition, and this process involves helping the family to stay within an average point range based on the youth's behavior. TFCO homes will also need to be coached on how to translate the points awarded during visits with parents including how to handle situations in which the youth

returns from a visit with excessive points (e.g., +300 or -100), in a manner that supports the youth's parents.

Encourage parents to make the visits as much like "real life" as possible. Parents sometimes want to make the youth's visits special occasions, which is understandable, but the main objective of visit is to provide practice time for new parenting skills, which is best done under normal everyday circumstances. As treatment progresses, the family therapist can increase parents' involvement in modifications of the home point system. Include behaviors they've specified as goals or problems they've experienced during home visits. Use PDR (Parent Daily Report) from the TFCO home to show parents what is improving and to identify behaviors for them to work on. Encourage parents to be as actively involved in the design of the treatment plan as they can, pointing out that this is the time to work "the bugs out," so they can keep the plan going smoothly when their youth returns home.

Tips for Successful Family Therapy Sessions

Using Role Play

When learning any new skill, practice is key to mastering the skill. This is true for parenting skills, too, although it is more difficult to create opportunities to practice parenting than other kinds of skills. In the therapy setting, role-playing exercises are an excellent way to help parents learn how to implement the techniques being taught and also receive feedback on how they are doing. Incorporating role-play exercises into the sessions breaks up the time spent in “talk,” and can be a fun way to put words into action. Practicing how they will give reinforcement or administer discipline gives parents a chance to become more skilled and feel more confident before they actually use the new techniques with their youth. It also gives the therapist an opportunity to identify areas that are difficult for parents and to coach them on how to use the techniques more effectively.

Parents are often hesitant to participate in role-playing exercises. They may feel embarrassed or defensive. Knowing that role-playing makes some people uneasy, the therapist should try to present these situations in as non-threatening a manner as possible. This may be accomplished more smoothly if the therapist simply slips into a role-play exercise rather than asking parents if they want to participate and engaging in a lengthy “set-up.” The therapist can also take the lead and model the parent’s role before asking the parent to jump in.

Example:

Teaching parents to disengage

Family Therapist: *“Let’s say you said ‘Stop arguing,’ what would your son say?”*

Parent: *“I’m not arguing, I’m explaining.”*

Family Therapist: Models disengaging by getting up and walking out of the room.

Another effective way to get started with role-plays might be the “Wrong-Way/Right-Way” method. The therapist instructs the parent to do it wrong first. It usually invokes less anxiety to intentionally do it wrong than to try to get it right the first time. Starting with the “wrong way” can introduce more humor and make the whole exercise more fun. Doing it wrong may even be cathartic for some parents. Below is an example of how to introduce the wrong way of the role-play if the purpose of a particular exercise is to have the parent give a reward and praise the child in a positive and enthusiastic way.

Example: Wrong-Way/Right-Way

Family Therapist: *"Pretend I'm your son and I've cleaned up the kitchen just like you've asked me to. You're going to tell me that I've done a good job and give me an extra 2 points. Let's assume you're really not that pleased because it's the first time I've cleaned the kitchen all week. I've finally done it right. Also, let's say that you've had a stressful day, you've had lots of financial worries, and you're feeling pretty down. Now, act as depressed as possible and tell me that you appreciate my efforts, and that you're giving me extra points."*

Parent: (in monotone voice) *"Good job cleaning up, you get an extra 2 points."*

Family Therapist: *"That was great! You used a sad tone of voice, and you didn't make eye contact at all. Even though you said, 'Good job,' it didn't sound like you meant it. You seemed preoccupied and didn't even look at what I had done in the kitchen. Also, you talked very softly and had almost no inflection in your voice. That was great. The message I got was that you were either unimpressed or preoccupied with something else."*

The therapist then debriefs the exercise and reinforces the parent for doing a good job of acting the "wrong way." Point out what the specific behaviors were that conveyed the tone of the message. This method allows the therapist to give parents specific feedback on their behavior without being critical of their performance. It provides an opportunity to actually acknowledge the parents' discomfort with being reinforcing in an acceptable way. The therapist can support how the parents are feeling and at the same time help them improve the way they interact with their youth during new or stressful situations.

Next, the therapist role-plays the right way or asks the parents to do it. In the above example, the parents would be instructed to tell the child that he has earned extra points in a positive, supportive way. The therapist again provides feedback to the parents on their performance. It is important to begin by commenting on something the parents have done well before giving any corrective feedback. If the therapist is not satisfied with the parents' performance it may be necessary to break the exercise down into smaller steps and work on specific aspects of the tasks one at a time. Debrief each role-play exercise by helping the parents to identify what elements were effective or ineffective. It may take a few attempts. In order to set the parents up for success and to ease their anxiety, it is usually helpful for the therapist to take a role in the role-play exercise to demonstrate the desired behavior before the parents are asked to perform.

Joint Sessions

Once parents become more focused and the therapist has things going in the right direction, it is time to get the parents and youth together during sessions to work on solving problems together. At this point, it is assumed that parents will be at least starting to make good decisions about the types of problems that will involve input from their children. Inevitably, disagreements will come up after the youth returns home. The family needs to learn a new way to interact with each other and solve problems in order to avoid falling back into familiar negative habits when problems arise. The overall goal is to have these practice sessions be successful, thereby providing reinforcement and motivation for family members. The key is to start the joint sessions at a point in the treatment when the parents and the youth are likely to be successful. The first joint sessions should be brief and structured. A recommended format would be that during the first 20 minutes the family therapist meets with the parents while the individual therapist meets with the youth. During this time the therapists are preparing each participant for whatever the task will be in the joint session. The therapists should set the stage for success by anticipating problems and strategizing ways to handle them. For the individual therapist this will typically mean planning an exit strategy with the youth, and often a non-verbal signal can be developed that will mean that it is time to go. Then, the parents and youth come together with each of the therapists for the planned discussion, which lasts approximately 15 minutes. After the discussion, the parents and youth separate again and continue the sessions with their therapists, debriefing the practice session.

For the first combined session or two, it is a good idea to keep the tasks simple and avoid "hot" topics or problems. An example of a good activity for these early sessions is to have the family plan what they will do together on their next home visit. A fairly neutral activity like this should help keep the focus constructive and positive and give family members an opportunity to get comfortable interacting in this setting with the therapists. When ready, the family can move on to working on specific problems in these sessions. The two therapists should clearly specify the issue to be discussed with family members, help them identify their goals for the interaction, and coach them on how to interact and negotiate with each other around the issue. Just as role-play exercises are used with the parents and youth separately, they are effective teaching tools for joint sessions.

Example: Saying no to the youth in a joint family therapy session

John is a 17 year old who seemed to respect his father's authority, but undermined his mother's attempts to exercise parental authority. The mother's history included a phase where her problems with alcohol interfered with her reliability and her ability to be responsible. Although John seemed affectionate with his mother, he regularly interrupted her, talked over her, and disagreed with her before she had a chance to make a point or express herself. The therapists wanted to help the mother be more firm and teach John to be more respectful of her. One role-playing exercise the therapist used was to instruct the mother to say no to John three times during the session. To make it less threatening, she was given the option to say no to unimportant or silly things that John would not do anyway (e.g., Don't sing while we are talking.).

These sessions provide an excellent opportunity for family members to practice appropriate communication, negotiation, and problem-solving strategies under the guidance of their therapists and receive feedback and direction. Videotaping the sessions and watching the interactions with parents is an excellent way to give feedback. Parents are often critical of themselves when they watch the interactions, so the therapist needs to be prepared to highlight and reinforce their strengths. Using videotape in the example of mom saying “no”:

The family therapist edited together several sections of videotape of family sessions in which the mother said “no” and watched the tape with the mother, reinforcing her for being firm. The therapist and mother also viewed sections of the family session in which John interrupted the mother. The therapist used that illustration as a basis to set up a role-play with the mother to teach her to take points away for interrupting.

As family members start to make progress with a new skill or problem, the skill should be reinforced through practice and further development. Continuing with the current example:

Among other strategies, John was told that he could earn points during sessions for paraphrasing what his mother said before reacting. His assignment for one session was to teach his younger sister to ask for something respectfully from their mother without nagging or interrupting. After a number of weeks of these kinds of exercises, both mother and son gradually improved. Focusing on the current communication problem allowed unresolved issues from the past to become secondary. Working on ongoing interactions strengthened the functional relationship between them.

This example is intended to illustrate the point that direct practice and application of a variety of skills during treatment sessions is a more effective strategy than just talking about what needs to be changed. Therapists should vary the ways that the family practices new skills in order to keep things interesting. The family therapist can then illustrate how those experiences can be generalized to out-of-session situations and give “assignments” for further practice and application during home visits. In addition to working on dysfunctional family dynamics specific to each individual situation, the joint sessions provide an excellent opportunity to teach family members a problem solving “routine” they can use when the youth returns home. A variety of problem solving strategies can be taught, most following a similar format:

- Identify the problem.
- Brainstorm solutions.
- Identify the pros and cons of solutions.
- Select a solution.
- Specify how to evaluate whether the solution is working.

Practicing the “routine” in joint sessions and experiencing success with the routine is paramount to the family’s ability to effectively solve problems later.

Reunification and Aftercare

As the youth's return home draws near, the therapist should focus attention on adapting the behavior plan to long-term use and solidifying the parents' skills using the system. By the time the youth returns home he will have had several weekend-long visits that should reveal the family's strengths and weaknesses. In the weekly sessions between these visits, the family will have identified problems during the visits and the therapist will have helped them refine their skills and work toward resolving the problems. Undoubtedly, new problems will arise once the youth returns home. Even though the family will have a new set of skills to apply to these problem situations, they will probably need further assistance. The therapist should be available to the family and regularly check in with them after the youth goes home. Often, the therapist can help parents with a problem on the phone, but in most cases it will be necessary to have family members come to sessions together for the first three months after reunification. Typically, contacts by parents to the therapist fade after three months because at that point the family has either successfully adjusted to reunification or more serious problems have presented that require more significant therapy than casual contact. The goal of aftercare is not to solve all of the difficulties these families might encounter, but rather to make sure that they are headed in the right direction, that they have the skills they need to tackle known problems, and that they have support that will be helpful if further problems emerge.

Appendix

Handouts for Parents

1. Behavior Curve
2. Expectations for Home Visits

Handouts for Encouragement and Teaching

3. Ideas for Behaviors to Encourage
4. Examples of Ways to Encourage
5. Steps to Improving Behavior or Teaching a New Behavior
6. Sample Worksheet: Teaching New Behavior
7. Worksheet for Teaching New Behavior

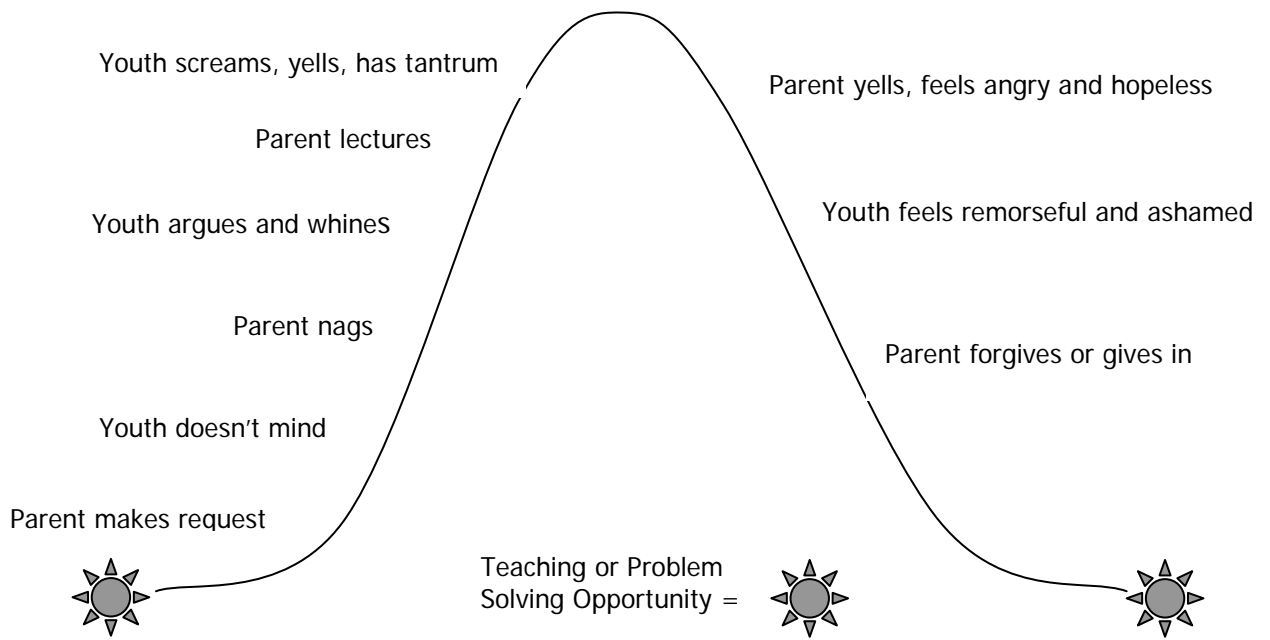
Point Charts

8. Using Point Charts
9. Fine Tuning Charts
10. Three Sample Point Charts for Home Visits
11. Planning for Visits

Discipline

12. Discipline Basics
13. Examples of Privileges to Remove

Behavior Curve



Expectations for Family Visits Through the TFCO Program

During visits, youth need to be supervised at all times by a parent or other adult living in the home. It is most helpful if you as a parent can stick to the schedule that your daughter or son is following in the foster home. Your Team Lead is available to brief you on the details of that schedule.

Telephone Use: Visits are not a time for your youth to contact friends. Therefore, his/her use of the telephone to talk to friends is not allowed unless the Team Lead and the parent approve it. Approved telephone contact with friends is to be supervised during visits.

Going Places: Families are encouraged to do things together during home visits. You are free to take your youth anywhere that you are going. The key is that s/he is to be supervised at all times. Wandering around stores presents a risk for some youth. If your youth has had problems with stealing, be sure to carefully supervise him/her in settings where stealing might occur.

Having Visits With Friends: This is done only with the prior permission of the Team Lead. If the Team Lead and you have approved contact with friends, your youth and his/her friends need to be supervised by an adult during home visits.

Bringing Things Back To The TFCO Home After The Visit: Your youth may want to bring some possessions back to the foster home. This can be done only with the prior approval of the Team Lead. Please call your Team Lead before a visit if you know in advance that you will want to send things back to the foster home with your youth. If, during the visit, you discover that you want to send something back to the foster home, call your Team Lead to get approval first.

Buying Things For Your Youth During The Visit: Buying your youth food or treats during the visit is fine, but buying items such as clothing, shoes, or other things must be pre-approved by the Team Lead.

What To Do If Things Aren't Going Well: Many youth will try to test limits and rules during visits. Parents are key players in their youth's treatment. It is important for your youth to see you as cooperating with program rules. If your youth acts up during a visit, call the Team Lead to talk about the situation. It is much better if you can call early in the process when your youth is just starting to misbehave, rather than waiting until there is a full-blown conflict. The most important thing to remember is to call if there is a conflict or any type of rule breaking on your youth's part. It is not a failure or a bad reflection on you as a parent if you call. By calling you are playing an active and positive role in your youth's treatment.

Will this level of supervision last forever? No. As your youth becomes better at making responsible choices and decisions s/he will get increased privileges. Your Team Lead will talk to you about when and how this will happen.

Who to Call: _____

Ideas for Behaviors to Encourage

Cooperation/Minding
Being polite (Please and Thank you)
Trying something new
Using good table manners
Offering to help
Being mature in a difficult situation
Positive mood or attitude
Thinking of others

Examples of Ways to Encourage

PARENT TIME

- Play a 15-minute game with parent
- Have a story read
- Take a walk with parent
- Be taken out to a movie
- Go out with parent for ice cream
- Night out with special person
- Go to park alone or with parent
- Bake or cook with parents
- Shop with parent
- Use special grown-up “toy” that requires supervision
- Ride motorcycle with parent or other adult

PRIVILEGES

- Choose a special TV program
- Have a shared bedroom to self for one hour a day
- Have first dibs on bathroom in the morning
- Play Nintendo or other TV game
- Telephone time
- Permission to go to special event (party, dance)
- Stay up half an hour later
- Choose from a grab bag of small, wrapped items
- Go swimming
- Go out to play
- Have a friend spend the night
- Watch cartoons
- Visit grandparents or other special family
- Make a craft project—work on it 15 minutes a night with parent
- Look at a book in bed
- Ride a bike

- Push grocery cart
- Go fishing or hiking
- Go to friend’s house to play

RESOURCES IN THE HOME

- Play Nintendo or other TV game
- Choose a special TV program
- Take bottles back to store and keep or split the refund
- Use mom’s makeup
- Use parent’s tool

COSTS MONEY

- Rent a video
- Play Nintendo or other TV game
- Choose from a grab bag of small, wrapped items
- Be taken out to a movie
- Get a comic book
- Go out with parents for ice cream
- Go swimming or to wave pool
- Earn articles of clothing for self
- Shop with parent
- Take bottles to store and keep money
- Earn money (allowance)
- Read nature books
- Go ice-skating or roller-skating

FOOD

- Dried fruit as a snack
- Make popcorn in the evening
- Choose dinner one night
- Take special lunch to school
- Homemade cookies, cake, pie, etc.
- Go out for pizza with family
- Gum
- Choose dessert for evening meal
- Bake or help cook meal with parent

Steps to Improving Behavior or Teaching a New Behavior

1. Describe the behavior so that it is specific and you can clearly picture what is happening:

THIS: He *leaves his clothes all over the floor.*

NOT THIS: *He is irresponsible.*

2. If it is a chore, break the behavior you want the youth to learn down into small, attainable steps.

Cleaning your room MEANS: *Clothes in the hamper*
Books on the bookshelf
Bed made
Toys on the shelf

3. If it is a problem behavior, describe a prosocial opposite. What do you want him/her to do?

PROBLEM:

Not Minding

Yelling

PROSOCIAL OPPOSITE:

Minding

Using an inside voice

4. Praise success at taking steps toward a goal.
5. Be generous with praise. Don't wait until the goal is achieved.
6. Pair praise with rewards, such as points, stars, kid bucks.
7. Use incentive charts — children love them, and charts help parents follow through.

SAMPLE WORKSHEET

TEACHING NEW BEHAVIOR

A. What I'd like to improve.

Jason being more responsible about getting to school

B. What are the steps to improvement?

1. Being up by 7:15.
2. Being dressed by 7:30.
3. Eating breakfast.
4. Having backpack by the door the night before.
5. Leaving the house by 8:00.

C. What I can do to encourage this behavior.

1. Check each day that Jason does these things.
2. Offer verbal encouragement daily.
3. Provide a small incentive each day that he earns 4 out of 5 of the steps (television or videogame time in the afternoon).
4. Have a weekly incentive when he gets 3 of 5 days per week (pick the weekend video or make him pancakes on Saturday).

WORKSHEET FOR TEACHING NEW BEHAVIOR

A. WHAT I'D LIKE TO IMPROVE:

B. WHAT ARE THE STEPS TO GET FROM WHERE WE ARE TO THAT GOAL?

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

C. WHAT CAN I DO TO ENCOURAGE THIS BEHAVIOR?

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

USING POINT CHARTS

Charts or other written contacts are a means for providing youth with positive attention for positive behavior. Parents find them helpful for teaching a new behavior or activity, or for learning a new routine like:

- Doing chores
- Improving a specific behavior (doing homework for 40 minutes each night)
- Being home on time

When you write it down and keep track of the youth's progress on a chart, it is a good tool for teaching and encouraging.

Charts can help produce long lasting change.

Tips for making charts successful:

- Be generous with praise.
- Use incentives that feel comfortable for you.
- Use praise and incentives together "You did your chore well today, and on time. Let's go get an ice cream."
- Don't expect perfection. Most youth don't make their goal every day. Focus your attention on the successes.
- Remember to review the chart every day and follow through with incentives and praise.

Fine Tuning Charts

1. Was the target behavior clearly defined?
2. Did I check the behavior each day?
3. Was the behavior broken down into small enough steps so my youth could be successful?
4. Did I encourage what had been accomplished?
5. Did I provide an incentive if it was earned?
6. Was the goal realistic, or would a smaller goal be more achievable?
7. Does anything need to be added or dropped to make the contract better?
8. Is everyone in agreement with the contract?
9. What part of the contract is going well and should be kept?

Example 1:

Point Chart for Initial Visits

TFCO Visit Points			
Name:		Date:	
POINTS	THINGS TO DO TO EARN POINTS	EARNED	TOTAL
10	Follow Directions / Cooperation		
10	Attitude / Maturity		
10	Volunteering		

Daily Total: _____

COMMENTS

Example 2:

Point Chart for Visits

TFCO Visit Points				
Name:		Date:		
POINTS	THINGS TO DO TO EARN POINTS	EARNED	TAKEN	TOTAL
10	Follow directions/Cooperation			
10	Accepts feedback without comment			
10	Attitude/Maturity			
10	Volunteering			

Daily Total: _____

COMMENTS

Example 3: Point Chart for Visits

TFCO Visit Points				
Name:		Date:		
POINTS	THINGS TO DO TO EARN POINTS	EARNED	TAKEN	TOTAL
10	Accepts feedback without comment			
10	Cooperation/Doing Chores			
10	Attitude/Maturity			
10	Consideration			
10	Volunteering			

Daily Total: _____

COMMENTS

Visit Planning

Parent:

Youth:

Date:

Visit Activities	Rules & Expectations to Pre-teach	Points (Encouragement & Limits)	Preventing Pitfalls

Discipline Basics

Discipline discourages behavior. Use discipline to reduce problem behaviors. Use encouragement to promote positive behaviors.

Use small consequences. Small penalties are fair and easy to use consistently.

Act quickly. Quick response helps youth connect their behavior with a consequence.

Pick your time. When you can, choose a time and place for discipline encounters.

Be contingent. Base consequences on youth's behavior, not on your mood.

Be consistent. Consistent parents create consistently good behavior.

Be calm yet firm. Breathe. Count to 10. Don't match your emotions to your youth's emotions. You are the parent.

Respond, don't react. Decide what you're going to do before you act.

Don't lecture. Lectures may make parents feel better, but youth don't listen.

Avoid threats. Threats teach youth to push parents to their limit.

Avoid arguments. Talk worsens problems when people are upset. Talk later if at all.

Don't demand promises. We all repeat mistakes. Next time the problem occurs, be consistent. Don't make youth say they'll never do it again.

When it's over, let it go. Discipline cleans the slate. Don't hold grudges.

Discipline is not revenge. Used properly, discipline is a teaching tool.

Give 5 points for each point taken. Balance discipline with encouragement.

Examples of Privileges to Remove

ELECTRONIC GAMES

TV SHOW

BIKE

SKATEBOARD

INLINE SKATES

BALLS

OTHER SPORTS EQUIPMENT

VIDEO GAMES

PLAYING WITH FRIEND

DESSERT

MUSIC OR RADIO

TELEPHONE TIME

TREATS

PLAYING OUTSIDE

BOARD GAME

Make sure the privilege is something you can control and that the privilege is meaningful
