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SHAPING INHIBITION

The purpose of this shaping session is to build skill in impulse control. Each time an individual acts impulsively and receives a “pay off” (e.g. grabs a pop and drinks, kicks a peer who then backs off), impulsive behavior as a whole is strengthened into habit. Inhibition is a skill that develops into self-control, and the ability to “wait”. Everyone can wait sometimes, but teaching the skill of waiting on command requires precision and consistency.

Select a cue word/phrase (“hold on”, “hang on”, “wait”, etc.) and only use the word when you have control over the waiting time. At random times, not under your control, use different word or phrase until training is completed.

Steps:

1. Select an item or event that the child strongly desires in that moment. A good indicator is if the child rushes or reaches toward the object.
2. Hold up an open hand and say, “Okay...hold it!”
3. Prevent access to the item. Act distracted, or as though you are thinking of something. Count silently through the waiting time, using the chart below.
4. When the time is up, give the item to the child (or access to the event). The non-verbal receipt of the item is sufficient reinforcement.

Practice this brief technique at least twice each day and up to six times per day. If the child waits appropriately, without excessive body motion or vocalization, progress to the next interval as shown in the chart. If the child exhibits impulsive behaviors, retreat to the previous interval. Continue to move up by 2 seconds after 2–3 successful days, up to 1 minute. Then begin a generalization procedure.