



# Helping the Child Who Struggles with Impulsivity

Kimberly Burkhardt, Ph.D.  
Clinical Psychologist  
Rainbow Babies and Children's Hospital

# Objectives

- *Identify examples of impulsivity and common comorbidities*
- *Identify behavioral strategies to assist with managing impulsivity in children*

# What is Impulsivity?

- Acting without (or less) forethought about the appropriateness or consequences of the action
- Examples:
  - Interrupting a discussion
  - Blurting out answers
  - Difficulty waiting one's turn
  - Difficulty managing one's emotions
  - Engaging in risky behaviors
  - Rushing through work
  - Acting aggressively

# The Larger Picture

- Behavioral disinhibition
- Learned behavior
- Anxiety
- Exposure to trauma
- Prenatal alcohol and/or drug exposure
- Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)

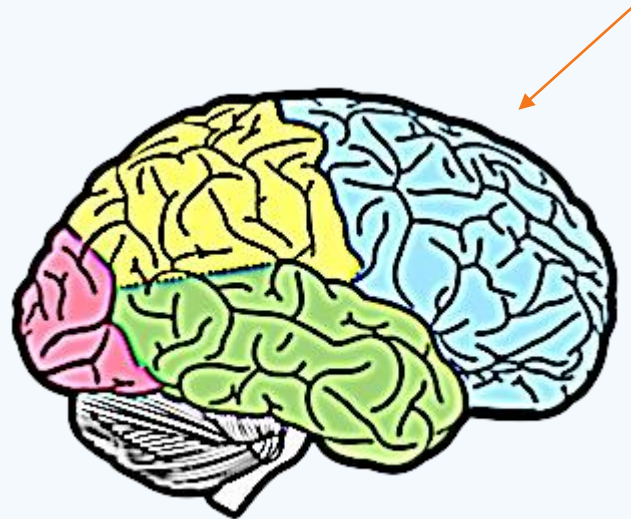


# ADHD

- *Six or more symptoms of inattention for children up to age 16 years*
- *Six or more symptoms of hyperactivity-impulsivity for children up to age 16 years*

# Brain Functioning

- *Frontal lobe*



# Stages of Impulsivity

- Urge
- Tension
- Act
- Relief
- Guilt

# PARENT INTERVENTION



# The Foundation

- Foster/build the relationship
  - Special time
- Establish consistency, structure, and routine
- Slow down the pace
- Set expectations
- Praise the targeted behavior/positive opposite

# *The Foundation – You and Your Child*

- *Emotions vocabulary*
- *Warning situations*

# Praise Statements

- “Great job keeping your hands to yourself.”
- “I love how you’re using calm and kind hands.”
- “You’re coloring so neatly. Nice work!”
- “Good work reading quietly.”
- “Great job listening and waiting your turn!”
- “I’m so proud of you for taking your time to complete your homework.”

# Understanding the Function of Behaviors

- To escape or avoid
- To get attention
- To have a need met
- To obtain something that is reinforcing
- To manage sensory sensitivity





# *Giving Effective Commands*

- *Present the command as a statement*
- *First-then*
- *State what to do rather than what not to do*
- *Give one command at a time*
- *Make sure you can follow through*
- *Minimize distractions*
- *Externalize time*
- *Visual cues and aids to accompany verbal instruction*

# Using Reinforcement

- Break down behavior/shorter timeframe
- Verbal praise
- Spontaneous rewards
- Reward system
- Token economy

# Rewards Menu

- Stickers/points/stamps
- Special treat or snack
- Choosing the family meal
- Movie night
- Special game
- Trip to the park
- Cooking/baking
- Nails/hair
- Extra video game time
- Later bedtime
- Money
- Dollar store toy
- Small Lego set
- Sleepover
- Seeds for a garden
- Outing with a friend

# Ignoring Minor Misbehavior

- *Avoid eye contact*
- *Do not touch the child*
- *Use a neutral facial expression*
- *Do not talk or respond to the child*
- *Return your attention as soon as the misbehavior stops*
- *Be consistent*

# Positive Discipline Strategies

- Time out
- Removal of a privilege
- Natural and logical consequences



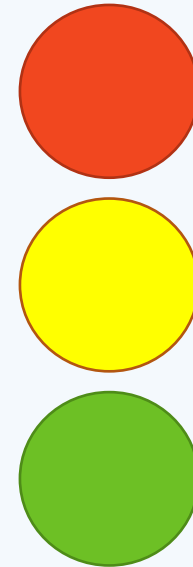
# PROBLEM SOLVING

# Problem Solving

## POPS

- What is the **PROBLEM**?
- What are my **OPTIONS**?
- **PICK** an option.
- **SOLUTION**. Did I pick the right solution?

Stop, Relax, Think/Stop, Opt,  
Go



# Internalizing Symptoms/Externalizing Behavior

- Parent training in behavior management (e.g. ADHD, ODD)
- Behavior therapy (e.g. young children, anxiety, ASD, ADHD, social skills intervention)
- Cognitive behavior therapy (e.g. anxiety, depression)
- <https://effectivechildtherapy.org>