

Supporting Positive Behavior in Teens

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St. Louis Arc

OUR VALUES



Respect



Collaboration



Empowerment

The Mission of the St. Louis Arc is to empower people with intellectual and developmental disabilities and their families to lead better lives by providing a lifetime of high-quality services, family support, and advocacy.

Strategies to Support Teen Behavior



This info graphic is discussing strategies to support positive behavior in teens. Each topic will follow the story of an individual who is dealing with a specific problem. While this article will relate to situations at the St. Louis Arc's summer programs, the strategies can be adapted to other scenarios.

What to do if your teen is seeking attention

Be Proactive

Encourage and support interaction with adults who are positive influences; listen, converse, praise, and spend 1:1 time with your teen regularly.

Teaching Skills

Help your teen learn how to gain attention/acceptance through positive behavior (e.g., clubs, teams, academic success) and evaluate relationships.

Responding

Increase amount and quality of attention for positive behavior, acknowledging and praising the teen for small actions; minimize attention for problem behavior.



Sara will ask the same questions over and over even if she knows the answer. Her questions usually revolve around the weather.



- Sara is able to recap the successes with her staff partner at the end of each day. Sara is praised throughout the day, especially when she discusses a topic that a peer is interested in.
- Sara is given times when she can talk about weather. She is reminded by staff when it is appropriate to discuss the weather and this gives her expectations for her day. Respect that this is a topic that is meaningful to her.
- If interested, Sara would be the weather reporter for Teens in Motion. Participants may then approach her for weather updates or potential changes to the schedule for the day.
- We would make Sara 3 or more laminated weather cards. This empowers Sara to be able to choose when she checks the weather. Once Sara uses all of her cards, staff encourage Sara to discuss a different topic.
- Sara would be praised for discussing different topics that were of interest to her peers. We still want Sara to express her love of weather, while connecting her to other interests she might have in common with others.
- If Sara continued to talk about weather after her weather cards had been used, staff would remind Sara that the group is not discussing weather and move onto the next topic.

What to do if your teen wants items or activities

Be Proactive

Establish expectations to obtain and timelines for preferred items or activities (e.g., money, electronics, transportation); warn when access will be discontinued.

Teaching Skills

Teach teen to request, choose, and work for preferred items, manage money and time, and select alternatives to less appropriate choices.

Responding

Provide access to preferred items/activities only following appropriate behavior; avoid succumbing to "negotiation."



Darren loves to play on his Nintendo DS. He would rather spend his time on his DS than participate in activities with the group.



- Darren is given a picture schedule that he can utilize throughout the day. This schedule indicates times that he can use his DS.
- Depending on the volunteer site, Darren will agree to how much time he will stay on task before a break. If Darren is unable to complete his duties for the agreed upon time, he will have to wait to access his device. Once he has completed his task, access to the device will be given.
- Darren is learning time management and job expectations. When Darren gets a job he will know what tasks he enjoys and the amount of time he can devote to those activities.
- If Darren is unable to stay on task, the staff will evaluate the difficulty of the assignment and change the time devoted to that activity. Staff would modify the assignment and then slowly work up to the more challenging task.
- Darren will have his device available during breaks. If Darren chooses to not work at his volunteer site, he will not have access to his device until the lunch break. It is important for Darren to know that lack of work does not equal extra time to play on his device.

What to do if your teen is trying to avoid/delay situations

Be Proactive

Offer choices; allow teen to arrange environment and schedule (i.e. what, when, where, how); provide down-time and breaks.

Teaching Skills

Encourage teen to communicate needs for personal space or time; learn self-management (e.g. planning/scheduling activities).

Responding

Allow breaks, escape from demands, environmental changes, or reduced demands for appropriate behavior, not problem behavior.



When Jessica first volunteered at a restaurant, she refused to fold boxes or fill salt and pepper shakers.



- We provide Jessica with at least two options and descriptions, the day before she needs to make her choice. We respect all preferences!
- When creating Jessica's schedule for the day, encourage completing the least preferred activities followed by more preferred activities. Make sure that her schedule includes breaks. It might be necessary to have a visual schedule.
- During our Teen Scene class, Jessica can learn how to describe her feelings and the best way to communicate to her peers, support staff, and supervisors while volunteering.
- We offer support for finding calming strategies that best meet each teen's specific needs. Our flexibility encourages growth in communication and job skill acquisition as directed by the teen's preferences.
- While in transit, staff review expectations for the volunteer sites and how to communicate needs.
- Jessica would be encouraged to seek out different activities at the volunteer site by speaking directly with the restaurant manager.
- Teens are always expected to complete some aspect of the task, whether a new activity or simply helping to clean up.

What to do if your teen enjoys the behavior itself

Be Proactive

Offer options, provide down-time, breaks, access to sensory items, and establish clear expectations for different environments.

Teaching Skills

Help your teen learn how to gain sensory experiences with a range of items in different environments as appropriate.

Responding

Minimize attention for less desired behavior and encourage completion of task.



- William is encouraged to participate in activities that are equally engaging for him.
- Sensory items are available throughout the day. All sensory needs are respected.
- Down-time is built into the schedule so that William can expect when it is most appropriate to engage in these behaviors.
- While volunteering, staff teach teens what behaviors are expected and how to ask for a break when needed.
- Because William destroys the pencils, he is introduced to other sensory items to replace pencils. When outside, staff help him find sticks, and when inside he can choose other sensory items like a clicking cube.
- Staff prompt William to ask for a break as they have previously practiced and encourage him to chose other sensory items.
- William is praised for asking for a break and when he re-engages in his volunteer work.



Remember this will take time!

- Don't expect a positive outcome on the first try.
- Sometimes things will get worse before they get better.



Resources

- Workshops/ Advocacy Family Supports Department St. Louis Arc
Sharon Spurlock
sspurlock@slarc.org
314-817-2222
- Autism Speaks
www.autismspeaks.org



Want more ?

- Check us out online!
www.slarc.org
- For more information about teen summer programs at the St. Louis Arc contact:
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