

When the Chips Are Down by Richard Lavoie

Summary:

Do you ever have days when the kids seem totally out of control? Do you find yourself fall into the same pointless arguments with your students or your children?

Host Richard Lavoie, a nationally-known expert on learning disabilities, offers practical advice on dealing with behavioral problems quickly and effectively. He shows how preventative discipline can anticipate many problems before they start. And he explains how teachers and parents can create a stable, predictable environment in which children can flourish.

In addition this video is offers great strategies that work for all students, not just learning disabled students.

They are in the process of creating a series for PBS...

The Slogan is:

Learning Disabilities – The real challenge is educating those who don't have one.

The 3 most important traits that successful parents and educators for special needs kids are:

- A knowledge base – understanding why these kids do what they do.
- A bag of tricks
- A philosophy – a belief system in the way that these kids should be handled and taught. Similar to a religious faith, you pull it close when you need it, to help you get through the tough times.

Lavoie describes positive and negative feedback in the following way.

- Positive feedback – changes a child's behavior
- Negative feedback – only stops the behavior
- **Example:** The bullying kid. The principal sends student to the office, calls mom, makes him write sentences – all negative reinforcement. The principal sees the student doing something nice...he gets positive reinforcement – pulls student over and gives him positive reinforcers. He tells the student how much he appreciates what he just saw, calls home to tell mom, has student help him do a job. The student is more likely to be nicer the next time.
- **Changing behavior takes time and effort.**

Successive Approximations

- Reward direction not perfection (steps to desired behavior)
- **Example:** Student who yells out the answers. Each day you tell the student, you did this right but here is what you still need to work on. Reinforce the steps. Every day the student will get slightly better – it takes patience and commitment.
- Students with learning disabilities take longer to spell, to learn language etc. So it makes sense that they would take longer to change a behavior.

- **Example:** The baby says mama. The baby gets lots of reinforcement. We reinforce each step of language – it is the same for behavior.

Performance Inconsistency

This is part of the LD profile – this is why it so hard for them to stay motivated.

- **Example:** Times tables – the student has practiced and practiced and then when the test is passed out the information is gone.
- The way we deal with these inconsistencies is crucial.
- These kids have good and bad days. Some parents say “Well you were able to do it when you put your mind to it.” Good days – pull it close and use it and celebrate it.

Behavioral Questional practices - Things that don't work...

These are things we do everyday but there is no evidence that they work.

- Corporal Punishment – physical contact with a child. The problem is that we don't know how the child is going to react.
- Time out – it is usually used incorrectly. It is isolating. It was not meant to be used as a punishment. It is supposed to be used to separate kids so that they receive no reinforcement for undesirable behaviors. It is up to the adults to take kid out of time out – not up to kids. They should be taken out for a specific time.
- Forced Apologies
- Sarcasm – LD kids are very literal
- Confiscating goods. Research shows us that children learn their morals and values by what they see us do. Always give students an opportunity to get it back.
- Cheap Shots – the teacher who asks the kids if they were good for the substitute (when they know the kid was bad). You are asking the kid to lie.
- Imposing school tasks – read an extra chapter, assign more homework. Gives kid wrong idea about school.
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Things that Work – Ways to discipline our children

Preventative Discipline - kids respond to their environment. Maybe we need to change the environment. LD kids have very little internal structure. We need to provide them with tight external structure.

- Being Proactive - we are too reactive and not proactive enough with children.
- **Example:** Kid is getting dressed for dance and dad should have told his kid what he did not want him to wear before he put it on. Less likely to have an argument before the kid goes to all the trouble of getting dressed.
- A predictable environment.
- Rules – they need to be posted.
- Structures and Routines for everything in your class – the best way to tell a structured teacher is the day the teacher is not there.
- Set an Agenda. Explain what is happening. As adults we insist on knowing what the goal and objectives of a lesson are before we decide to attend. Why don't we

do the same for kids? Use it as your guide and deadline to have kids help you get through the day. Kids love this type of challenge.

- Use your voice effectively – never yell. They only hear the yelling, not the message.
- **Broken record technique** – used for kids who argue. If you argue with kids, you have automatically lost. The child wants: power and control, Attention, to derail a lesson.
- **Example:** Kid pushes another during lesson... You say, “In my classroom you keep your hands to your self.” Repeat it 3 times. It takes the power away from the student.

- Praise kids- we can't use it too much but it needs to be used effectively.

Descriptive vs. Evaluative Praise.

Use descriptive praise – “I gave you 15 problems to do and you got 14 right.” Take a moment of your time to give kids positive praise.

Corrective Discipline - The teacher is primarily responsible for disciplining the LD child - not the children.

- Teacher talk – punishing something that he did wrong by punishing the whole class. Try collective rewards instead in the name of that child.
- Many times the punishment does not fit the crime. You can't take their favorite thing and hold it over their head – it doesn't work in human relations.
- Punishment needs to be Immediate and definite.
- Disappointment - dangerous – the most painful punishment in any situation is the emotion of disappointment. It hurts – you let me down. Extremely hurtful – but we use it with kids all the time.
- Using Effective conferencing techniques – begin conversation positively, get hands dirty in the middle and end it positively. Pick the right time to talk to them about it and pick the right spot. You hold the meeting in neutral turf.

Poker Chips

How do you build a child's self esteem?

- Think of self-esteem as poker chips. If you have a lot of esteem – you have a lot of poker chips. When good things happen to you, you get more poker chips. The charmed life of the popular kid – has lots.
- The kid with LD – has a small stack. Never been a team, never tests well... These kids go to school and compete against each other – not fair. The LD kid says “mom please don't make me play this game – I don't have enough chips.” We say you have to play. Would the LD kid play recklessly? Sure some kids will say they don't care and just bet the whole stack. Some kids will play conservatively, they are going to hold tight to their chips. The LD kid will not take as many risks.
- Take away only what is necessary. Dad yells at kid – you take away thousands of chips – can't do that.
- Go to bat for your kid. There are going to many people in your child's life that take away chips, you need to advocate for them and also help them get more chips.

- How do you give poker chips? You make a big deal of the one thing they do well. Be a talent scout. Make sure your kid has more poker chips at the end of the day than he did when the day started.