

10/19/18 Dr. Childress Comment

Oppositional-Defiant School and Home Behavior Problem Treatment Plan

School-involved clinical psychology: this is a treatment plan for a 10-year-old boy (Vincent) referred to for school behavior problems and oppositional-angry-defiant behavior at home. Early discussions were being initiated at school regarding expelling Vincent to a non-public school for behavior problem children.

An entrenched pattern of Vincent continually getting in trouble had created a narrative that he was a “bad” kid who was “always getting in trouble,” and this perception had achieved a self-fulfilling force in defining Vincent to Vincent. We had about two more months of school to practice change, and then the summer to stabilize and increase the affection in the mother-son relationship. It would be important that Vincent succeed at school in the fall, otherwise the school’s patience with him may run out.

The treatment plan begins with the foundational re-framing for therapy, Vincent is a good kid who is discouraged. The basic goals of treatment are defined in items one and two, and are reframed away from “problem behavior” (good and bad) into social behavior (nice and mean). The goal is to alter Vincent’s self-perception away from being a bad kid and give him a path to becoming a nice kid. This involves the principles of narrative psychology (social constructionism).

The goals for treatment merged into describing specific ways to achieve those goals. The treatment focus is on creating a balance between structure to contain “mis-behavior” with increasing affectionate support for healthy child participation and cooperation with social-parental-teacher activity.

Note regarding “parental alienation”: This is **NOT** a “parental alienation” family, this was a school behavior problem (home defiance problem) family. Notice how the treatment plan focuses heavily on giving the child lots and lots of parental love; listening to the child, honestly seeking cooperation with the child, maintaining parental authority (proper family hierarchy) while promoting abundant affectionate involvement of the parent.

Mother-love and father-love promotes healthy child development. We always want children to receive abundant affectionate involvement from their mother, and abundant affectionate involvement from the father.

We **NEVER** abandon a child without the love of a mother or the love of a father. That is inconceivable, because it would be extremely damaging to the emotional and psychological development of the child. Healthy child development thrives in abundant parental love, and it becomes distorted, twisted, and damaged in the absence of the mother’s love or the father’s love being received by the child.

Treatment Recommendations for Vincent
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Vincent is a good kid. He's bright and socially mature.

And he's not motivated toward school. For him, school is a place where he will get into trouble. He feels really bad at disappointing his mother when he gets into trouble. And he doesn't believe he can avoid getting into trouble at school. He's given up. And his giving up is at the core of his lack of motivation.

So the question is, how do we restore his motivation. Our goal is to activate two motivational systems

1) Motivated to treat other people nicely.

He shows this motivation during sessions. His behavior is socially appropriate and socially organized.

However, Vincent is inconsistent in showing the motivation to treat other people nicely at home with his mother and step-father.

Vincent does not display this motivation in the classroom, where his activity is disruptive and annoying to his teacher.

2) Motivated to achieve good grades in school

The purpose of school is not to behave in the classroom. The purpose of school is to learn and earn good grades. Children behave in the classroom in order to learn and earn good grades.

School is not primarily about behavior. School is about learning and good grades. Vincent needs to develop his motivation to learn and earn good grades.

Treating people nicely

- Vincent needs to treat his mother and step-father nicely, to not adopt a disrespectful tone, to not make inappropriate comments, to not be rude.
- Vincent needs to be cooperative. He needs to have a pleasant attitude of expressing his desires and of cooperating with the rules and restrictions of situations and the needs and desires of others.
- Vincent needs to recognize that his teachers have a job to do, which is to impart information to the students under their care.

- Vincent needs to recognize his responsibility in cooperating with his teachers in allowing them to accomplish their goal.
- He needs to cooperate in not disrupting their job and he needs to cooperate in fulfilling his role in the social contract, to attend to and learn the material being taught.

Treatment Goals for Motivating Frequent and Consistent Nice-Pleasant-Cooperative Social Interactions at Home and with Teachers:

- 1) Make it personal. It's not about rules, it's about how we treat people. It's not about "misbehavior," it's about treating other people nicely or meanly.
 - a. Treat Vincent with respect. Be nice to Vincent. Make it as hard as possible for Vincent to be mean to us. Treat Vincent as we want him to treat us.
 - b. Recognize that we cannot force Vincent to be nice. With sufficiently severe punishment we can force him to be somewhat obedient, but we cannot force him to be nice. Being nice is not achieved by punishment. Being nice is simply how we treat people. Vincent needs to understand this important social lesson.
 - c. Listen to what Vincent wants and needs. We may not necessarily give Vincent what he wants, but we need to sincerely listen and try to accommodate his wants and needs. Listening to the needs of others, and working to cooperate with those needs is how we treat other people, and it's what we expect from Vincent. While we strive to listen and respect Vincent's wants and needs, we remain the adults and we remain in charge. Calm and confident authority.
 - d. Give Vincent lots of love, affection, and smiles.
 - e. When Vincent acts mean, rude, or disrespectful, react with surprise and hurt, highlight how mean he's acting, and use moral suasion to shame his actions. The more positive the relationship we have with Vincent, the stronger the influence of moral suasion. Seek to allow Vincent to alter his approach and to repair the relationship (V: sincere "I'm sorry" – hug).
 - f. Give Vincent lots of love affection and smiles. Make it hard for him to be mean to us, make it hard because he likes us.
 - g. Enlist his cooperation because he likes us. Make it personal.
 - h. When he's mean to us, we show him our surprise and hurt, and also respond in a socially appropriate way. Discipline and punishment for mean actions are appropriate. Recognize, however, that punishment

cannot compel people to be nice. At best, punishment can only compel obedience, and our ultimate goal is not obedience, it is for Vincent to treat others nicely.

- i. See him as the person we want him to be. He **IS** the person we want him to be. When he acts out of character from the person we want him to be, be surprised and respond as if his “problem behavior” is out of character for him. He is a nice person. He is a respectful and thoughtful person. He is an intelligent person. He is a loving person. See him as all of these things more strongly than he sees himself as a rude, defiant, unmotivated, and disrespectful person. Vincent will become as we see him to be.

Motivating Academic Achievement

- Vincent views school as an interpersonal struggle. He has lost sight, or never understood, that the fundamental purpose of school is learning and achievement. School offers Vincent a chance to excel. He should be focused on getting straight A’s.
- A focus on good grades would bring Vincent into the social group of good students who are actively participating with the goals of the teacher, doing their homework, listening to lessons, and cooperating in the classroom because that’s what good students do, because they want to achieve.
- We need to activate Vincent’s personal motivation for positive academic achievement.
- Currently, the focus for Vincent and for others is on his classroom behavior. This focus needs to shift.

Treatment Goals for Motivating Vincent to Seek Success in School:

- 1) Parents should expect grades of A on his homework, classroom worksheets, and tests.
 - a. Parents should review test performance on the day the scored test is received. Vincent should be encouraged to retake AR reading tests until a score of 100% is achieved.
 - b. A positive treat should be offered to Vincent every time he obtains an A on a test. The positive treats are not “reinforcers,” they are social acknowledgement of his effort and success. Taking him for an ice cream, offering him a sincere broad smile and hug, having a family dinner in his honor, doing a silly “Dance of the A” that makes him smile.
- 2) Make learning a focus of family activity.
 - a. Parents should review errors that he makes on tests and make sure Vincent understands the correct answer.

- b. Parents should sit with him during homework and discuss the subject activity
- c. Parents should take him to museums. Provide him with a broader life exposure and make the museum event a family bonding day.
 - Museums to attend: Museum of Natural History; Getty Museum in Malibu (roman villa); Southwest Museum (Native American museum); travel to Solvang (Danish culture); San Diego Zoo; local ski trip; Griffith Observatory/Planetarium; Zion/Bryce National Park trip; whale watching trip, Calico Ghost Town; Yosemite camping trip (or tent cabins); a day trip to the UCLA bookstore, wander campus, eat lunch at an on-campus facility, enter Powell library, and then attend a UCLA college football game the following week; Santa Barbara Mission and a visit to UC Santa Barbara bookstore; creating craft activities from Michael's or the Internet for each holiday season.
- d. Parents should buy learning books with lots of pictures about history, astronomy, and science. Read/review these books as part of homework time or for 15-20 minutes before bedtime.
- e. If there is a subject in which Vincent reports struggling, such as math, parents should review the current homework assignment AND should begin to extend the homework-review session to include looking ahead to the upcoming topic curriculum.
- f. Parents should create a warm, comfortable, and inviting study area. A dedicated desk and 2 chairs in a quiet-focused area of the house, a desk lamp for focused lighting, and snacks during study time (a couple pieces of cheese and some grapes; or some grapes and a couple of cookies; milk or water – just a small snack to nibble while studying). Two chairs, one for Vincent and one for the parent. If appropriate (once Vincent's academic focus has been established), the parent can sit nearby and read separately a magazine or pleasure book, offering active involvement only upon invitation.