



## Setting an Agenda

Always start the session by setting an agenda together. You should not jump straight into teaching the new material, nor should you begin with an open ended check-in. Instead, begin with asking the parent and/or child what they want to add the agenda and then provide a brief overview of the material to be covered, breaking it into a few main steps. If there has been a crisis of the week (COW), put that into the agenda at the beginning. Set an appropriate time limit on your discussion of the COW so that you can transition to the other items on your agenda, or if more fitting, to a review of material already learned that might apply to this COW. Always try to make room at the end of the session for the “Leave ‘Em Laughing” activity, and mention this activity when setting the agenda.

## Reviewing Practice Assignments

Always remember to review practice assignments that were assigned in a previous session, no matter how small. Forgetting to review assignments sends the message that practice is not important, just the opposite of what you want to convey. In fact, practice is the most important part of learning new skills.

If the assignment was completed, be sure that the child or parent understands the basic ideas and objectives that it was intended to convey. Be highly supportive in your comments and provide plenty of praise, even if there were problems or there was only partial completion.

Discuss whether completion of the practice assignment felt successful. If it did, review what skills, behaviours, or insights were related to that success. If the practice was felt to be unsuccessful, suggest different interpretations of the outcome or see whether the child or parent can find a silver lining. This is also a good time to emphasise the importance of persistence. Especially with parenting skills, it often takes a few tries before things start to work smoothly.

If the practice assignment was not completed at all, determine what factors might have prevented it from getting done, and work together to develop a plan to address any barriers. Possible solutions might include a reminder phone call to the home about the practice during the week, asking the child or parent to develop a specific plan that allows the child and parent to do the practice together at home during the week. Sometimes it can help to have the child or parent pick the specific day and time that they will complete the practice (e.g. after dinner but before bath time on Tuesday), so that it is “on the schedule”.

## Being Socratic

Another essential skill is being Socratic, which means to teach by asking questions rather than by explaining. There is usually a lot of material to teach, and if you find yourself doing most of the talking, you are probably not being Socratic. Instead, you should think of the concept or idea that you want to explain, and then ask guiding questions until the child or parent articulates that concept or idea. For example, rather than saying, “Maybe you should try again,” you could ask, “What do you think you should do next?”, “What would happen if you tried again?”, or “What happens to people when they give up?” Being Socratic can feel slow and even tedious for the therapist, but it is much more interesting for the child or parent and far more likely to lead to enduring new beliefs and ideas for them.