

Active Ignoring

Use This:

To teach caregivers skills to reduce the occurrence of mild negative behaviours.



Goals

- The parent will be aware of the ways in which unwanted behaviours are sometimes rewarded through attention
- The parent will learn how to remove attention for mild inappropriate behaviours (e.g., complaining, whining, reassurance seeking), while increasing attention for more appropriate alternatives
- The parent will feel comfortable about using the new skill
- The parent will understand the concept of an extinction burst and will know how to look for it

Materials

- **Fear Thermometer** and **Fear Ladder** (2 unrated copies, for anxiety/trauma), **Feelings Thermometer** (for depression) (pp. 318, 320, 342)
- **Active Ignoring** parent handout (p. 394)
- **Checklist of Strategies**
- MINDED video
- **Weekly questionnaires** and **Monitoring sheet** (see pages 277-293)
- **Therapist Note Taking Sheet** (p. 276)

⌚ If time is tight: Illustrate the link between parental attention and child behaviour and demonstrate how to decrease the child's display of negative behaviours by removing attention and rewarding alternative behaviours.

Main steps

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| <input type="checkbox"/> Set an Agenda | Remember to start by setting an agenda together and reviewing any practice assignments. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Obtain Weekly Ratings | If the main focus is traumatic stress or anxiety, use the 0 to 10 scale of the Fear Thermometer to obtain Fear Ladder ratings from both the child and his or her parent. If the main focus is depressed mood, use the Feelings Thermometer to take a rating. Review Weekly questionnaires and Monitoring sheet in detail, in particular examples of praise and how it worked/didn't work. |

<input type="checkbox"/> Review the Importance of Consequences	<p>If you have not already done so, introduce to the parent the idea that behaviour is strengthened or weakened by its consequences (that is, what comes after the behaviour). Explain that regardless of what a child is learning to do, his or her skills will be strengthened or weakened by the events that follow them.</p>
<input type="checkbox"/> Review the Importance of Reinforcement	<p>If you have not already done so, briefly discuss the idea of <i>reinforcement</i>. In order for a behaviour to increase in strength, that behaviour must be reinforced, or rewarded, after it occurs. Also, the reinforcement cannot come at other times, only when the behaviour occurs. Explain that if a child is reinforced regardless of whether he or she has performed the behaviour, the reinforcement will have no effect on the future performance of the behaviour. However, if a child is reinforced if and only if the behaviour is performed, the behaviour will be more likely to occur again. Discuss the ways in which behaviours are increased in frequency and intensity by reinforcing them, either with tangible rewards or with attention from others.</p> <p>Example script</p> <p><i>If you cook a new recipe and you like how it tastes, you are likely to cook that meal again, because it is rewarding.</i></p> <p><i>If you do a favour for someone and she thanks you or gives you a gift, you are more likely to do another favour for her later.</i></p>
<input type="checkbox"/> Discuss Removal of Reinforcement	<p>If you have not already done so, point out to the parent that just as behaviours can be made to occur more often by the consequences that follow them, behaviours can also be lessened in strength or frequency by ignoring them. If a child continues to engage in a behaviour but receives no reinforcement or attention for this behaviour, the behaviour will begin to happen less often. Emphasise that the consequence of poor behaviour is withdrawal of positive attention i.e., active ignoring is the consequence of poor behaviour.</p>

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- Review Example Problems** Discuss some examples of what usually happens when whining or complaining occurs. Be sure to point out how such behaviours are often rewarding for the child. Make clear how the behaviour is related to the consequences.

Example script

***You:** What happens when your child complains about cleaning his room?*

***Parent:** We argue. I try to tell him why he has to do it anyway, but he just argues.*

***You:** So does your child end up cleaning his room?*

***Parent:** Not usually. Usually I just get too fed up and I do it myself and then punish him – you know, take away a toy or something.*

***You:** So in a way, your child kind of gets his way – he does not have to clean up? And on top of that, he gets to see you feeling upset, gets you to come into his room, and even to clean up.*

***Parent:** Uh huh. I guess he’s pretty smart that way.*

***You:** So there is kind of a reward in it for him if he keeps arguing.*

***Parent:** There sure is.*

- Review Example Solutions** Point out that the way to change this situation is not to respond. Responding can provide attention in a way that ends up being a reward.

Example script

***You:** What would happen if you just didn’t argue? If you just set rules for morning chores and enforced them?*

***Parent:** I guess my child would probably just give up complaining about brushing his teeth eventually. Probably lose some rewards or privileges if he didn’t brush his teeth in time for school.*

***You:** But do you think the complaining would stop, if you didn’t respond to it?*

***Parent:** Probably after a while.*

- Review Important Steps** Introduce the important features of “successful ignoring”. Remind the parent of the following:

- Do not get drawn into arguing, scolding, or even talking. Many parents feel that they have to continually re-explain to their child why they are ignoring their child during the behaviour. The time to explain was before the behaviour started.
 - Do not express anger or interest, either verbally or in your facial expression or movements.
 - Do not make eye contact with your child, and do not even glance at him or her more than briefly.
 - It will help to get absorbed in some other activity (e.g., going into another room, reading a book).
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<input type="checkbox"/> Emphasise Attending to Good Behaviour	<p>Emphasise that paying attention to good behaviour is at least as important as ignoring bad behaviour. Attending and ignoring are meant to work together.</p>
Example script	
<p><i>You: The “active” part is the most important part of this skill. So tell me, when do we usually notice children, when they are good, or when they are bad?</i></p>	
<p><i>Parent: It sure is easy to notice when they’re bad.</i></p>	
<p><i>You: Right, what we are going to try to do now is to notice when your child is good. As soon as you notice, you can tell him things like, “that’s really nice,” or you can answer his question, or smile at him. That’s how you can reward the right behaviours. For kids, it can be helpful if the difference in your attention and ignoring is really striking – almost like the difference in turning on and off the light.</i></p>	
<input type="checkbox"/> Deal with Concerns: Guilt	<p>If the parent expresses uncomfortable or guilty feelings about the idea of ignoring, clarify again that he or she is not being asked to ignore the <i>child</i>, but simply to ignore the unwanted <i>behaviour</i>. The parent should provide plenty of praise and attention when the child is doing well and not performing the unwanted behaviour. So the child is not really getting less attention, he or she is just getting it at different times and for different reasons.</p> <p>Remind the parent that this skill can feel very unnatural at first, because it feels natural to respond to whining and complaining, for example. Assure the parent that this skill is not harmful for his or her child. In fact, failure to use active ignoring could lead to bigger problems later.</p>
<input type="checkbox"/> Deal with Concerns: True Distress	<p>Point out that sometimes the child’s behaviour will be honest – even though it is reinforced by attention. For example, a complaining child may actually have a mild stomach ache on the way to school. Thus, this skill is not about proving the child is “faking.” Rather, the purpose is to get the child to develop a better way of coping when feeling bad. The parent will usually know whether the distress is serious enough to warrant real action, or if it is more of a routine concern that could go away on its own.</p>
<input type="checkbox"/> Select a Behaviour	<p>Pick a behaviour that the parent would like to work on. Make sure the behaviour is something mild or attention-seeking and that it is safe to ignore the behaviour in the context of epilepsy. Good examples are whining, complaining, asking too many questions, pouting, or acting grumpy or upset.</p>

ACTIVITY
Practise Active Ignoring

Engage in a role-play activity in which you act as the child (**adapt for telephone delivery**). Instruct the parent to read a book or magazine and to use the techniques that you just discussed. Remind the parent that when you are misbehaving he or she should try to ignore you, and when you are good, he or she should praise or pay attention. Alternate (about every minute) between engaging in appropriate (e.g., sitting quietly) versus inappropriate behaviour (e.g., complaining or reassurance seeking). If you can pick the behaviour identified by the parent in the previous step, that is ideal.

Explain Extinction Burst

Inform the parent about the idea of an “extinction burst.” Use examples to express the idea that when we are used to getting rewarded and the rewards suddenly stop, we often try harder and feel frustrated before quitting. The parent needs to be aware that active ignoring may be frustrating for his or her child at first, and may cause a temporary increase in the unwanted behaviour. Emphasise that a temporary increase *does not mean that the parent should give in*. On the contrary, it is usually a sign that the parent is effective at ignoring – in other words, the strategy is working. It is important to stick firmly to ignoring during extinction bursts and remind oneself that they are always time limited.

Example script

You: Have you ever pushed a button for the lift, and it didn't come? What do you usually do then?
Parent: Oh I always push it again!
You: Right. In fact, sometimes people push it many times, or jiggle it, or even hit the button or the lift door. That's because they are expecting a reward (the door to open) and when they don't get it, there is an “extinction burst.”

PRACTICE ASSIGNMENT
Active Ignoring

Explain to the parent that during the coming week he or she is to practise active ignoring. Remind the parent to respond to the chosen undesirable behaviour with active ignoring each time it occurs, and to praise the opposite or lack of the behaviour. Pick something that is likely to go well. You want the parent and child to experience success with this practice, so start with something the child can already do without difficulty or redirection if possible.

Ask the parent to use the **Monitoring sheet** to indicate what happened during active ignoring and how the child reacted. The parent might also wish to note specific problems encountered with active ignoring so that these concerns can be addressed with you later.

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- Send the materials for the next session** Tell the parent/s you will send a written summary and the materials for the next session. Remind them that they do not need to be completed for next session as you will go through them together in the session. Tell the parent/s you will also send the **Weekly questionnaires, Monitoring sheet** and **Checklist of Strategies** which need to be completed for the next session.

Confirm date and time of the next call.

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- Summarising** Ask if they would like you to summarise the session, if they want to summarise or if you should do it together.
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Leave ‘Em Laughing

End the session on a positive note with the parent by perhaps talking about things that are unrelated to his or her child, or discussing an area of interest you have in common with the parent. Also, the parent might be feeling overwhelmed by the challenging tasks he or she is undertaking; it can sometimes be helpful to leave a few minutes at the end of the session for the parent to share concerns or the challenges he or she has faced with the child since the previous session. The end of each session should be used to praise the parent’s efforts and to convey support and encouragement.

Share with Child (if possible)

At the end of the session, if the child is available, it can be helpful to brief him or her on the materials covered.

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- Review Concepts** If the child is available, speak with the child and parent together and explain to the child that there will be some changes in communication in the family that are meant to be helpful for everyone. For the time being, his or her parent is not allowed to respond to certain behaviours anymore (use the behaviour that the parent has already identified with you). Ask questions to make sure the child understands.

Example script

Remember, if you complain and whine about going to school in the morning, Mum is not allowed to talk to you about it. Sometimes you might forget and bring it up or try to talk with her, but she is not supposed to pay attention. These rules are going to help everybody handle things better in the morning.

<p><input type="checkbox"/> ACTIVITY <i>Practise Active Ignoring with Child</i></p>	<p>Repeat the role play that you performed earlier with the parent, now with the child instead of you (adapt for telephone delivery). Make sure that the child has an activity that he or she can engage in, such as reading, drawing, or playing with a puzzle or game. Ask the child to switch between appropriate play and mildly inappropriate behaviour (i.e., whining, complaining). Remind the parent about when to pay attention and when not to pay attention. After the role-play has been concluded, excuse the child from the room, and discuss with the parent his or her thoughts about his or her performance. Give lots of praise for any success! Provide the parent with specific feedback about his or her ability to alternate between ignoring and attending. Make specific suggestions with respect to how the parent can improve his or her active ignoring skills, and provide support and reassurance.</p>
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Helpful Tips

- If working with a child with anxiety, active ignoring is best for such behaviours as whining, crying, excessive reassurance seeking, or complaining (especially somatic complaints), coupled with praise for independent or brave behaviours.
- If you have previously covered material related to rewards, you can shorten your review of reinforcement in the beginning of this module.

How's Your Style?

- Did you praise often?
- Did you review often, by asking questions?
- Did you simplify the steps as needed?
- Did your pace match that of the child or family?
- Did you stay on track?