

Influence Techniques

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Parents, child care workers, teachers, counselors, babysitters or others spend much of their energy and thought trying to influence young people's behaviors. Much of the time these efforts proceed rather smoothly. There are, however, moments in every caregiver's daily work with children or adolescents when the adult in charge feels at a loss, or at her or his wit's end. And the adult is then uncertain in which way to influence a child's or a group of youngsters' behaviors. "What to do?" is frequently the frantic thought. At such moments, adults tend to fall back upon their standby influence "tools" — such as verbal command, threat, or even in desperation, physical interference. Each one of these can be valid techniques; but usually not in a moment of crisis. These standard tools tend to be overused and not especially fitting for the moment.

In confronting difficult child care situations, one could apply the analogy of comparable decisions faced by a competent carpenter. A skillful carpenter uses more than a hammer and a screwdriver, especially when delicate work has to be done. A proficient carpenter chooses the fitting tool for each particular task at hand. The same holds true for child care work.

The following 40 techniques can be used to assist children or adolescents, thereby *influencing* behavior toward adherence to the adult's guiding directions — and hopefully toward eventual incorporation of such directions as their own.* The techniques, developed for child and youth care workers, are mostly self-explanatory and are amplified by a few descriptive sentences. Caregivers may want to expand their repertoire beyond these 40 selections and add their own techniques. A large and diversified repertoire of influence techniques will undoubtedly come in handy in tense and perplexing moments of child care. Try them!

* The idea and term of "influence technique" included a good number of selected techniques originally developed by Fritz Redl and David Wineman (195, pp. 395-487). Full credit and appreciation are due to these two creative clinicians and authors of the classic publication just cited.

FORTY INFLUENCE TECHNIQUES

1. *Planned Ignoring:* Purposefully “not seeing” is used to provide children with an opportunity to release tension through active behavior within safe limits or “to let go.” It is hoped that by letting the child proceed as he or she is, the next time the child will do all right. It actually entails a playful putting aside of one’s influence.

2. *Acknowledged Ignoring:* Purposefully “not seeing or knowing” but with the tacit understanding between the child and the caregiving adult that the latter is aware of the “oversight.”

It is helpful when a child (From now on, “child” is used although it may apply as well to several children or youth) needs to have opportunities to err, and such acknowledged “erring” helps him or her to become more aware of the undesirability of the manifested behavior.

3. *Signal Interference:* Conveying by means of gesture such as looks, facial expressions, motion by hand, tapping of foot, and other forms of signalling that the caring adult is aware what the child is about to do.

It is used when it is thought that a reminder, especially an unobtrusive signal, can mobilize the child’s memory or conscience to refrain from proceeding or to go ahead — whatever is intended to be “signalled.”

4. *Proximity Control:* Moving within visual, hearing, or reaching contact of the child or children in order to be in *proximity* as a controlling force.

It is used when the actual presence of the caring person within “proximity” is necessary, in order to assure the child with the needed sense of control and support to function effectively, or at least from refraining to function inappropriately.

5. *Touch Control:* It is one step further in direct involvement from “Proximity Control” (see #4). It involves conveying proximity by actual physical contact such as a “touch” with one’s hand or fuller body involvement.

It conveys, as in the case of “signal interference,” the idea that the caring person is there to maintain control or to encourage a relaxation in controls — whatever is desirable to occur.

6. *Interest Relationship:* An attempt to involve child and worker in a joint activity or conversation which is of special interest to the child concerned and will ultimately involve them both.

It is used when an absorption in an appealing joint experience with an adult can direct the child toward new and appropriate activities in place of the anticipated or ongoing inappropriate ones. Note — there is no reference to that which the child was about to do. The focus is upon finding something different and more appropriate to do.

7. Humor: To introduce humor to help child to relax and to influence her/him to find more appropriate activities or expressions.

It is helpful when there is a need to reduce tension and child can share humor. (Note, most important! Sarcasm, cynicism, fun at the expense of others does *not* constitute humor).

8. “Hypodermic” Affection: Give special support and/or affection to convey to the child: “I am with you in spite of your feelings and behavior.”

It can be used when a child is provocative and most likely anxious. A child will calm down when the caring adult ignores the provocative behavior and gives support to the child’s feelings about the situation.

9. Hurdle Help: To do with the child in the beginning what he or she is actually expected and capable to do on her/his own.

It is appropriate when a task seems to the child too big or undesirable but s/he is capable of doing it. Actively doing with her (or him) will help to hurdle a sense of futility, loneliness, or powerlessness, and get her/him on the way.

10. Labelling: To specify a situation, to clarify — what it is all about in order to place it within the child’s sense of comprehension.

It is helpful to specify a situation and bring it within the context (or vocabulary) of the child’s understanding and experience.

11. Interpretation: To explain a situation by amplifying important points and what it means to the child.

It is used similar to “labelling” (see #10) as an effort in bringing the situation within the child’s understanding. In interpretation the effort is directed toward changing behavior through a change of the child’s cognition of the factors involved.

12. Reminder: To repeat a previous direction or understanding.

It is helpful if a mere recall of a previous understanding is sufficient to influence adherence to the cited expectation.

13. Stated Permission: To repeat a previous permission or understanding about an activity in order that the child can proceed on his/her own.

It is used to strengthen and to influence a child’s sense of freedom with support in order to carry on what otherwise would cost the child some qualms or uncertainties.

14. Joining In: To join the child in the activities.

It is helpful to influence (to support) a child’s activities and to encourage his/her following through with them — to emphasize the worthwhileness.

15. Direct Appeal: To make a request directly to the child and to rely on one’s own (personal) authority.

It is used when the person “appealing” has more relevance than the desired

change in behavior. It requires that there is a mutual relationship between the child and the caring person and the child desires to identify with such a caring adult.

16. Restructuring: To rearrange the situation (space-time-physical arrangements) in such a way that it will effect a child's behavior in the desired direction.

It is to be used when the complications are seen as directly impacted by the contextual circumstances and a restructuring (contextual change) will make a difference and predictively change the interactive process or outcome.

17. Regrouping: To make a shift in the group or subgroup's composition. It is used if a different constellation in interpersonal relationships can bring about a change in behavior or prevent undesirable behavior.

18. Environmental "Props": To set up special environmental factors which will help shape (influence) behavior.

It is useful when proper use of furnishings, space and equipment can influence behavior (e.g., closing doors, numbered tools, removal of tempting gadgets, etc.).

19. Appeal to Rules: To remind a child of existing rules and/or agreements. It is used when a child has an awareness *and* comprehension of the meaning of rules as well as the capacity to hold him/herself to such rules.

20. Change of Rules: To adapt existing rules to a situation or make exceptions of the rules.

It is appropriate if a purposeful deviation from the rules will help a child to live eventually more successfully within them. In short, it makes the rule, rather than the child, expendable.

21. Appeal to Higher Authority: To refer a question, concern, or problem to the arbitration of a higher authority or, at least, a reminder that such a step could be undertaken.

It is helpful when the judgment of a "higher authority" is considered more appropriate to influence the desired outcome *without* denying the authority of the caregiving person. This technique is pertinent when questions, concerns or problems fall outside of the jurisdiction of the caregiving person.

22. Appeal to Intellect: To challenge the child to think it through, to reason it out for her or himself.

It is appropriate when a child has capacity to approach the behavior under consideration in a rational way *and* to control him/herself accordingly.

23. Counseling — A Personal Marginal Interview: To discuss the total situation with a child in a manner in which the focus is primarily upon helping the child to adapt to or to master a particular personal reaction to an ongoing or

projected situation.

It is helpful when a child needs to explore together with an adult his or her own *personal* affect, behavior and understanding of a situation.

24. Rub in: To point out repeatedly the undesirability or futility of any one particular behavior or the results of such behavior.

It may be pertinent when a child's anxiety needs to be mobilized in order to become more "conscience stricken" or aware of the consequences of his/her behavior or situation.

25. Scolding: To blame a child for his/her behavior (or lack of appropriate behavior).

It is useful if the child is aware of his behavior, the consequences of it and has the capacity to behave differently. Similar to #24, it appeals to his conscience and assumes that s/he has a desire and capacity both to do differently and to satisfy (to please) to some extent the person who is scolding.

26. Heighten Anxiety: To stress the implications of the behavior for the child and others.

It is pertinent when a child needs to become aware of the consequences of his/her behavior and the impact upon him/her personally. Similar to #24 and #25, it is only appropriate when the child can and needs to be more conscience stricken.

27. Personal Appeal: To appeal to personal relationship between caregiving person and the child in order to rely upon the personal meaning the request has for the adult(s) asking for it.

It is significant when desired influence can apparently only be shaped through the relationship with the person. Desired behavior will be influenced to sustain or improve the personal relationship with little concern for behavioral change.

28. Appeal to Honor: To appeal to a child's sense of honor and self-esteem.

It is appropriate if child has the proper balance of a sense of fairness and can employ it appropriately in order to function effectively.

29. Appeal to Group Goals: To appeal to child's or children's identification with their group.

It is appropriate when a child has an identification with his/her group and desires continuous group membership, then an appeal can be instrumental to accomplish the desired change.

30. Appeal to Group Pressures: To appeal to the group to handle the particular situation as an internal group problem.

In order to rely appropriately upon "group pressure," two conditions have to exist: (1) identification with group, as indicated under #29 and, (2) the individual must have sufficient secure status in the group in order that such group

pressure remains fair (without scapegoating) and helpful to her or him. Appeal to continued maintenance or enhancement of positive group relationships.

31. Authoritative “Permission”: To expressly permit a behavior to occur. It is appropriate when open *permission* or sanction helps either behavior to go into the desired direction or such permission takes the edge off a need to defy, imitate or antagonize. “Permitting” something openly often can stop behavior which is meant to try out the adult or to express an attitude of rebellious defiance.

32. Authoritative “Verbot”: To declare precisely on the basis of one’s authority what is and is not allowed (“verboten”). It is helpful if an authoritative statement that a certain “piece of behavior” is intolerable serves as a deterrent and circumstances do not favor any other influence technique.

33. Teaching of Behavior: To demonstrate the ways a “piece of behavior” can be carried out. It is helpful when a child needs help in learning the *skills* of carrying out a behavior and if his eventual mastery of these skills will mean applying them.

34. Replacing a Child’s Action by One’s Own: To do for the child what s/he could and should do on his/her own. It may be appropriate when doing an act on behalf of or for the child might help him/her do it at a later and appropriate occasion upon his/her own.

35. Promise: To promise a reward (reinforce) beyond the result of the desired behavior and compliance. It may be helpful when the desired behavior may not be sufficient reason in itself to be carried out and when an increase in desire to do so is most important. It also includes the notion that the promised reward is instrumental at this time but will either be unnecessary in the future or always an intrinsic part of the desired behavior.

36. Reward: To connect a “piece of behavior” with a reward upon accomplishment. It may be useful if the accomplishment of a behavior must be stressed far beyond the accomplishment itself (also, see #35).

37. Isolation (Time-Out): To separate a child from the immediate ongoing peer associations and/or activities/events. It is pertinent when a child has to be separated from ongoing events and/or associations because the ongoing environmental situation is not conducive to his or her functioning on a level he or she is capable. Note, it involves isolation from *ongoing* events and associations. It does not necessarily require isolation nor separation from caring persons. In most instances, isolation requires continued contact with the caregiving persons.

38. *Physical Restraint:* To control a child's movements when s/he lacks the necessary self-control.

It is helpful and, at times necessary, to hold a youngster physically either to keep him or her from doing physical harm to him/herself or others or to remove him/her from the scene of "dangerous" involvement. It must not be confused with "physical punishment." Physical restraint is used only in cases which constitute an emergency.

39. "*Antiseptic*" Bouncing: To take a child out of ongoing situation to prevent her or him from getting into greater complications for her or himself.

It is pertinent when caregiving person can predict serious subsequential behavioral events of which the child him/herself is not aware *and* which can be hopefully avoided by techniques such as isolation. (Also, see #37 and #38.)

40. *Threat:* To indicate forms of reprisals as a consequence of undesirable behavior.

It may be advisable to remind a child of unpleasant consequences of his or her behavior if the *thought* of such consequences will help him or her to control his/her behavior. A threat also must contain the ingredient that the person advancing or implying the threat is able and willing to carry out. (In many ways, a threat also implies a dare and a desire, or even the necessity, to make the threat come true.)

In summary

The foregoing 40 influence techniques, as has already been suggested, are introduced to expand adult caregivers' repertoire of interventive techniques. An expanded, readily available "stock" of facile means of intervention is essential in professional care and treatment work in order to mesh the interventive efforts with the care receivers' immediate personal requirements. The major step from spontaneous to professionally-oriented care work involves a worker's capacity to be *personally* involved with the care receivers while simultaneously sacrificing the worker's own favorite personal style of doing things. Redl and Wineman alerted us many decades ago that an effective therapeutic caregiver trades his or her favored private way for handling children or youth for practice strategies needed in each particular circumstance (Redl & Wineman, 1957, pp. 48-59).

This chapter is included in this publication as a mini-workbook. Reading its content may stimulate caregivers; it might possibly sharpen and specify the techniques already known and practiced by the reader. Rarely, however, does the mere reading or reflecting of a particular learning content lead to an acquisition of added skills. An intermediary step is necessary. The reading of new skills has to be bolstered by rehearsal and trial practice with them. Then, such skills have a chance to be adopted and with *added* use to become eventually part of a worker's interventive practice repertoire. It is hoped that those interested will strive for this mastery. A person with an ample repertoire of techniques will have a better chance for gaining more *effective* influence.