Managing Explosive Children

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Disclosures

Neither I nor my spouse has a relevant financial relationship
with a commercial interest to disclose.

Outline

- Overview of maladaptive/ explosive behaviors in children

- Prevention of explosive behavior

- Managing explosive behavior

Predispositions to Explosive Behavior

- Depression

- Mood instability

- Anxiety

- Trauma

- Immaturity

- Impaired frustration tolerance
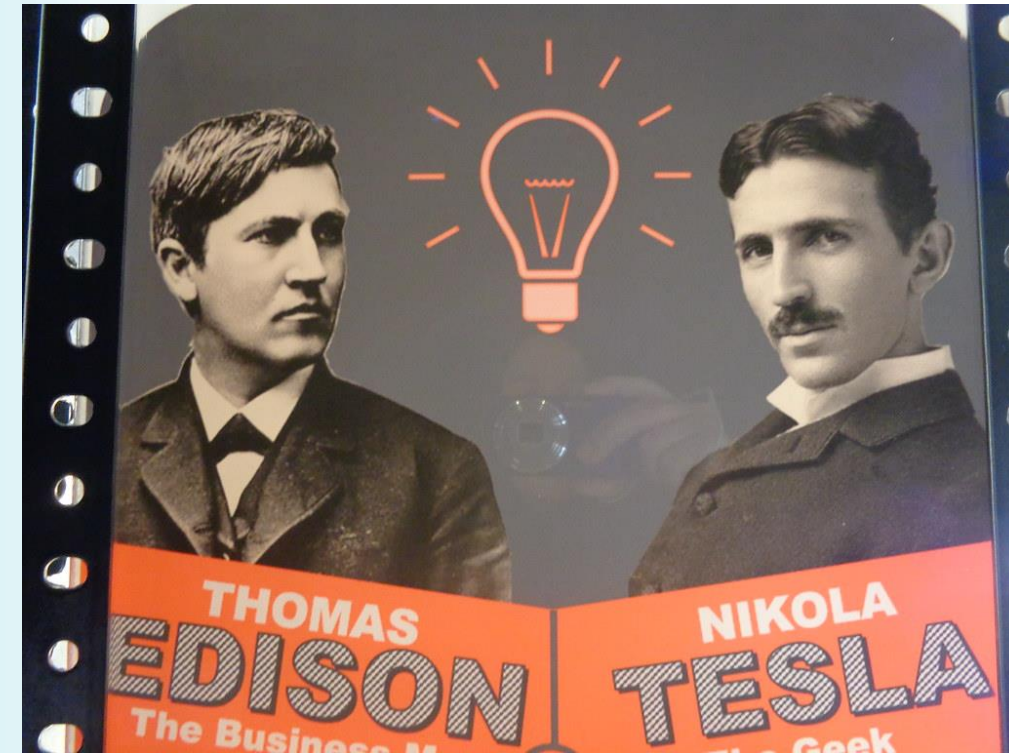
- Disruptive behavior disorders

How Do Children Develop Behavior Problems?

- Power Struggles

- Poor monitoring and supervision

Power Struggles

- Coercive Interactions
  - Negative reinforcement paradigm
  - Reciprocal interactions
  - Methods of coercion escalate over time

Negative Reinforcement

- When a behavior is successful in decreasing a noxious stimuli, it is more likely to re-occur next time the noxious stimuli is presented.
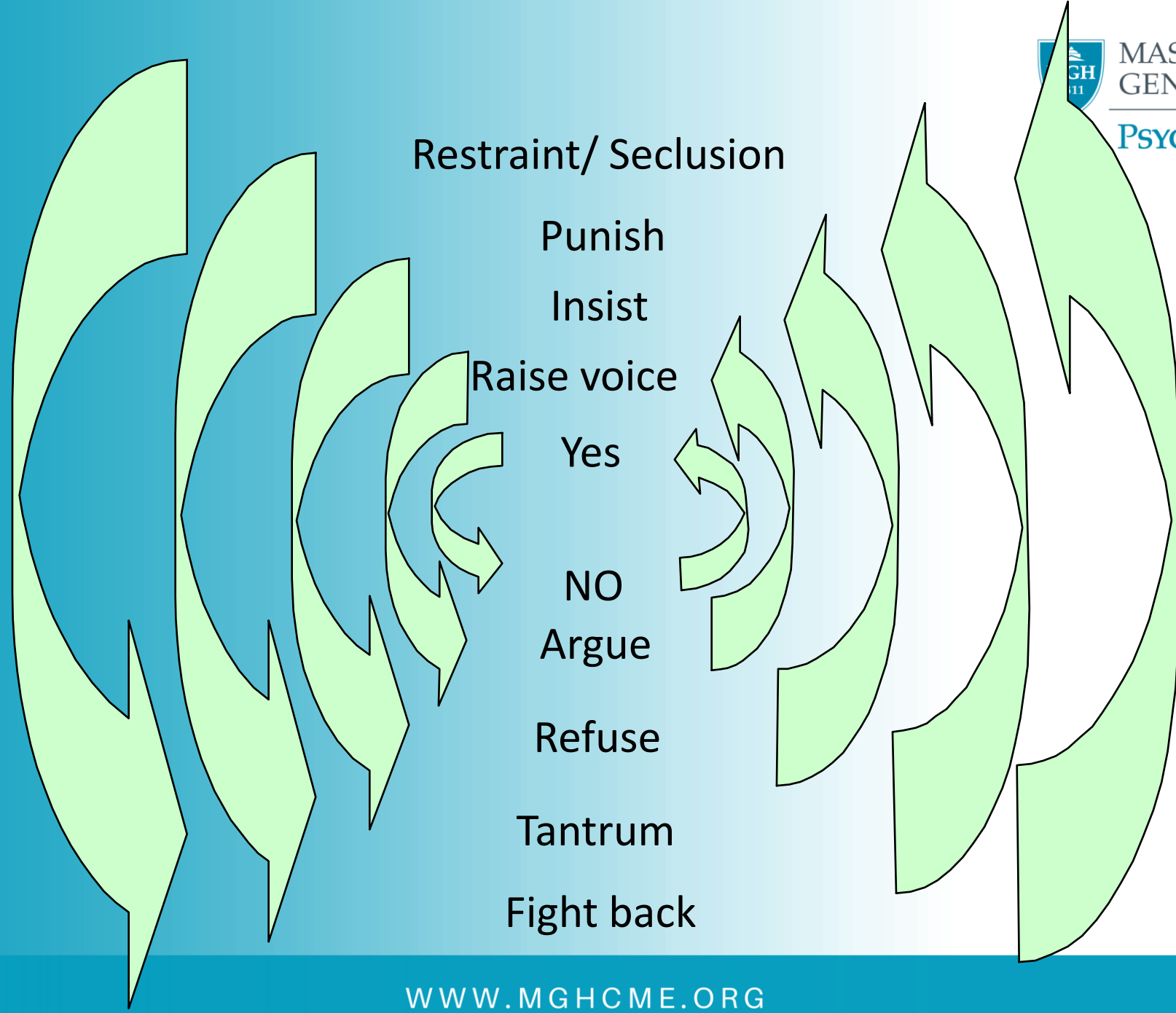
Positive Reinforcement

- When a behavior is followed by an experience that makes it more likely that the behavior will recur

- A reinforcer can be anything

- A reinforcer is person specific

- Reward is in the eye of the beholder

Restraint/ Seclusion

Punish

Insist

Raise voice

Yes

NO

Argue

Refuse

Tantrum

Fight back

Escalation of Behaviors

- Coercive strategies are not 100% effective over time

- Staff and children get frightened when they do not feel in control

- Staff and children develop "learned helplessness"

Danger of One Trick Pony

- "Get more involved" approaches

- "Back off" approaches

- Confusing when approach does not match the problem
  - "Back off" the interaction for problem "power struggles"
  - "Get more involved" for problems with supervision

Managing Explosive Behavior is an Open Book Exam

- "Screening"
  - No need to reinvent the wheel
  - Identify past triggers
  - Identify past effective means of de-escalation

  - Guardians
  - Children

Explosion Preventative Programming

- Keep kids busy

- Maximize structure

- Consistency

- Sequencing

- Rewards

Positive Behavioral Strategies

- Behavior systems should result in improved evidenced-based strategies

  - Positive Attention (supervision)

  - Limit Setting (avoid power struggles)

  - Rewards (prevent power struggles)

  - Active Listening (supervision)

  - Selective "Ignoring" (supervision)

  - Effective Commands (avoid power struggles)

  - Problem-Solving (goal setting)

Positive Attention

- Staff must 'pay attention' to positive behaviors at specific times and places

- Children repeat positive behaviors as part of a routine in response to praise

  - Positive attention preferred to negative attention

  - Child internalizes staff expectations

  - Child internalizes a coping/adaptation scaffold

- Strengthens staff-child rapport

Positive Attention

- Positive attention in action (supervision)

  - Time and place for attention – after completion of daily routine tasks and before access to rewarding experiences

  - Use of labeled and unlabeled praise

  - 'Catch child being good'

  - 'Special Time'

Limit Setting

- Without limits there are no boundaries

- Without boundaries there are no limits

- Know what the child can do

- Create clear expectations in your mind – visualize where and how child will function

- Limits are embedded in the routine of expectations/tasks and rewards

Limit Setting

- Best for routine to assert limits without verbalization

- Say what you mean and mean what you say

  - Short simple statements

  - Do not demand and do not request

  - Be careful with if – then limits

- There is a time and a place for limits

  - Emergencies

  - Positive routines prevent need for day to day limits that can morph into power struggles

Rewards

- Daily tasks are tied to daily rewards

- Short and long term rewards

- Rewards are essential for children to grow and develop (adults too!)

- Rewards can be anything provided they are motivating to the child (eye of the beholder)

- Rewards and challenges have to be in balance

- Over-rewarding can de-motivate

Active Listening

- Core skill of supervision
  - Mirroring
  - Validating
  - Empathizing

  - No interrupting
  - No advice giving
  - No commentary
  - No judgment

Active Listening

- Mirroring
  - Repeat what they say and then say
  - "Is there more that I need to understand"
  - Continue until they are done
- Validating
  - "Is there more that I need to understand"
  - "No, that is it"
  - "What you said makes sense to me"
- Empathizing
  - "Given what you said I understand how you feel"

Why Does Active Listening Work

- Listening takes you out of potential power struggles

- You are listening, validating, and caring

- Interrupting, advice giving, commenting, judging, teaching trains children to not listen.

Selective Ignoring

- Active attention to the daily routine

- Accompanied by redirection to routine

- Targeted intervention to address specific problem behaviors

- Attention is withheld so problem behaviors are not reinforced
  - Remember negative attention is rewarding too

- Attention given when neutral or positive behavior is observed

Selective Ignoring

- Attending to the routine and redirecting

- Most effective in addressing:
  - Whining
  - Negotiating/answer shopping
  - Interrupting
  - Teasing (if object of the teasing participates)
  - Use of 'baby talk'
  - Demanding or disrespectful tone

- "What are you supposed to be doing now?"

Giving Effective Commands

- Goal of the behavior system is to avoid giving commands at all

- Avoid phrasing commands as questions

- Break commands into single steps

- Eliminate distractions in immediate environment

- Speak in a firm, but calm voice

- Children should repeat commands to ensure accuracy

Effective behavior planning

- Reasonable Expectations

- Adequate Rewards

- Proper Sequencing

Trouble Shooting

- Sequence errors

- Child does not know what to do

- Expectations are unrealistic

- Reinforcers are inadequate

- Monitoring strategies are inadequate

- Staff inconsistency

Trouble

Principles of Verbal De-escalation

Technical

- One voice should take the lead

- Honesty

- Avoid public splitting

- Know your limits and tag out when mentally exhausted

- Optimism that child will regain control soon

Principles of Verbal De-escalation

Technical

- Regulation of Affect
- Consider employing a very limited range:
    - Warm, enthusiastic and encouraging

    or

    - Dispassionate, conveying a sense of mild boredom and regret

    - Affect- negative or positive- can reinforce
    - Arguing is still intimacy
    - Dispassion is non-rewarding

Verbal De-escalation

- Finding the Middle Ground

- A – **A**dult "Because I said so!"

- B – **B**oth: Collaborative Problem Solving

- C – **C**hild "Do whatever you want…"

Collaborative Problem Solving

Conflicts are to be addressed in terms of competing **concerns**, not competing **solutions.**

Instead of:

"No you won't... Yes I will!"

Consider:

"What are you worried about?...Here's what I'm worried about."

CPS

- **Step 1** – Elicit child's concern
- **Step 2** – Prove you have heard child's concern
    - Mirror, validate, empathize
    - If nothing else, parrot
- **Step 3** – Articulate your concern
- **Step 4-** Invite child to resolve both concerns
- **Step 5-** If child cannot start solution, offer suggestions
- **Step 6-** Accept **any** solution that effectively addresses both concerns.

Thank you!