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EXPLAINING TWO CHOICE DISCIPLINE

"We need to teach the next generation of children from day one that they are responsible for their lives. Mankind's greatest gift, also its greatest curse, is that we have free choice."

Elisabeth Kübler-Ross

Two Choice Discipline (TCD) is a **behavioral system** used by adults and children when engaging in activities that require socially responsible communication, cooperation, and collaboration.

TCD is a **communication system** that includes language structures and routines for speaking respectfully and clarifying expectations proactively. TCD helps adults communicate expectations clearly, and it helps children understand the relationship between decision-making and consequences related to choices.

TCD is not a token economy system that includes external rewards for behavioral compliance. The intended purpose for using TCD routines is to provide consistent language for managing behavioral responses.

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Two Choice Discipline helps children:

• Communicate and collaborate respectfully,
• Make decisions using preestablished choices,
• Accept consequences related to their choices, and
• Self-regulate, or manage their own behavior within preset boundaries.

When using TCD:

• There is no competition or extrinsic reward such as points or prizes for compliance.

• There is no bargaining, bribing, or compromising.

• There are no acceptable excuses for choosing to act disobediently or for challenging authority disrespectfully.

• There is no blaming others or displacement of responsibility for one's choices or behavioral responses.

TCD includes language structures, or speaking routines, that adults use consistently when they offer choices or apply consequences. A speaking routine for offering two choices might sound like this:

> You have two choices. You may choose _____ (name a choice) or you may choose _____ (name another choice). Make a good choice now, please.

A speaking routine for applying a consequence when a child chooses to disobey might sound like this:

> You had two choices. You chose to disobey. You chose a consequence.

In this case, the child had two choice options but chose neither, demonstrating a challenge for authority to control. Choosing to disobey was a choice, so the child chose a consequence.

Choices and consequences are introduced and discussed prior to implementation. Sufficient guidance for making decisions is provided using TCD routines so that choices and consequences are communicated clearly.

Using TCD to Change Behaviors

Successfully changing how adults and children communicate often requires unlearning old habits and learning new behaviors. The following overview identifies the process for implementing TCD to facilitate respectful communication and collaboration.

List reasonable expectations for improving communications.
• Consider the child's age, maturity, and prior instruction and experiences, and determine if expected outcomes are developmentally and socially appropriate.
• Consult with other adults and review literature to determine if your expectations and consequences for noncompliance are reasonable.
• Determine if sufficient instruction, modeling, and practice have been provided.
• List intended outcomes, or goals, that can be achieved in a reasonable amount of time by providing modeling, instruction, encouraging feedback, and practice.

Observe and gather data to identify target behaviors for improvement.
• Observe adults and children in multiple environments and situations to identify problematic behaviors that need changing or replacing.
• Identify factors that are influencing behavioral responses.
• Note how often a challenging behavior occurs (frequency).
• Observe characteristics of undesired behaviors such as duration, or how long a response lasts.

Prioritize target behaviors according to the highest need for change or replacement.
• List problematic behaviors.
• Prioritize and rank the behaviors using numerals to identify behaviors with the highest need for intervention and improvement.
• Select the top 1–3 behaviors as target behaviors for change.

Identifying problematic behaviors is one of the first steps when implementing TCD.

Providing two choices establishes clear boundaries within which children practice decision-making in less consequential situations.

Create choice options for each target behavior.
- Identify situations where you can provide two choices for each target behavior that may occur in everyday activities.
- Identify no-choice situations that involve safety, where there is no choice except to comply with the request for performance.
- Practice speaking routines that include fewer words.
- Practice communicating with present tense verbs, and voice tones and levels that are matter-of-fact, nonthreatening, and positive.
- Select two choices per target behavior that you can provide consistently.

Determine consequences for noncompliance.
- Predetermine age-appropriate consequences that increase with the severity of the noncompliance.
- Communicate and identify consequences for noncompliance that are age-appropriate and logically related to each target behavior.
- Use speaking routines to communicate expectations. You might offer two choices by saying,

> You have two choices. You may choose to put your things away correctly or you choose for me to keep them _____ days (name a reasonable number of days). Make a good choice now.

- Communicate using kind words and acceptable voice tones, and provide a warning, saying,

> You choose to speak disrespectfully. You choose to end this conversation. Make a good choice now.

- Communicate respectfully when a child chooses to speak disrespectfully. Disengage and end the conversation until emotions calm. You might say,

> You chose unkind words. You chose to end this conversation. We will speak again in 30 minutes (or whatever time period is needed).

Role-play "what if" situations and practice responding without bargaining or compromising.
- Observe situations in everyday activities and consider how behavioral interactions could have been managed better using choice options and reasonable consequences.
- Consider how you could use TCD speaking routines to clarify expectations in similar situations to maintain control.
- Select reasonable choice options and consequences that are fair and appropriate, and that you can implement consistently.
- Identify and discuss situations that involve safety concerns and in which complying with a request is the only choice without a consequence.

Teaching children to communicate respectfully begins by modeling desired behaviors in your communications with them.

Determining When and Where to Use TCD

Two Choice Discipline routines may be used in any environment to clearly communicate expectations for performance or to identify that there is no choice except to cooperate. Depending on the environment, timing, or specific situations that may become emotionally charged, you choose when to use TCD.

Prior to implementing TCD, you will need to plan, prepare, and practice. These suggestions will help you develop consistency for using speaking routines to clarify expectations.

- Before implementation, clearly identify behaviors that you want to change or replace.
- Before offering choices, practice using speaking routines to communicate choice options and encourage decision-making.
- Observe children and events, and consider how you can use TCD routines to offer choices and encourage cooperation.
- When you are ready to use TCD routines consistently, begin to allow simple decision-making such as selecting clothing, choosing foods for meals, or identifying preferences for play activities.
- Allow choice-making when you know the child will choose one of the two choice options that you suggest.

Use the TCD language structure and routines consistently. Depending on the circumstances and environment, you may need to change the wording slightly or vary the time that a child is given to make a decision.

- If you were asking a child to choose between two clothing outfits, you might say,

> You have two choices. You may choose this outfit (point to outfit) or choose that outfit (point to another outfit). Make a good choice by _____ (identify a time for the child to make a decision, e.g., bedtime, morning).

TCD speaking routines help you establish relationships that are positive and proactive.

- If you are asking a child to choose between two play activities, you might say,

> You have two choices. You may choose to play _____ (name an activity) or you may choose to play _____ (name another activity). Make a good choice now, please.

- If you are asking a child to choose to comply because there is no other choice, you might say,

> You choose to buckle your seat belt or you choose a consequence. Make a good choice now.

- If a child chooses NOT to cooperate, you might say,

> You chose not to obey (or name the desired behavior, e.g., wear a seat belt). You chose a consequence.

You select age-appropriate choices and consequences related to decisions. The following are key points to remember for following through consistently and according to your available time, attention, and needs.

- You do not have to name or describe a consequence immediately. Preferably, all choices and consequences should be discussed prior to use.
- You should not apply a consequence until you are in control of your voice and behavior.
- You choose when to apply a consequence, either at a later time, when you are at home, or when the cost for disobedience will be more effective for reducing the frequency of a problematic behavior.
- You do have to follow through consistently when applying a consequence regardless of how well a child behaves for the remainder of the day. Remember, the child chose the consequence, so allow him or her to live with the decision.

When a child chooses not to cooperate, you may make a choice for the child or assign an appropriate consequence.