Parents have the opportunity to teach their children in so many different ways. Sometimes you may want to help your young child learn a very specific behavior, such as reaching. The following example is a well-planned, focused teaching method called Systematic Instruction. Using this method can be a rewarding way to help your child learn new behaviors, acquire a new skill, or use it in different activities and with different people.

Learning Guide: Teaching New Behavior Systematically

Start by identifying something you want your child to do differently or better. This could be anything from your child being able to do a single, simple action such as reaching (as Sandy did with Maisie) to an entire new behavior or skill. You can find something to work on in almost every activity your child does. A single, simple action—such as grasping a spoon—or an entire new behavior or skill—such as dressing, eating, or reaching—can both be very rewarding for children and parents. Decide what you want your child to do during the activity in which you will work on teaching the new behavior or skill.

For Maisie, Sandy knew that she loved it when Sandy tickled her. Sandy started giving Maisie lots of chances to reach for her. When Maisie was reaching well, only had to wiggle her fingers before Maisie tried to reach and immediately provide the interesting response—something Maisie loves (such as tickling her other hand). Sandy sat in front of Maisie and waited until Sandy watched the things her daughter, Maisie, did in different activities and noticed that she knew that Maisie loved it when Sandy tickled her. Sandy planned to help Maisie learn to reach for Sandy. Sandy knew that Maisie loved it when Sandy tickled her. Sandy watched the things her daughter, Maisie, did in different activities and noticed that she would be better able to get toys and other things that she wanted if she could reach for them. Sandy knew that Maisie loved it when Sandy tickled her. Sandy planned to help Maisie learn to reach for the interesting response each time your child does the new behavior or skill. As your child learns the new behavior or skill, immediately provide the rewarding response. Involve your child in one of these activities. Get your child's attention and let him or her know a learning time is starting.

Most Prompts

You'll know the practice is working if...

- Your child uses the new behavior or skill in different activities and with different people and toys/materials
- Your child learns the new behavior or skill you teach
- Your child is interested and stays involved in the activity
- Your child has good choices for systematic teaching.

A Quick Peek

Sandy watched the things her daughter, Maisie, did in different activities and noticed that she would be better able to get toys and other things that she wanted if she could reach for them. Sandy knew that Maisie loved it when Sandy tickled her. Sandy planned to help Maisie learn to reach for the interesting response each time your child does the new behavior or skill. As your child learns the new behavior or skill, immediately provide the rewarding response. Involve your child in one of these activities. Get your child's attention and let him or her know a learning time is starting.