



***EasyChild Report: Working With Children
Through Operant Conditioning Learning***

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Abstract

EasyChild is a behavior modification software system designed to encourage children to succeed in life. This behavioral software system is designed to help raise children with consistent rewards for their achievements. EasyChild is a program for behavioral change which is grounded in both behaviorism and common sense with a premise that: "Kids can be whatever you want them to be", provided we give them the tools and the direction they need to be successful.

EasyChild correlates behavior to the world of work. The values learned have a lasting effect on our children. Built into the program, there is an immediate value and profound effect in a families' home life. EasyChild is for any parent or teacher who is facing the age old challenge of raising or teaching kids in today's world.

Why does EasyChild work? Because it is based on how children *learn*: Operant Conditioning, where a proper response is the outcome of certain stimuli, such as rewards. However, current talk therapy and counseling espouses that Operant Conditioning may not be an important child raising theory, but that is an anachronism. Research indicates that Operant Conditioning is one of the few approaches to working with children, with and without special needs, that has efficacy.

Why? If this is fact, then "why are we raising a nation of lost children?" (Time Magazine). One domain of thought is attributed to our children's inability to adjust to their constantly changing environment or perhaps our own inability as parents and teachers to help them manage change. This inability to adapt, and to adopt, is creating children with poor reading skills, study skills, manners and ethics. In other words, perhaps our parenting skills aren't as ideal as we thought they would be prior to having children. Remember thinking, "We will be the best parents ever, and our children will be super stars because of our parenting skills, wisdom and life's experiences that we will pass on to them." For most of us, this is not how our world has turned out.

We need direction in helping our children reach their goals. We have been tracking our children's progress for years in school grade books and Report Cards, isn't it time we have more help, whether it be in school performance or successful life practices? EasyChild is designed to do just this. It gives parents and teachers an edge in securing success for the young lives that they touch.

While parents and teachers have reached for books and magazines for years to help them navigate the principles of behavior modification skill sets in the home and the classroom, EasyChild is perhaps the first software product to really move into this skill set niche. It creates consistency for parents and teacher's who can't always track, inspire, reprimand or see a child's behavior at a given moment. It is not a parenting substitute...it is a parenting *enhancement*.

If child development programs adopt research-based programs like EasyChild, our children's school performance and behavior can improve, as evidenced in the information that follows. This paper serves as a guidebook to the logic, the principles of behavior modification, the thoughts and the premises that have gone into the creation of EasyChild Software.

Introduction

Human behavior is primarily the adjustment of the individual to his environment, thereby fitting him for a successful life and for happiness with themselves and with others. It is simple logic to conclude that an understanding by counselors, teachers and parents of the science of human behavior is an essential element in education.

“I can’t get no! Satisfaction.” A popular Rolling Stone’s lyric that typified a generation of baby boomers. These lyrics verbalized an unrequited feeling that seemed to shock a nation. The words tell the human story of the search for pleasure or reward. It is a statement asking a question: “How is satisfaction achieved?” The inner need objective is the quest of the individual and the chant of a nation on the move like a swarming colony of ants. The human drama has mystified the desire – until recently.

The shackles of this human mystery were loosened by the advent of the behavior perspective. This work began with the discovery of the conditioned reflex by Russian physiologist Ivan Pavlov (1894-1936) around the turn of the century. This gradually gave way to the perspective that “only the study of directly observable behavior and the stimuli and reinforcing conditions that control it could serve as a basis for formulating scientific principles of human behavior” (Carson, Butcher, & Mineka, 1996). The mysteries of the human spirit started to take form. Satisfaction became tactile. How would the behavioral perspective affect learning in human behavior? The application of these principles to raising kids would wait another 40 years for B.F. Skinner’s learning theory, called Operant Conditioning.

Operant Conditioning is the behavioral process to weaken harmful stimuli in order to achieve satisfaction. It is based on the assumption that all behavior is a response to environmental stimuli and serves as cues for behavioral response. In his book, *Beyond Freedom & Dignity*, B. F. Skinner describes the role of learning in human behavior as a quest for satisfaction: “When a bit of behavior is followed by a certain kind of consequence, it is more likely to occur again, and a consequence having this effect is called a reinforcer” (p25). Skinner’s model is based on the scenario of antecedent behavior, response, and consequence. A reinforcing consequence will tend to increase behavior, and a punishment consequence will decrease behavior. Skinner started writing in the 1950’s on how to apply these ideas to raising kids. He advised that child management and educational objectives should be developed in accordance with the Behavioral Principles of Learning (Shunk, 1996). Operant Conditioning was transforming child raising into a science. No longer could teachers, parents and children relinquish empowerment to their subjective needs of: “I can’t get no! Satisfaction.”

This is the genesis of EasyChild. It is a software-based learning and behavior modification conditioning system that creates positive effects for:

Parents: To reduce parenting anxiety, decrease arguing with their children, to have more positive interactions with their children, which will create a peaceful, time-saving home environment.

Educators: To manage cause & effect, to track results, and to ensure that goals are met.

Children: To help them grow up with a set of expectations that they have learned so they are empowered to create their own sense of satisfactions.

The Laws of Behavior

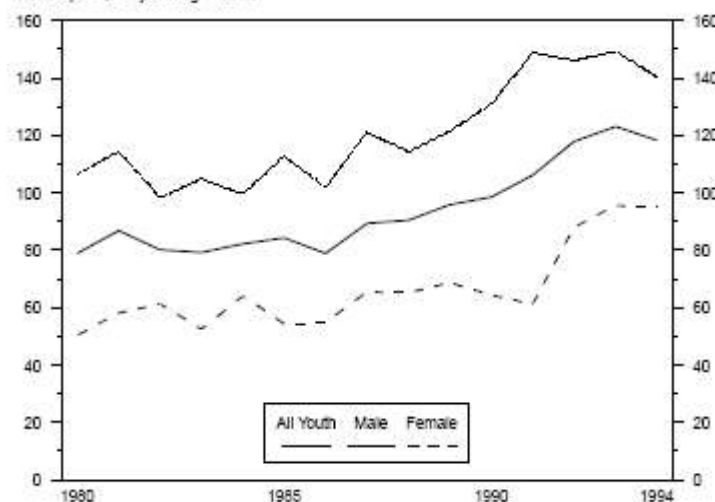
Human life is governed by certain predictable laws. Whether you are aware of their existence or not, they exist and their existence affects us –every one of us – every day of our lives. Most of us have heard of the physical laws governing our world such as the law of gravity, but few of us have become familiar with the laws which more closely affect our personal lives. These are the laws that determine the absolute direction and destination in the game of life. There is one major law that governs success: *The law of cause and effect*.

Everything in the universe operates on the law of cause and effect (Skinner, 1971). There are no exceptions to this. Nothing does or will happen by accident. For every effect there is a cause. You have only to take care of the cause and the effect will, without exception, take care of itself. Good cause ... good effect. No cause ... no effect. Bad cause ... bad effect. It's good to be a student of cause, because there is a reason for everything that happens. If you don't like the effect, you change the cause. Anything that's occurring in your life, whether it's happening to you personally or whether you see it in the behaviors and the actions of the people you encounter, you have created, intentionally or unintentionally. That is a fact. It is a law of the universe. Nothing you can think about or whine about will change the law. The law of cause and effect is predictable and irreversible. "Knowing how to use the law, kids can attract success and happiness. Ignorance of the law can result in boredom, frustration, and failure, which can lead to fear, drugs and suicide."(Bruns, 41).

From the Center of Disease Control's Study, *America's Children: Key National Indicators of Well-Being*, it is stated that youth victims of violent crimes is on the increase:

Violence affects the quality of life of young people who experience it, witness it, or feel threatened by it. In addition to the direct physical harm suffered by young victims of violence, research suggests that violence can adversely affect victims' mental health and development, and increase the likelihood that they themselves will commit acts of violence.⁴⁰ Youths ages 12 to 17 are more likely than adults to be victims of violent crimes,⁴¹ which include simple and aggravated assaults, rape, and robbery (stealing by force or threat of violence).

Figure BEH4. Youth who were victims of violent crime, by gender, 1980-94
Victims per 1,000 youth ages 12-17



Note: Violent crimes include simple and aggravated assaults, rape, and robbery (stealing by force or threat of violence).
Source: U.S. Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics, National Crime Victimization Survey.

If we allow actions to have random effects instead of structure, our children will not know what to expect later in life when the rules will be firm in the workplace. Here are simple rules of life that lead to success:

Accountability: This is for actions which will hold true for the entirety of their lives. We do not have a choice of whether we want to play by the established rules. In most cases, we have to.

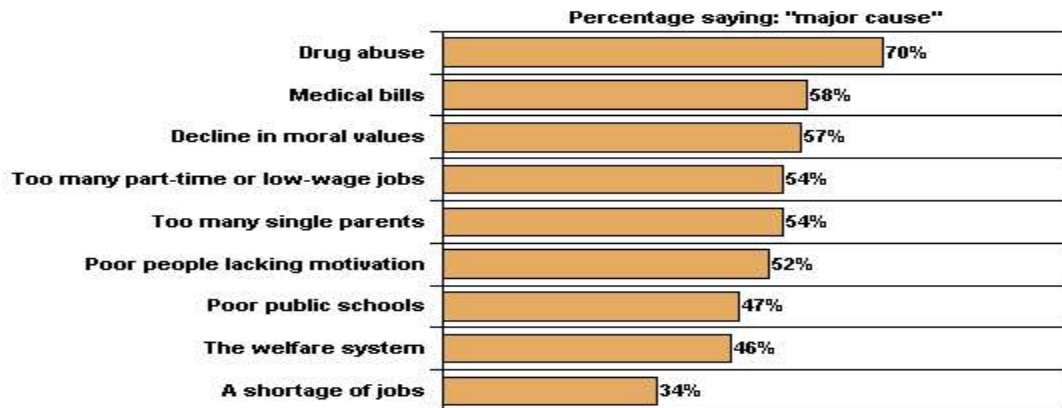
Responsibility: When we survey our lives, we have no one but ourselves to thank for what we see. We have the ability to change our position or keep it the way it is.

Learn to Earn: “Kids Must Learn To Earn” (Bruns, 44). Just as any game has rules, so does life. Earning one’s way in life is paramount, and kids need to be taught this at the earliest possible age.

These concepts are best taught during the critical stages of learning, ages seven through sixteen. During these years, children must become able to learn skills such as: read, write, calculate, and perform household chores. It is through their contribution to home, school, to a social group, and to society as a whole, that children learn to earn in a positive sense. This will instill a sense of achievement and personal satisfaction. Yet in our society where the individual is often catered to, the positive ethic of contribution is not always learned. The negative ethic of instant gratification, drugs, and the social allure of gangs often prevail. “Happy Kids Are Deserving Kids” (Bruns, 49). Now here’s the principle that hurts and no one wants to talk about it. *Need* is not the deciding factor as to who gets the rewards, rewards are given to those who *deserve them* and to those who have earned satisfaction of a job well done. Someone who receives a reward without earning it does not have a sense of appreciation. “Life responds only to those who deserve, not to those who need” (Bruns, 52). This sums up the point of EasyChild. The chart below illustrates that 57% of American’s feel that moral values are a major cause of poverty. Again, it’s the universal law of Cause and Effect at work:

More than half of Americans say drug abuse, medical bills and a decline in moral values are major causes of poverty, but not a shortage of jobs

For each of the following, please tell me if this is a major cause of poverty, a minor cause of poverty, or not a cause at all.



Source: NPR / Kaiser / Harvard 2/01

Reward a Behavior and You'll Get That Behavior

Rewards are privileges. As an adult, it's expected that all privileges must be earned. Parents and even teachers receive money for their labors. Money isn't the real goal; however, you really work for the privileges money can buy. We earn the privileges of flicking on a switch for light, turning a dial for temperature or the simple privilege of enjoying a hamburger and fries without actually having to butcher a cow or dig a potato. Whatever the privilege, it's naturally tied to some action. The more productive the action and the less loathsome the behavior, the higher the salary and the more privileges you receive. The less productive the action and the more loathsome the behavior, the fewer privileges earned.

This premise leads us to the next law, "Kids Can Act Any Way You Want Them to Act" (Bruns, 56). Think of the minds of your kids as a slate you can write to. They are ready to learn the rules as quickly as you can teach. The seeds which you plant are the fruit you will bear in your home. When students understand "The System" they are in a position to create their own results. Their positive behaviors of responsibility will produce desired results, while undesired behaviors will result in not receiving rewards. The choice is up to the kids, the parent is only a facilitator at this point. "Laws create a concrete world. Order is security. Discipline is freedom" (Bruns, 65).

Reward for labor must be clearly defined and consistent. Those who get paid do the work vs. those who don't, won't get paid. How long would you labor without reward?

What does all this have to do with children and learning? Children and adults obey the same rules for the same reasons. Fail to pay an adult for their labor and punish them for no probable cause and I'll introduce you to a real crank. Do the same to a child and I'll show you one loathsome kid. What makes people conform? Benefits for the right actions, clearly given (Skinner, 1965). Most children without a disability require boundaries because today's society withdraws these boundaries and parents willpower. Too often parents reported to me that when they press their will upon their children, the young threaten to call the police. Boundaries for children without disabilities are a challenge, but with children with disabilities like ADHD, ADD, Asperger's, and Autism, one of the symptoms is not being able to accommodate their external levels of control, impulse control, and social boundaries. These children especially require a structure in which they can learn to measure their activities and develop self-monitory ability. Initially this is an external system in which they can complete through cost management – a token system. EasyChild permits both parent and child to learn the boundaries. Later, the child will internalize these boundaries. But in and of itself, both parent and child need a system to teach and guide. EasyChild makes this possible.

From the U.S. Surgeon General's *Report on Mental Health*, it states that the relationship between a child's temperament and parenting style is complex (Thomas et al., 1968); it may be either protective if it is good or a risk factor if it is poor. Thus, a difficult child's chances of developing mental health problems are much reduced if he or she grows up in a family in which there are clear rules and consistent enforcement (Maziade et al., 1985), while a child exposed to inconsistent discipline is at greater risk for later behavioral problems (Werner & Smith, 1992). For children with ADHD that might be on medication, EasyChild can bridge the gorge and combine the benefits of behavior modification with their prescriptive therapy, which is proven to increase their chance for success.

Ignore The Emotional Response and That Behavior Will Fade Away

Behavior rewarded will occur more frequently, but you can't merely strengthen new behaviors with a smile and hope the annoying ones go away. It's not that simple.

Two behaviors cannot exist at the same time; they change back and forth until the new behavior dominates. If you want to effectively eliminate unacceptable behavior to make your life easier and your child more responsible, then you must purposefully learn how to ignore the annoying behaviors. How do parents ignore loathsome behaviors? The focus must be on the contract which creates objectivity. EasyChild creates this structure. Emotion and frustration is arrested because parent and child have a common tangible focus. Frustration is caused by being out of control and EasyChild creates parental control.

Actions Speak Louder Than Words

Behavior is affected by action, not words. Regardless of how you feel about it, these laws of behavior exist everyday to determine what you do how often you do it or can't do it.

Education as a Science

The application of Operant Conditioning in education is simple and direct. "Teaching is the arrangement of contingencies of reinforcement under which students learn" (Skinner, 1965). Children learn randomly and results are blatant. Our children should be taught directly.

EasyChild shows parents how to create the structure and then implement it.

In the *Technology of Teaching* (1968), Skinner addresses shaping as a foundation to instruction in educational. Operant Conditioning learning has been adopted in developing direct instructional reading programs. These models shape the behavior using programmed feedback. The scope and sequence is developed around an instructional technique of model, lead, practice, and test. Carnie and Sibert describe the process of reading in their book, *Direct Instruction Reading* (1979). Their approach to reading philosophy and programs are based on experimental research of a federally funded ten year study called *Project Follow Through*, which evaluated several learning approaches to reading. The ten year study compared Operant Conditioning learning to a Piaget Language approach (Carnie & Sibert, 1979). Only students in a direct instruction approach performed basic skills, cognitive and affective measures.

Prospects are good for success when programs have a foundation in learning principles. For instance, California chooses comprehensive reading programs that do not support research. Sacramento refuses to adopt any programs based on Operant Conditioning learning and purges all material influenced by this research. There are current legal battles between publishing companies whose programs were developed in accordance with the finding of the *Project Follow Through*. California will not acknowledge the efficacy for these programs and perhaps a result, California children have some of the lowest reading scores in the nation.

Learning by Accident and Learning on Purpose

How children learn will determine their success. There are two ways to learn: learning by accident and learning on purpose. *Learning on purpose* is the most effective. *Learning by accident* is groping and hoping for a satisfactory outcome. Learning by accident eventually gets the job done, but it takes too long and could even be dangerous. Take the story of a child that places a hand on a hot surface because no one has told him an object was hot. How much precious time, and the consequences, do you want to spend groping and learning by accident?

There is another way to approach learning on purpose, and that is through Operant Conditioning. It gets the job done, gets it done faster, gets you moving in the right direction and gets you to your destination.

Everyone eventually arrives at the learning destination, but there is a right way and a long way. Which way do you choose? If you don't like what you're doing or where you are, then change it. The problem with most people is they spend their entire lives learning how *not* to do something. That certainly is one way of learning, but it takes too long and then they spend their remaining years in regret.

Learning can be on purpose or by accident. It's a choice. How should your children spend their time? As I said before, the clocks are ticking. There are no time outs (Villars, 1968).

Pike Syndrome

What's the Pike Syndrome? Scientists did an experiment where they took a pike and put him into a large fish tank with an ample supply of minnows. Whenever the pike became hungry, he merely had to open his mouth and snap up a minnow. Then the scientists put a glass jar over the pike. They wanted to determine how long the pike would continue to hit the glass jar striking out after minnows before he became discouraged. For quite a while the pike would strike out after the minnows and crash into the jar. This behavior continued for quite some time until the pike gradually did it less and less. When the pike finally stopped, the scientists removed the jar. The pike sank to the bottom of the tank and just laid there. Once again with the jar removed, the minnows started swimming freely around the pike, even brushing up against his mouth. Not once did the pike strike out. The scientists' intention was to teach the pike the rules of their game – when the jar is down, relax; when the jar is removed, feast. But the pike just lay on the bottom of the tank and literally starved to death. Minnows everywhere for the asking, and the pike just starved to death.

So many children give up before they really even get started just because they don't know how to play the game. They become a pike starving to death with minnows everywhere.

Our children were born for success and happiness, not discouragement. If our children want to win, then they will have to know how to play the game. Keep it simple and operate the way life is supposed to operate.

Telltale signs of uninspired children: tired, moody, critical, unhappy, poor grades, can't find anything to do, dabbling with drugs, misbehaving at school, being rude, cursing, talking back,

destructive, no respect for the personal belongings of others. Yet these uninspired kids were born to win. How do you make all uninspired, unhappy kids inspired and happy? You teach them that *through change they can get what they want*.

Whenever I meet parents who report that their children continually whine and pout, I tell them that the children have a wining attitude. That always shocks them. If kids haven't learned how to effectively communicate their needs, whining is a wining attitude. Taking responsible action must be learned because nobody out in the real world is going to just feed them what they need and want. Parents may supply their needs while the kids are learning, but the relationship cannot continue. Kids are destined to fend for themselves, and growing up without having learned how to achieve through responsible action can be a very hopeless and desperate situation – a situation that could even motivate kids to escape (Skinner, 1971).

Children escaping their responsibility have become a national disaster that touches all our lives. They want that quick fix to wash all those blues away. From rural farm towns to major cities, kids are turning to drugs and alcohol, running away from home, and committing suicide at an alarming rate. The story of a troubled child doesn't merit the evening news anymore, its neighborhood gossip.

Learning how the game operates isn't easy but it is an easier alternative to some of the escape routes our children are choosing today. It is a learned behavior, not an inborn privilege. Raising kids for success is teaching children how to become responsible for their actions. It's not an option, it's mandatory.

Disruptive Home Behaviors

All major child raising problems have minor beginnings. It's like never doing any minor repairs on your home. The minor problems can be overlooked until your house begins to fall down – major problem. Not fixing a leaky pipe until it rots the wall – major problem. Listening to your kids whine just a little each day about something, or watching them not always doing their best job, or some days not getting their work done at all, until one day all these minor behaviors explode into outright refusal to cooperate – major problem. The difference between their behaviors and what they need or want begin to grow apart (Thomas, Becker, & Armstrong, 1968).

How do kids become uninspired and unhappy? Most people wait for major problems to happen before they're willing to change. Children with problems never have the time to get what they want because they always have problems. After a while they quit trying. They just shrink their wants to match what they're getting. They gradually become unhappy and uninspired. Kids become uninspired and unhappy not because they don't have what they want, but because they don't know how to get from where they are to what they want (Skinner, 1971).

Life is merely a game. It's not a question of whether you want to play; it's a question of *do you want to win*. The problem is that most people know what they want to win but they don't know how to play the game to get there. Their ignorance forces them to live in daily discouragement. Once they're discouraged, bingo, the Pike Syndrome catches another fish before they even start the game.

Summary

Kids can achieve to almost any level they desire, especially in our time in history. The opportunities are exciting. We have the highest standard of living the world has ever seen. For the first time in the history of mankind, we don't have to work twelve hours a day just to put food on the table; in fact, we have twice as much leisure time as we do working time. We have mobility, health, the longest life spans, and every opportunity to achieve to any level or direction of success we choose. The possibilities are endless. Why is it then that so often so many children barely reach beyond the basics? They don't even know how to achieve their daily needs, let alone how to be happy? Why are some people so successful and others not?

These questions haunt parents today and yet, for thousands of years, all over the world, parents have been raising millions of happy, decent children. The mere fact that we've come as far out of the caves as we have and into the skyscrapers is an indication that the process has been successful. But for some reason, recently, people have lost their direction and the ability to play the game of life successfully. Acquiring the ability to play the game isn't as clear as it has been in the past. Raising kids in the past could very well have been easier, and not because the lifestyle was simpler. People do long for the good old days but most couldn't survive because they couldn't get along without Kleenex or air conditioning. The past was not simpler, it was just different. Around the 1900's over ninety percent of the population lived on farms, now over ninety percent live in the cities.

The modern city dweller has almost forgotten his dependence on agricultural cycles. We give most of our attention to irregular business cycles which affects our scale of living much more than the cycles of the seasons which govern agriculture.

Being closer to an agrarian lifestyle teaches us more directly the way life is supposed to operate. It taught responsibility, such as to livestock, and accountability, such as to planting and harvesting. There is little room for debate on how farm life works. If you plant you will reap – if you don't, you won't. These are the only options for the farmer; it's a law of success.

Although EasyChild is a system designed to encourage children to take control of their lives, there have been educators, psychologists, and therapists who are unwilling to adopt these theories on raising kids, fearing EasyChild could take away a child's freedom. They are unwilling to give up beliefs in autonomy, freedom to choose, to deliberate, to decide, freedom to act, to be given credit for what they have done, the importance of feelings, and that their behavior and accomplishments are somewhat their own and come from their own inner motivation to achieve (Skinner, 1971, p.96).

Skinner calls this kind of thinking Prescientific. He terms his ideas Scientific because they are based on an unemotional look at human behavior (Skinner, 1971, p.10). He purports the idea that our behavior is "determined by the genetic pool and by our environmental conditioning" (Skinner, 1971, p.19). Our behaviors are reinforced, or not, for the good of the whole, not for the good of the individual (Skinner, 1971, p.123). I know these are not easy ideas to adopt in a world that uses a system of "Permissiveness" for raising kids. A system that begs for less structure not more. But "Permissiveness is not a policy, it is the abandonment of policy, and its apparent advantages are illusory" (Skinner, 1971, p.73). To

refuse to control is to leave control, not to the person himself, but to other parts of the social and non social environments (Skinner, 1971, p.79).

EasyChild creates the structure for parents to raise their kids in a peaceful family setting. EasyChild creates for children a way to regain their control and dignity, and a tool for their parents to regain control of the castle. It is a system based on research and common sense.

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