

Negotiation strategies to support misbehaving kindergarten children: The “Deal” Strategy

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Purpose

To negotiate behavioural changes with children, while developing an attitude of personal accountability for progressing the kindergarten program.

Methods

Child is asked about their favourite fruit, the name of which is then used as a code for a deal on a behavioural change. The child becomes excited to share what their favourite fruit is, e.g. banana. When this child misbehaves, a negotiation process commences that entails asking them to demonstrate an improved behaviour. The agreement will then be known as the “Deal Banana”. Henceforth, calling out “Deal Banana” prompts the child to modify the behaviour specified in the “Deal Banana” agreement.

Each child picked their favourite fruit to be the code used for negotiating a deal of behavioural modification. Each deal is linked to a specific behavioural change by a specific child, e.g. “Deal watermelon” is “child X not to throw rocks at others”. Other examples of behavioural changes included: not deliberately breaking another child’s work, using words such as “please”/“thank you”, and not hitting other children.

Child	Deal name	Behavioural change
K	Kiwifruit	No throwing of rocks
H	Strawberries	No kicking
F	Orange	No crying but using words
E	Strawberries	No snatching of anything
A	Pineapple	No running in indoor area
B	Grapes	No throwing cardboard
D	Coconut	No hitting peers with toys
L	Peach	No breaking of peers’ work
P	Nectarine	No spitting

A table showing examples of the deals negotiated with some children.

Results

In total, 20 out of 50 children engaged in the strategy. Children were excited & started negotiating own deals with peers; holding each other accountable for actions & behaviours, by reminding each other of the deals they negotiated.

Example 1 A new kinder child was always unsettled when his parents dropped him off in the morning. Using this strategy with him led to negotiating “Deal Apple”, which meant “No crying in the morning and to have a happy face”. The strategy worked well; when “Deal Apple” was called out to him, he would smile and say his good byes to his mum in the morning. The parents confirmed the success of the strategy and emailed to thank the author.



Example 2 A child didn’t want to eat at the centre. A negotiation process commenced with him & “Deal Mandarin” reached, translating into “listening to parents & teachers when it’s meal time”. Because the “deal” was his choice, he held himself accountable and started to eat at the centre slowly, until his eating habits became comparable to other children’s. He was proud of himself; believed the author was one of his best friends, probably attributable to the experience of having some power in deciding on a deal and for friendly negotiations.

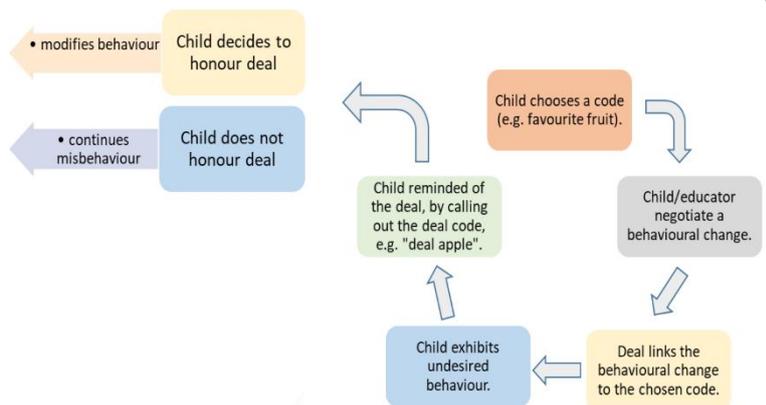


Discussion

The “Deal” strategy supports Outcome 2 of the Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF)¹, as children develop an understanding of the reciprocal rights and responsibilities necessary for active participation. Moreover, they become more socially and emotionally competent, thus aligning with Outcome 3 of the EYLF, and preparing them for more challenging schooling encounters.

This strategy could be a modified example of Pavlov’s classical conditioning². The learning process here involves some cognitive component and social negotiation where the child is given some power and the ability to choose. First, they choose their code (fruit name), then choose to enter the behavioural modification agreement (i.e. deal), and then decide to honour that agreement when prompted by the deal call out. The process involves an elaborate set up, where several points of exit are available to the child to end the agreement. Yet, it has been observed that most children decide to honour the “deal” and continue to demonstrate the modified behaviour agreed on. They quickly develop a sense of ownership of the decision and become accountable for the deal they formed.

The social context in which “deals” are formed may have contributed to the success of the strategy. This is because children start to become aware of each other’s deals, share stories about how they negotiated their behavioural changes, and their favourite fruits. They then start encouraging each other to adhere to their behavioural changes, mostly in a funny manner. They seem to have fun holding each other accountable by calling out the deals they formed.



Conclusion

This “deal” strategy proved to be successful in managing children’s behaviours, while involving them in a negotiating process. Children felt they were given the choice to decide, and they decided to honour their deals and adhere to the negotiated behavioural plan.

Furthermore, the strategy fostered a sense of collaboration and teamwork among the children, as they became more autonomous in collectively honouring the deals they negotiated, thus facilitating their daily routine and curricular activities.

References

1. Department of Education & Training (2009). *Belonging, Being & Becoming: The Early Years Learning Framework for Australia*. ACT: Commonwealth of Australia.
2. Pavlov, I. P., & Anrep, G. V. (2003). *Conditioned reflexes*. Courier Corporation.