

THE PRACTICE ACADEMY

One of the most successful techniques to use with the ADHD and/or other defiant child is to help them practice the skills and procedures that they fail to use. We refer to these practices as “Practice Academies.” The purpose of an “academy” is to practice a desired behavior so that the child really learns it. Having the child learn to implement a procedure/skill by repeatedly practicing it, becomes both a consequence and an ordeal, but most of all a skill builder. Here is how to do a Practice Academy:

1. Name the Practice Academy

When a child misbehaves or fails to engage in a desired behavior, calmly say to them what their behavior is telling you about what they need, NOT what you are going to do. Figure out what behavior you WANT and start your sentence with, “Your behavior is telling me you need a (desired behavior) Practice Academy.”

e.g. (said with sadness or unemotionally) “uh oh! Your behavior is telling me that you need a ‘cleaning your room practice academy.’”

Remember: **It is HOW you say it.** Use sadness in your voice, or at least be calm. This is 9/10 of the battle, otherwise it can turn into a struggle between you and the child.)

2. Pick a time

Select a time when it will be convenient for YOU to supervise them. They need to practice until they have clearly mastered the procedure/skill **and** are bored. The best time to get their attention and make the learning more effective is during a time when the child would rather be doing a favorite activity: watching TV, playing with a friend,... For teachers the best time may be during recess, lunchtime or after school. Determine which time you think will have the most impact on the child.

3. Practice, Practice, Practice

Practice repeatedly (5-8 times or more) until they have clearly mastered the procedure/skill **and** are bored. Having them practice until they are bored helps them learn the skill better since they are learning to handle their frustration and complete a task at the same time.

Remember, practice doesn’t make perfect. Perfect practice makes perfect. So have your child practice the task perfectly many times, and with a good attitude.

Here is how it might look: Your child is constantly late for school because they are not getting up and getting ready on school mornings.

1. You respond, “Uh oh! What your behavior is telling me is that you need a “getting up and ready for school practice academy. Don’t worry about it, I have time to let you practice it this afternoon after school.”
2. After school, instead of TV, play,..., instruct them that it is time to do their academy. (The more favored the activity they want to do, the greater the impact of the Practice Academy.)
3. Have your child get into their pajamas, turn out the light and lie in bed. After 30 seconds, you announce that it is time for them to get up for school. With a good attitude, he/she will get up, get dressed, brush their teeth, come downstairs, pretend to eat cereal, get backpack on and tell you they are ready to go. You must watch, monitor, the entire process.
4. Next tell them they did a good job and to undo it and get back in bed. The whole process is reversed back to their being in bed in their pajamas. You wait 30 seconds and again announce it is time to get up and ready for school. Repeat until it is completed perfectly and with a good attitude. Do not accept dragging their feet, groaning and moaning,...these do NOT qualify as a good attitude.
5. Be patient. Do not expect children to have mastered the desired behavior or skill after one “academy.” A Practice Academy may need to be repeated several times over several days, and again at various times throughout the year. Only practice when they show the problem behavior. Permanent behavior change will occur gradually, usually not quickly.