

Wife Therapy

C.A. Childress, Psy.D. (2007)

A husband brings his wife to therapy because she needs treatment. Her symptoms are:

- she often argues with him
- she often loses her temper with him
- she often actively defies or refuses to comply with the husband's requests and rules
- she often blames her husband for her own misbehavior (i.e., her noncompliance and anger in response to her husband's commands and rules)
- she is often angry and resentful of her husband
- and she is often vindictive with her husband

His wife is clearly oppositional and defiant with her husband, so the therapist begins wife therapy with her. Without discussing with the wife her perceptions of this situation, the therapist prescribes the following treatment plan:

- The cause of the wife's oppositional and defiant behavior is that she is seeking her husband's attention through her misbehavior (i.e., her oppositional and defiant behavior). The therapist explains to the husband that his negative attention of yelling and angry-arguing with his wife is actually reinforcing to her, and that she is willing to endure his anger and yelling, even his punishments of taking away from her things that she values, simply to get his negative attention
- So the overall treatment plan is for the husband to provide his wife with positive attention when she is obedient with his commands and is behaving appropriately (in order to teach her how she should behave in order to get his attention), and to withdraw his attention from her when she is argumentative and non-compliant with his commands and rules.
- So the husband is instructed to administer the following treatment plan:
 - "Catch her being good" – when his wife is engaging in appropriate behavior, such as cooking a meal or doing what her husband tells her to do (i.e., following directions), then her husband is to provide her with specific praise for this behavior (i.e., "Nice job making dinner. I like it when you make dinner").
 - Remove attention from misbehavior – Ignoring
 - If his wife becomes argumentative with her husband's commands, or becomes attention-seeking at inappropriate times (such as when her husband is engaged in a conversation with someone else), her husband is to simply ignore her attention-seeking behavior.
 - Remove attention from misbehavior – Time Out from Reinforcement
 - When his wife becomes non-compliant, her husband is to place her in a chair in the corner for one minute per year of her age, so if his wife is 30 years old, she would spend 30 minutes in the chair.
 - If his wife refuses to walk to the chair, her husband is to physically escort her to the chair.
 - If his wife resists being escorted, her husband may need to physically drag her to the chair.
 - If his wife leaves the chair before her designated time is completed, her husband is to give her one warning that if she leaves the chair again he will beat her. If she leaves the chair after this, her husband is to strike her twice (and only twice!) and return her to the chair. He is to repeat this beating up to three times if necessary. If his wife continues to be non-compliant after

the three beatings, her husband is to lock her in her room for the designated time period.

- Her husband is directed not to speak with her about any issues while this process is going on. He is to ignore her “minor disruptive behavior,” such as her efforts to engage him in dialogue about the issues or if she begins to cry and show other signs of emotional distress. The therapist instructs the husband that if he responds to his wife’s emotional distress then this will just reinforce her for this way of getting his attention.
- When she has completed the designated time in the chair, her husband is to give her the initial command again, which she is to complete. If his wife continues to be non-compliant, her husband is to repeat this process.
- The husband is also instructed that when he initially begins this process with his wife, his wife’s behavior may become worse, but he is told to ignore any protests, arguments, and crying by his wife and eventually, if he is consistent, she will learn to comply with his commands and will be cured of her disorder.
- The husband is also instructed by the therapist in the use of good commands:
 - Good commands to his wife should be limited to one-step until his wife has demonstrated the ability to follow multi-step commands.
 - Good commands to his wife should be stated in a neutral tone of voice.
 - Good commands to his wife should be specific and stated in the positive as to what behavior he wants his wife to do instead of telling his wife what not to do, such as “I want you to wash the dishes now” versus “Stop watching so much TV.”
 - Good commands to his wife should be phrased as statements as opposed to phrased as questions, such as “I want you to clean the house now” versus “Do you want to clean the house now?”
 - In giving commands to his wife, the husband should allow his wife 5 seconds to comply before warning her that she will be punished if she doesn’t comply with his command. She should then comply within 5 seconds or the husband should begin the time-out from reinforcement process.
- Rewarding good behavior
 - The husband is also instructed by the therapist in how to develop a point-system for his wife. They identify target behaviors, such as cleaning the house, making meals, following the husband’s directions, etc., and they assign points to each of these behaviors. If his wife completes the target behavior then she earns the designated points which she can redeem at the end of the day for a reward, such as a bubble bath. If she earns enough points during the week, she will earn additional rewards, such as a small shopping trip, or a special coffee drink at Starbucks.

Questions: As a psychotherapist presented with this initial complaint by the husband:

1. Would this be your treatment plan?
2. What is the problem with this treatment approach?
3. Is this treatment plan consistent with the wife’s healthy psychological development?
4. Is the wife’s healthy psychological development even a consideration in this treatment plan?
5. What would you do differently? child
6. Why do we do “marital therapy” with adults but ~~wife~~ “therapy” with children?

Wife Therapy Translations

C.A. Childress, Psy.D. (2007)

1. Childress alternative translation of Barkley:

One of the major causes of noncompliance [**in wives**] is ineffective **wife** management methods being employed by **husbands**. As a result, noncompliance by **wives** becomes a very effective method for escaping or avoiding unpleasant, boring, or effortful tasks and on some occasions even getting rewards for doing so (e.g., **shoes** for the tantrum in the store)

2. Childress alternative translation of Barkley:

It becomes clear that some **wives** having certain temperamental and cognitive characteristics are more prone to emit coercive-aggressive behavior and acquire noncompliance than are other **wives** (p. 21; emphasis added).

3. Childress alternative translation of Barkley:

Immature, inexperienced, impulsive, inattentive, or temperamental **husbands** may display inconsistent management strategies with a deviant wife (p. 21; emphasis added).

4. Childress alternative translation of Webster-Stratton:

Wives' behavior is maintained by the attention it receives. Even negative **husband** attention such as nagging, yelling and scolding can be rewarding to **wives**. (p. 64)

5. Childress alternative translation of Webster-Stratton:

If the ignoring is consistently maintained, **wives** will eventually stop what they are doing (p.64)

Original Quotes

From: Barkley, R.A. (1987). *Defiant Children: A Clinician's Manual for Parent Training*. New York: The Guilford Press

1. Barkley original quote

One of the major causes of noncompliance is ineffective child management methods being employed by parents. As a result, noncompliance by children becomes a very effective method for escaping or avoiding unpleasant, boring, or effortful tasks and on some occasions even getting rewards for doing so (e.g., candy for the tantrum in the store) (p. 21).

2. Barkley original quote:

It becomes clear that some children having certain temperamental and cognitive characteristics are more prone to emit coercive-aggressive behavior and acquire noncompliance than are other children (p. 21).

3. Barkley original quote:

Immature, inexperienced, impulsive, inattentive, or temperamental parents may display inconsistent management strategies with a deviant child (p. 21).

From: Webster-Stratton, C. (1992). *The Incredible Years: A Trouble Shooting Guide for Parents of Children Aged 3-8*. Toronto, Ontario; Umbrella Press

4. Webster Stratton original quote:

Children's behavior is maintained by the attention it receives. Even negative parental attention such as nagging, yelling and scolding can be rewarding to children. (p. 64)

5. Webster Stratton original quote:

If the ignoring is consistently maintained, children will eventually stop what they are doing (p.64)

Guidelines for Child Suppression

Quotes from Behaviorism

- In many cases when the time out procedure is implemented, children may throw **temper tantrums lasting as long as an hour or more**. During these tantrums, the parents may feel as if they should capitulate in order to terminate this **unpleasant behavior**. Although this parental response would certainly be effective at stopping such children from crying or becoming disruptive, it would merely serve to reinforce the future occurrence of such behavior (p. 112; emphasis added).¹

Enforcing Time Out

- When the child first leaves the chair without permission, the parent is to provide a warning. This warning is provided only once, on the first occasion the child leaves the chair and is never repeated during subsequent uses of time out. The parent returns the child to the chair and states, "If you get out of that chair again, I am going to spank you!" This is said quite loudly as the parent points a finger at the child, again adopting a firm stance and posture. **While saying the word "spank," the parents should clap their hands loudly in front of the child for dramatic effect**. Thereafter, should the child ever leave the chair again without permission, the parent sits in the chair, places the child over a knee, and **delivers two (and only two!) swift spanks** with an open hand to the child's buttocks (p. 113-114; emphasis added).¹
- Once the basic TO [time-out] procedure has been described to the parent, the parent is then instructed what to do if the child decides to leave TO while it is still in force. The child should be immediately returned to the chair. The first time this ever occurs, the parent states, "If you get off the chair again, I will spank you." This warning is only presented once; that is, the first time the child ever leaves the chair. It is not repeated in subsequent TO periods. If the child gets off the chair again, the parent returns the child to the TO area. She or he then **administers two (and only two) spanks on the child's bottom with an open hand**. The parent is never to use any other object. The child is placed back on the chair, and the parent says, "If you get off the chair again, I will spank you again." If the child again leaves the chair, the parent **repeats the procedure**. (p. 79-80; emphasis added).²
- We generally have placed **a limit of no more than three occasions of spanking occurring in a therapy session**. If three occasions of spanking have been administered in a session, the parent and therapist can then resort to another backup procedure (e.g., the parent can leave the room or can restrain the child in the TO chair). (p.80; emphasis added)³
- For a younger child who gets off a Timeout chair, there should be one warning: If you get off the chair again, you will go to the Timeout room. If the child comes out of the room, **it may be necessary to hold the door shut or use a lock for a short time** (p. 77; emphasis added).³

¹ From: Barkley, R.A. (1987). *Defiant Children: A Clinician's Manual for Parent Training*. New York: The Guilford Press
C.A. Childress comment: the statement that it would be counter-productive for parents to "capitulate" to the child in order to stop the "unpleasant behavior" is not only tremendously insensitive and uncompassionate to the child's clear emotional distress (i.e., tantruming for over an hour), but it is also not true. Engaging another human being in dialogue is not "capitulating" to them, engaging another human being in dialogue is respectful and teaches respect, and engaging another human being in dialogue fosters the development of socially acceptable and socially organized solutions to human conflict. Engaging another human being in dialogue is a good thing.

² From: Forehand, R.L. and McMahon, R.J. (1981). *Helping the noncompliant child: A clinician's guide to parent training*. New York: The Guilford Press. (p. 60-61). C.A. Childress comment: the phrase "the procedure" is a clinically pleasant euphemism for "the beating." C.A. Childress comment: three beatings in a "THERAPY" session? Beating a child is never an appropriate activity during a "therapy session." Not even once. Beating a child is not therapy.

³ From: Webster-Stratton, C. (1992). *The Incredible Years: A Trouble Shooting Guide for Parents of Children Aged 3-8*. Toronto, Ontario; Umbrella Press. C.A. Childress comment: note that Webster-Stratton says "for a short time" while Barkley says "temper tantrums lasting as long as an hour or more." Locking a dyscontrolled child in a room, unsupervised, for any period of time would seemingly represent a highly problematic "therapeutic" approach to conflict resolution.