

Maureen Michaud, M.Ed., BCBA, "Building Independence and Success" (April 13, 2015): Ms. Michaud noted that although board certified behavior analysts (BCBAs) may work in many different practice areas, their goal is the same: to ensure that everyone learns skills that lead to being independent, happy, and successful. Behavior analysts in a school setting seek to understand the purpose of a particular behavior by asking a number of questions:

- when/why is a behavior happening?
- when does a child do what is asked?
- when does a child do something else?
- why would a child do what is asked?

Asking these questions can help teachers and parents/guardians in devising approaches to reinforce and motivate behaviors that lead to learning, independence, happiness, and feeling successful. She said reinforcers must be personal "because if your child doesn't like it, it's probably not a reinforcer." It's also important to understand what motivates a child because reinforcers and motivation go hand-in-hand. She stressed that reinforcers should be frequent and attainable, otherwise they lose their motivating power. Examples of reinforcers include public praise or quiet praise, a smile or high-five, special toy/book/outing, choosing a special meal -- but again, whatever it is, it should be personal.

In applying this approach to homework, parents/guardians should ask themselves, "does my child know why they have to do homework?...is it important to them?" If it's not important, then you need to find reinforcers and motivators. She also suggested having a regular homework routine with a planned and posted schedule. Some children benefit from having a say in the homework routine. For example, the routine could be come home, have a snack, do math first, take a break, and then do reading, etc. Bigger tasks should be broken down into smaller, more manageable daily accomplishments. There should be a homework-friendly space that is quiet and comfortable with a stockpile of all necessary materials neatly organized and immediately available. When homework is completed, the area should be cleaned up and

made ready for the next day. She also said that "Grandma's Law" -- first you do X (e.g., math), then you can do Y (e.g., play X Box) -- can help kids who like to know what's happening next. Finally, parents/guardians can serve as role models by doing their own homework (e.g., pay bills, balance checkbook, read newspaper or book, write letters/lists) at the same time.

Parents/guardians should play a supporting role by providing guidance and resisting giving answers. Children also may benefit from visual lists that include morning, after school, and bedtime routine tasks. Other children may benefit from a parent/guardian-child homework contract that delineates rewards and consequences. Parents/guardians should talk to teachers if there are ongoing struggles.