



Bridges4Kids Review: 1-2-3 Magic

Includes: 1-2-3 Magic: Managing Difficult Behavior in Children 2-12, (video), More 1-2-3 Magic: Encouraging Good Behavior, Independence and Self-Esteem (video), and 1-2-3 Magic: effective Discipline for Children 2-12 (book)

Background: This review is based on a real-life trial of the 1-2-3 Magic program by Bridges4Kids staffer Jackie Igafo-Te'o. Three children were used in this trial: Child #1, male, age 9, ADHD; Child #2, male, age 8, Autism, ADHD, Impulse Control Disorder; Child #3, female, age 6. *Please note that the 1-2-3 Magic program does NOT claim to help children with Autism and must be modified for children with ADHD. I chose to use it with all three children by tailoring it for each child's needs.*

Motivation: Many challenging behaviors existed with these three children upon starting this program in late November 2002. The atmosphere in our home had become chaotic at times and my husband and I felt that it was time to "take back" the authority in our home.

It was my goal to do the following:

1. Manage the difficult behavior (stop behavior),
2. Replace difficult behavior with more appropriate behavior (start behavior),
3. Craft an effective discipline program, and
4. Create an environment conducive to the children's desire to cooperate.

The Children

Child #1: Male, Age 9, ADHD

Child #1 is a very intelligent, sensitive, loving and active child. He had started getting negative notes home from school each day for things such as blurting answers out in class, being rude to his peers, and being a general "know it all". At home we had experienced the same types of problems with the addition of aggression toward his siblings coupled with the need to argue about absolutely EVERYTHING. This child had always been "fast" in that he was climbing out of his crib at the age of 9 months – he was always into something.

For this particular child I wanted to accomplish the following: stop the constant arguing and aggression at home and to start holding him accountable for his behavior at home AND at school – this meant keeping a notebook for teacher’s comments in his backpack for daily communication and talking to the doctor and getting his recommendation for medication (if necessary). At the start of this program the child was not on any medication or behavior program.

Child #2: Male, Age 8, Autism, ADHD, Impulse Control Disorder

Child #2 is a very creative child who is also fun-loving and extremely active. I did not enter into this program with high hopes of controlling “stop behaviors” or even with hopes of encouraging “start behaviors”. My main reason for entering into this with this child was to create equality in our household – each child would be accountable for SOMETHING and progress would be tracked on a chart. I’ll get into that later but I knew that I would have to lower the bar based on his ability to stay on task and to follow directions. This would require a significant amount of extra effort on my part.

I decided that if I was going to do this with him then I would need to think about what I would like for him to accomplish: gain self-esteem by seeing visuals of his “good” deeds (i.e. stickers each day for activities that we would specify for each child) and for him to conceptualize the idea of a reward system. In order for you to understand why I speak in a more negative tone regarding this child’s participation in the program, you need to understand this child’s level of functioning. His level of aggression is off the charts. In the year 2000 he broke 8 windows and managed to color every wall in our home (even the ceilings). In the year 2001 he started kicking holes in the walls – every wall has gaping holes (some going clean through into the other room!) – he went outside through the windows constantly to the point that we’ve had to bar every window and bolt every door. He was hospitalized for one week in order for professionals to try to figure out a game plan for controlling his behavior.

Child #3: Female, Age 6

Child #3 is a typically developing child. She loves to help out around the house and has shown an interest in trying to take care of herself (dressing, brushing hair, cleanliness, etc.). While she has not been diagnosed with any particular disorder or “special need”, she displays a strong tendency to argue, throw things, whine a lot, hit people, scream and just plain-old “not listen”.

The things that I would like to work on with her are: listening skills and the concept of rewards and punishment.

The Program

What Does It Mean?

1-2-3 Magic is very simple: you cut out the arguing and explaining that many adults catch themselves doing. It means exactly what it says – 1-2-3 – you give them one warning when they are doing something undesirable then you start counting. If you get to three then the consequence comes into play. For instance, if Child #3 is stomping through the house while whining, I would say something like “Child #3, if you would like to be heard then you need to speak in a normal voice”. If she continues, I would simply say “That’s One!”

She (of course) always continues and I say “That’s Two!” If the child stops then GOOD! If not, you say (calmly even if you are gritting your teeth and fighting back the pages of monologue) “That’s Three!” “Now, Child #3, go to your room for 5 minutes.” That’s it. Do not explain yourself – do not give hugs and sympathy. That’s the gist of the program. For more intense detail please GET THE BOOK AND VIDEOS!!! You won’t be sorry. If you can count to three and zip your lips then you’ve won half of the battle!

Decisions

The first thing that you need to do (after reading/watching the program) is to make up your mind to be firm. For me, that was a challenge. I tend to be wishy-washy with my kids at times. They know that if they catch me in a busy moment that they can basically get anything or do anything that they want – NOT GOOD. I decided that I was sick of hearing myself talk (wow – did I just say that?) It would be better for everyone in my life if I would stop explaining myself. After all, I must’ve had my children so confused at times that they didn’t know which end was up! Be firm. Warn the child. Count to three. I can do this....

The First Day and “The System”

Well, I picked a wonderful day to begin the program. We were traveling back from my parent’s house in the Mid-west after Thanksgiving (2002). There we were packed into my car for the next 12 hours – just me and 3 children. I think I was having a panic attack before I even left the driveway (just kidding). I started by explaining to the children that I had decided that we were going to make some changes in our lives. I was tired of yelling and even more tired of hearing children yell and fight. I got the negativity out of the way early and I haven’t said that to them since. From that point it was going to be different. Since I couldn’t ground them to their rooms in the car that day I had decided to use a deduction system from their allowance. Each child was given a base allowance of \$2.50 per week. Each infraction would in turn cause a deduction to be taken from their base allowance. The deduction depended upon the infraction. For instance, fighting and whining or arguing would be a \$.05 deduction. Hitting a sibling would be a \$.25 deduction. To make a long story short, when we arrived at home that day, Child #1 had only lost \$.25, Child #2 had lost nothing, and Child #3 was bordering owing me money! At that point I knew that money was going to be a good form of leverage for Child #1 and was not going to have much impact on Child #3. Child #2 automatically calmed down when the other two children were in good form. It was like “MAGIC”. We made it home in one piece and we were on our way to a new, more loving household.

The Program: Past and Present

The next day, we started following the program religiously at home. Child #1 seldom was counted past two. Child #2 was being included and I saw more progress than I’d originally thought that I would see. I had underestimated his ability to conform to a structured reward and punishment system. Child #3 was truly a challenge and spent many, many little stints of time in her room. I decided to give it a week before I started to incorporate “Start Behavior”. We made it through the first week with pretty favorable results – no one wanted to be in time out and they KNEW that I was going to put them there even if it meant for me to stop working, doing the dishes, sleeping, or whatever.

At the start of week two, I created a chart (see page 4) that we’ve been using ever since (for nearly 8 weeks now). The chart below is one that is used for Child #1. He needs help remembering things and has since been started on a regimen of Adderall XR to help with

some of the issues related to ADHD. He now remembers his homework, cleans his room, and even waters the cats! I am so very proud and impressed with his effort. I knew that he could do it! Child #2 has a chart with some of the same basics like “Brush Teeth” but we’ve also incorporated tasks like “pick up toys” and “take a bath”. Some behaviors that would seem to be expected for most kids but for him they are much more desirable now because he understands that there is a reward coming. He can see his progress and know that he will be able to buy something with his earnings. He amazes me – he always has. Child #3 is still quite a challenge. We have not experienced a whole lot of success with her. She is very obstinate and still ignores us (my husband is now “on board” with the program to help me). She still hits no matter what the consequences are.

Conclusion

I have decided that this program was definitely worth our effort and dedication. Child #1 and Child #2 are proof that it is magic when you set your mind to follow Dr. Phelan’s words. Child #3 is just going to take a little more effort. We have decided to sit down and re-view the videos and re-read the book. We are going to make this work. Dr. Phelan gives options and suggestions for children just like her. I am confident that we can see the same success with her as we have seen from our other two children.

Review

Dr. Phelan’s series “1-2-3 Magic” and “More 1-2-3 Magic” are well worth the price, the effort and the time involved in making it all happen. The only thing that I would change would be that I might have started the program years ago. I found the program to be easy to understand and even easier to follow. The program includes real-life scenarios and even some comic relief for those of who really need to laugh. If you’ve been considering any type of behavior modification program, I would highly recommend that you pick up a copy of his video 1-2-3 Magic: Managing Difficult Behavior in Children 2-12 to test the waters. The only ways that you can go wrong with this program are either a) to be unwilling to follow his simple instruction or b) to not purchase the program at all.

Good luck to anyone looking for something better. There is help out there.

Jackie D. Igafo-Te’o
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SAMPLE ACTIVITY CHART – “START” BEHAVIOR

Name _____

Weekly Activity Chart

Week Ending _____

	Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
Brush Teeth (a.m.)							
Make Bed							
Clean Up Room							
Clean and Refill Cat Water Dish							
Bring Home Homework & Homework Folder							
Do Homework							
Help With Dinner Clean-up							
Brush Teeth (p.m.)							
Prepare belongings for next day (backpack, coat, clothing)							

Timeouts (date/reason/amount)		

Allowance Losses/Gains (date/action/amount)		

Basic Info

Base = 2.50
 Max = 5.00

Each cell represents .05 toward the max.