

# Ep #79 Learning new behavior through continued practice

This is episode 79. Let's begin.

Smarter Parenting welcomes you to our podcast series, The Parenting Coach for ADHD. Here to heal and elevate lives is your Parenting Coach, Siopé Kinikini.

Hello, my friends. It's me, Siopé from The ADHD Smarter Parenting Podcast. How are you? I hope you're doing great.

There is so much going on in the world today. I personally am excited to talk about this next step of Role-playing because of everything that is happening in the world I have been able to communicate with different parents from around the country who are now at home with their children all day. And so we are working through some behavioral interventions that they can use in guiding their children along and coping with the difficulties that are happening. I actually have tailored this specific podcast to answer a question about Role-playing. And what we are going to be talking about during this podcast is how to make Role-play work more effectively with your children. Now we do something called cued practice, which is something that I will discuss during this podcast.

[Role-playing obviously is a big part of what we do, so I'm going to go over Role-playing.](#) We're going to talk about cued practices. What they are. Why they are super important for you to implement when you're working with your children and then the benefits of that. That's what we're going to cover in this podcast.

Now you have probably heard me talk about Role-playing as an integral part of the parenting skills that you find on Smarter Parenting. The reality is that is where your children learn things that move from the ideas and concept stage to reality. Role-play is the gateway from abstract to reality. And so when you're thinking about implementing Role-play, think of it that way. You can talk about a lot of different things to your child and yet comprehension wise, they could be interpreting everything completely differently than the way that you intend.

[That's why Role-playing is so essential in guiding your children along this road to better behavior.](#) When your child can actually do and see and experience, and there is an emphasis on the idea of being able to experience, what is expected of them, they will do a lot better and they will comply to the things that they need to do.

That's what I want to be sure that you understand. [Role-playing is absolutely essential and you want to establish Role-playing as part of your intervention techniques.](#) The tools that you are

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going to use to guide your children along. But if you think of it as, okay, I'm going to teach my child how to behave correctly. I'm going to teach my child what they need to do in this situation. I'm going to teach my child what my expectations are. Teaching your child and telling them and talking to them about it is only one part of it. The most important part of it is to Role-play, which is like I mentioned before, opening a door and bringing them into the reality of what that is. What it means. What it looks like. What it feels like.

There is an analogy to this that I've heard before where somebody asked another person to describe the flavor of salt. And if you think about it, we all know what salt tastes like, but to describe it I mean the words that we use to describe it like it's salty, it has this tart maybe, bitter, I don't know. It's a difficult thing to describe. Think of your child trying to understand concepts that you are explaining to them and they are like, "Okay, I hear what you're saying but I don't understand what you mean. I don't understand what that means or what that looks like or what that feels like or how to relate that to my experience at all."

So that is why we implement Role-playing. Role-playing is the way. It is opening the door for your children to really grasp the reality of what your expectations are. That's why you will find Role-playing in every skill that we do. I mean, the skills themselves are structured in a way that Role-playing is an essential piece of learning how to adjust and re-adjust behavior. All right. So super, super important to Role-play. Very, very important to Role-play.

I'm going to go over the [steps of Role-playing](#) because I think it's important to review. For those who may be listening to this for the first time, or those who have listened for a long time, review is always a good thing or going over it is always a good thing so you know exactly what it is. There are six steps to Role-playing.

The first step is to practice at a neutral and a calm time. The second step is to show your child how to do it correctly. That's the behavior that you want them to do. Step three is have your child practice at least three times. Step four is to be flexible during the Role-play. [Step five is to make it playful or make it engaging](#). You want your child to be able to engage with Role-playing. And then step six is to keep practicing.

Now I'm going to share an experience that I had with a parent who stated they were Role-playing quite a bit. And this parent Taylor, thank you, Taylor, for calling in and asking me about Role-playing. Taylor is working with an 11-year-old son who has ADHD and she stated that she was Role-playing with her son the behaviors that she expected and that she wanted from him. However, she did not feel like he was able to do the Role-plays when the situation arose.

She wanted her child to focus in on schoolwork, so they Role-played some techniques and some things that he could do in order to re-focus himself on the task at hand. One of which was standing up, raising his hands above his head. This is this kinesthetic or this body movement

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that would help him kind of re-center. So getting him to move around would be helpful for him is what she determined and so we implemented that.

She Role-played it with him and she practiced it at a neutral time; step one. She waited until he was calm and said, "Okay, we're going to practice what you need to do. If I see that you're distracted, then I'm going to give you a signal to get back on task," which for her was just to look at him and remind him.

And then step two, she showed him how to do it correctly. She showed him what she expected. Which was to stand up where he was at, raise his arms high above his head, take a deep breath, hold it and then let go and then sit back down and then re-focus. She did it first she showed him how to do it.

Now in step three, she had him do it three times. And she had him do it three times during this Role-play exercise that they were doing and he did well. In fact, she reported she only had to correct him on one or two things and then they practiced it until he could do it well on his own three times.

Now after that, she wanted to make it flexible, which is step four. So to be flexible is you want to be able to do it in multiple locations in the home. For example, he studies at the table in the kitchen, he also studies in his room and he studies sometimes in the family room depending on what's going on. So you're probably wondering why she has him study in different locations in the home, but she has other children and so it can be even more disruptive to have him specifically stay in one location, so she has these different designated areas for him to study in where it's less distracting in the home.

So to be flexible, step four for her, that they rehearsed it. They Role-played this in his room, in the family room, and in the kitchen, so he's able to do them three times in each location. And she did it more than that because he has ADHD. She wanted to be sure that this type of behavior was in his muscle memory and that he was able to recall it much easier. [So remember when we Role-play, it's like exercising a muscle. We're strengthening that muscle. We're strengthening his ability to respond in a positive way. So she was flexible; step four.](#)

[Now step five; make it playful.](#) She did make it playful for him in that they were able to practice using different things that would distract him during his studies. She would Role-play with him when acting as if she were a younger sibling coming in the room or hearing loud bangs upstairs. One of the things that she mentioned was that she would walk in the room and he'd be studying and she would just be disruptive, just be disruptive and then see if he could do it. Now during the Role-play, he was able to do it great. So she was playful in it.

She kind of allowed him to experience what she expected from him in various situations, and then they kept practicing. This is the area where I found out with Taylor that she needed to tweak to make some differences. And keep practicing, which is step six is one of the areas that I

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found needed to be addressed in a better way, at least for Taylor. What we call keep practicing is something called a cued practice in the Teaching-Family Model, which is the models that we use. A cued practice, let me explain what that is. A cued practice is when you plan to practice a skill at a later time, not during the time that you're teaching this skill.

For example, if I'm going to teach my child using Role-play like Taylor did, how to re-focus and get back on task, we would Role-play it and I'd go through the whole experience for him, everything that Taylor did. The keep practicing part or the cued practice would be to tell her son, "Hey listen, we're going to practice this again at a later time today and when we practice it, I'm going to expect you to be able to remember what to do and how to do it." So by being able to state that and say it and plan for it at a future time is a cued practice. And what this does is it allows you as a parent to re-visit the skill to be sure that the skill has stuck, to be sure that the skill is there.

The analogy that I used when I was speaking with Taylor was that it's like taking piano lessons. Now, I don't know if you've taken piano lessons, I've taken piano lessons, but you can't expect to be good at playing the piano if you only focus on the lesson you have with your teacher. There are a lot of cued practices that you need to do in between your lessons in order to make the improvements necessary.

I had a teacher, her name was Ms. Lang. I used to walk to her house to take piano lessons. Initially, I loved piano. I thought it was great. I'd go, I'd come home, I'd practice everything she taught and then it became monotonous. There were some lessons that I did not like, I did not like the music and so I would do the lesson and I would come home and I wouldn't open up my music book or sit at the piano until the next week, about a half-hour before our music lesson was to start again. Yeah, that was a disaster because not only did I not improve, I needed to go back and review a lot of things.

This is the exact same thing that's happening with your child if you do not do cued practices. If you are able to do the Role-play, you've invested that much time, you have to set some time apart in addition to remind your child of how to use the skill at different times of the day and preferably the same day and throughout the next following days. It's like allowing your child to live their life and then you're going to revisit it back and forth, back and forth.

This is going to do a couple of things. First, it holds you accountable to the skill that you're teaching your child to what you expect from them because you're going to be responsible to do the skill again. It's also going to be helpful for your child because it prepares them for the idea that sometime in the future I have to apply this, I have to use this, and I have to be aware that it's coming up.

Now you can probably already figure out the benefits of being able to do something like this. A cued practice is like getting a booster shot. So if you get your immunization, you need a booster shot every once in a while just to make it strong again. Cued practices do the exact same thing.

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If you are spending the time to do the original Role-play exercise, and that does take some time, a booster is seeing whether or not that sticks and if they need another visit to how to behave in that situation again.

Let's get back to Taylor. Let's talk a little bit about Taylor and her son. We started talking about cued practices. She said, "During the Role-play he did great, but when the situation arose where later on he was unable to remember or to do the skill that we had practiced." And so we implemented specific times throughout the day that she could remind him that they were going to do a cued practice.

I invited Taylor to go back and re-visit Role-playing this with her child again and she was glad to do that. Then I gave Taylor the challenge to plan specific times throughout that day, the next day and the next day to visit this skill. Random times for her and her child would not know exactly when. That's the whole process is that the child won't know when they're going to have to use it, but the idea that they will have to use it at a future date helps prepare them for that.

In order to help Taylor remember because she has so much going on and she's working with all her other children, I recommended that she put stickies, so fluorescent colored stickies around the walls to remind her about these cued practices. So she would just write down the time that she would practice it with her child to help cement the skill that she was trying to teach her child through the Role-play. She put that in the kitchen. She put it in her bathroom. She put it in his room. She put it in the family room. Just a yellow stickie as a reminder somewhere that she would normally see it so she could remember, "Okay, I need to remember to practice this again with my child to be sure that it stuck."

Now, the cued practice is not exactly like the entire Role-playing skill. You're not going through the entire thing again. With Taylor, because that was her concern is like am I teaching him the exact same thing that I did when we initially learned the Role-play, and my suggestion to her was no. Actually the idea of having a cued practice is for him to practice it in normal everyday life. So if he is studying and there was a tactic that she used to be disruptive during their Role-play, all she would need to do was do that specific thing that was distracting to see how he would respond. And it's this whole idea that he should be able to remember what he did before and then react to it appropriately.

So she's like, "Well, do I tell him that we're doing a cued practice?" And I said, "Well, you tell him you're doing a cued practice when you initially learn the skill and you tell him in preparation for the day, but you do not tell him exactly when it's going to happen." Yeah, it sounds suspenseful in a way right, and it keeps children guessing in some ways too.

She's like, "Okay, so let me understand this," and I'm reiterating it here so you can understand. You will initially spend a lot of time teaching a skill that you want your child to learn, like how to respond to you or appropriately, or how to re-focus in the case of Taylor and her son. So you're going to spend a lot of time teaching them what they should do, what it looks like, how they

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should behave, et cetera during that calm and neutral time. After you do that, after they're able to master that and do that multiple times, at least three times successfully on their own, you will tell them, "Great job. We are going to practice this again later today. I'm not going to tell you when but something later today is going to happen and I'll see if you can remember what we learned just now during this Role-play."

Can you see how much suspense we're building with children? Now it's not really suspense but it's anticipation and it's preparing them for success. You're actually preparing them to be successful at this because you're telling them.

So then you go out throughout your day and then you as a parent will determine when you are going to do the practice. You're going to practice it with them. However you don't tell them, you just do it and you see if they can do what you practiced originally.

Now if they are unable to remember or to recall, then you go back and you go through the whole Role-play scenario again and you work through it. Be sure they can do it three, four times again and then you tell them, "We are going to do a cued practice later on to see if it sticks." Now you won't have to do this more than two or three times because after the second time kids are like, "Wait a minute. Okay. Okay. I get it. I get it. I get it. I get it." And they're able to follow through.

Just be aware that it's a lot of work upfront, but the payoff is so beneficial. So, so beneficial for not only you but for your child. For you, it will save time. It'll save effort in the future because you won't have to address some of these behaviors again and again and again and become frustrated because nothing's changed. For your child, it's going to be beneficial because it guides them and lets them know exactly what to do. We're moving things in Role-play from this idea of being descriptive and unclear to clarity. It's like dealing with ideas when we're explaining what we want and then Role-playing them, which is specifically showing them what we want.

That was the recommendation I made for Taylor. She stuck the stickies around the house in order to remind her. Now you don't have to do that. For her, that was helpful because she could see a fluorescent stickie in her house. It was easy to recognize and to remind her. Some parents will do a string around the finger, which is helpful for them. Some will set an alarm on their phone to remind them to do a cued practice with their child.

If your child is able to do the cued practice successfully, then you absolutely need to effectively praise them. Praise, praise, praise for their ability to follow through. And what that will do is again, strengthen that muscle memory so they know how to respond in specific situations.

Now with Taylor, we went through this. We discussed it on the phone, but in order for her to really understand how to implement a cued practice at the end of Role-playing, I Role-played it with her. We Role-played it. I Role-played as her. I told her exactly what she needed to say after the Role-play, learning what to do during the Role-play and then I had her practice it with me so she could use her own words and her own ability to use it with her child.

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As you can see, me working with Taylor, we're working on this together, we brought ideas that we were discussing into the light by being able to Role-play them. Again, this is why it's so beneficial for you as a parent to Role-play what you want your child to do. Absolutely essential for their success is your ability to show them what you expect and what they should do. Children, they need more than descriptions. They need more than words. They need to see it, they need to feel it, they need to experience it, and that's what Role-playing does.

[If there is a specific skill that you want to teach your child and you are Role-playing it, don't forget to use a cued practice.](#) A cued practice will help guide that whole process along for your child to pick it up a lot faster and to implement it and then you can move on to something else that you need to address.

Parenting is one of those things that it's a job that never ends. There's always something to work on and there's always areas that could use improvement. However, when you start to implement these tools that we have on Smarter Parenting and that are from the Teaching-Family Model, what happens is you have tools to address multiple situations. You know exactly what to do, what to say, how to go about it, which saves you a lot of stress and anxiety and frustration.

I've seen it so many times. In fact, there are a lot of parents who have commented at the end of an intervention using these skills where they say, "Hey, you know, I'm just grateful you taught me exactly what to do and how to do it. I'm grateful you gave me what to say because a lot of times I would just wait and then react and usually I was upset and I didn't know what to do and then I would freak out and pretty soon there was a meltdown." You'd be surprised how many parents feel that way.

So we're giving you all the tools, we're telling you how to use the tools and guiding along that process. [So for this Role-playing, don't forget the cued practice, which is step six.](#) Step six you want to continue to practice regardless until they get it. Think of it again as music lessons, piano lessons, you can't expect your child to learn everything they need to know and how to perform well by just attending their music lesson with their teacher. It requires some effort outside of that lesson. You need to practice at home for a music lesson and then you go back and you can nuance and learn more and progress further.

It's the same principle here. With any behavioral intervention that you're going to do you need to practice. You need to plan a time in the future for your child because you're guiding them along of when you're going to practice these things again in regular life so they can see how that looks and how it feels and how it works.

I wanted to share those things. I'm giving a huge shout out to Taylor. Thank you for reaching out. And Taylor you're doing a great job. Absolutely doing a great job with your children. You're implementing skills and it's such a benefit for me to communicate with a parent online because

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we're able to tailor things very specific to their needs and to what is happening in their home at the time.

That's the benefit of communication. [If you call in and you sign up for coaching](#), that is absolutely what you are going to get. Is an individualized approach to the situations that are happening in your home. I am so happy to help and guide you along the process to save you time and effort and answer your questions specific for your needs. Every child is different. Every family is different. The environments are different. And yet, there are underlying principles that help all children and those principles can be found in this model, the Teaching-Family Model.

I'm here to just share those. [Please sign up for coaching](#). Let's get you the help you need. Let's save you some time. Let's save you some effort. Let's save you some frustration. Let's help your children. Let's build your relationships. That's exactly, that's exactly our goal here at Smarter Parenting.

Anyways, so Role-playing, cued practice, those are the things I want you to remember. I'm going to review a little bit what we talked about. We talked about Role-playing, the importance of Role-playing, but we've also talked about cued practices and how to implement them and to do them with your child. We also talked about why it's important to continually practice these skills even after you do your initial teaching of what they need to do in order to help your child be successful. All right.

That's it for me from this week. I can't tell you how grateful I am for the opportunity to be able to share this information with parents around the world through this podcast. I need to give a shout out to the [Utah Youth Village](#) who have made this possible, so thank you so much. And I will talk to you again. All right, see you later.

### **PODCASTS MENTIONED IN THIS PODCAST**

[Ep #71: Changing the brain though Role-playing](#)

[Ep #48: What it takes to change behavior](#)

[Ep #13: Practice leads to success](#)

### **RESOURCES**

[Behavior skill: Role-playing](#)

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