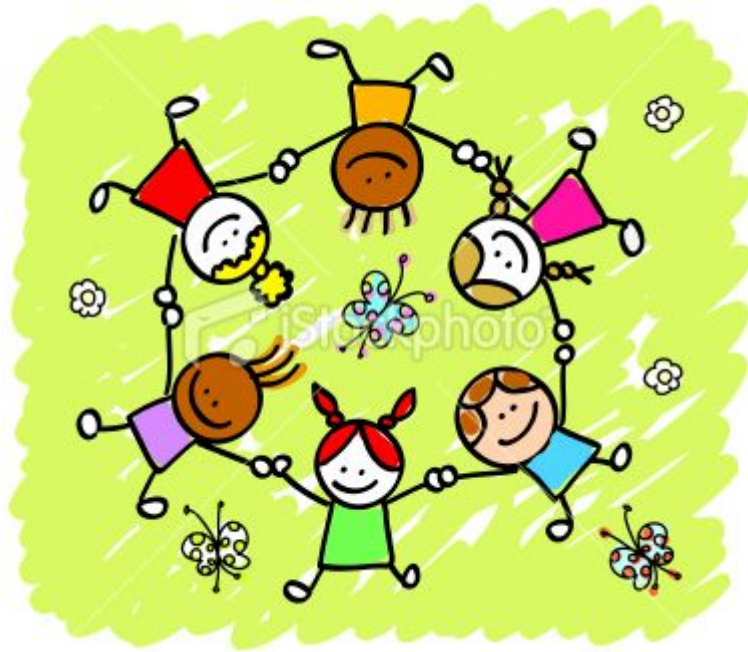


Parenting Children with Difficult Behaviors



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Agenda

- Introduction/Welcome
- Discussion of Tantrums, Aggression, and other Challenging Behaviors
 - Administering Appropriate Consequences
 - Questions - Discussion

Tantrums



Children with difficult behaviors often have trouble making decisions. They may not have the language to express their emotions or ask for help. These confusing feelings can lead to frustration, anger, and outbursts of uncontrolled emotions.

****These difficult behaviors may include impulsive/hyperactive behaviors, difficulties with social skills, or oppositional/aggressive behaviors****

Impulsive and Hyperactive Behaviors

Symptoms of hyperactivity in children:

- Constantly fidgets and squirms
- Often leaves his or her seat in situations where sitting quietly is expected
- Moves around constantly, often running or climbing inappropriately
- Talks excessively, has difficulty playing quietly
- Is always “on the go,” as if driven by a motor

Symptoms of impulsivity in children:

- Blurts out answers without waiting to be called on hear the whole question
- Has difficulty waiting for his or her turn
- Often interrupts others
- Intrudes on other people’s conversations or games
- Inability to keep powerful emotions in check, resulting in angry outbursts or temper tantrums

Examples of using behavioral methods with such children:

- Reward your child with privileges, praise, or activities, rather than with food or toys.
- Change rewards frequently. Kids with ADD/ADHD get bored if the reward is always the same.
- Make a chart with points or stars awarded for good behavior, so your child has a visual reminder of his or her successes
- Immediate rewards work better than the promise of a future reward, but small rewards leading to a big one can also work.
- Always follow through with a reward.
- Consequences should be spelled out in advance and occur immediately after your child has misbehaved.
- Try time-outs and the removal of privileges as consequences for misbehavior.
- Remove your child from situations and environments that trigger inappropriate behavior.
- When your child misbehaves, ask what he or she could have done instead. Then have your child demonstrate it.
- Always follow through with a consequence.

Some suggested tips for rewarding the impulsive/hyperactive child are:

- Create charts with points or stars for good behavior or for completed tasks. It is important to give points for even simple positive behaviors, which may be taken for granted in other children (responding happily to a change in plans, changing an obscenity to a more acceptable expletive).
- Rewards for any child can include playing a favorite game with the child, extending bedtime by an hour, or allowing an extra half-hour of TV.
- Rewards of food or gifts should be used infrequently, if at all. They can create other problems, such as being overweight, having a bad diet, or making continuous demands for objects.

- A reward system should rotate different types of rewards, because such children are easily bored.
- Children with impulsivity/hyperactivity respond better with small rewards promised in the short-term than large rewards offered in the future. One approach that employs both short- and long-term rewards uses a system that gives the child points for specific positive behaviors. As the children accumulate points, they can use them for larger tangible rewards, such as a favorite video game.
- Rewards should be promised only when caregivers are fairly certain they can follow through. Children with these concerns respond with much greater frustration than those without to disappointment, and are likely to have a strong (and noisy) negative reaction. A parent must remember that this response is part of the child's make-up and not necessarily in their control.

Social Skills Difficulties and Discipline:

Children with social skills difficulties share some or all of the following characteristics, which can vary from mild to severe:

- Communication problems (for example, with the use or comprehension of language)
- Difficulty relating to people, things and events
- Playing with toys and objects in unusual ways
- Difficulty adjusting to changes in routine or to familiar surroundings and

Discipline

Difficult behavior usually serves a purpose for these children. Once you identify the desire, you may learn how to prevent the behavior and replace it with something more appropriate. For example, the desire may be to gain attention or obtain something, or avoid or escape from an unpleasant situation.

Traditional forms of discipline are not effective with children with social deficits who are displaying difficult behavior. The child may not simply seek approval or understand anger from another person so your reaction to the behavior may have little impact. It is always important to look at what motivates and interests each child and to assist the child to communicate his/her needs, anxieties and frustration in

acceptable ways. Assistance through behavioral services, role play and modeling may be necessary.

Discipline Strategies for Children with difficult behaviors

- Solve any medical or sleep problems
- Increase supervision and structure
- Establish set daily care routines
- Have set places where activities always occur
- Establish a reward system
- Work on simple directions - following them everyday
- Increase your efforts to “catch them being good”
- Use picture schedules - if helpful
- Use of stop sign/universal no symbol
- Allow plenty of time (exercise patience)
- Pick your battles and follow through
- Increase consistency between care givers (work together)
- Be consistent and firm (not 100%)
- May need “down time” following school/daycare
- Have a set community outing each week that occurs just for “teaching” and practicing good behavior

Time outs

Discussion Questions:

- How well do time outs work?
- Any challenges?

What to do if Time outs do not work...

- For some children taking space does not work. They won't move away from the activity or they escalate further.
- What's important to remember is that the goal is to help them calm down and to take away your attention
 - If the child is **not** engaging in unsafe behaviors, you should actively ignore them, taking away your attention.

Oppositionality & Aggression



Oppositional Behaviors:

All children are oppositional from time to time. There are also times in normal development when oppositional behavior is expected. This is especially true when the thrust toward separation is most intense, around the ages of two and three, and again in early adolescence.

During the toddler and preschool years, when a certain degree of oppositional attitude is considered normal, ordinary points of contention in the family become battlegrounds for intractable power struggles with these children. These oppositional episodes typically center around eating, toilet training, and sleeping. Tamper tantrums are usually extreme in a child with these concerns.

The more a child reacts in defiant, provocative ways, the more negative feedback is elicited from the parents. In an attempt to achieve compliance, the parent or authority figures remind, lecture, berate, physically punish, and nag the child. But far from diminishing oppositional behavior, these kinds of responses toward the child tend to increase the rate and intensity of non-compliance. Ultimately, it becomes a tug of war and a battle of wills.

Aggression is any intentional behavior that causes physical or emotional harm to a person or damages or destroys things. Examples are hitting, kicking, punching, throwing things, teasing or name calling, and hurting oneself. Sometimes children are aggressive without meaning to cause harm. Other times, children use aggression to achieve a goal.

Why a Child Might be Aggressive:

- He has not developed social skills needed to make requests and get along with others
- Does not have a strong sense of trust or belonging
- Has not yet learned to name, understand, and respond appropriately to strong feelings
- Can not control impulses, cope with frustration, or wait for gratification

- He is repeating behaviors he has witnessed or experienced
- He is using behaviors that have been encouraged or rewarded in the past
- He is coping with past traumas

Immediate Response:

- Stay calm (easier said than done!)
- If safe to do so, get down to the child's level
- Use eye contact and make a strong statement. Again using simple words. Example: "No hitting. Hitting hurts."
- Speak in short sentences with simple words
- Model the use of words that describe feelings, "___ took your toy. You felt angry. You hit ___. Hitting is not allowed."
- Offer a choice as a consequence. Example: "You can sit in the chair or you can talk with me about a way to solve the problem"

Why a Child Might Have a Tantrum:

- Conflicting feelings about independence
- Does not understand how to handle anger and aggression
- Expressing anger or frustration
- Might be tired, hungry, sick, or overstimulated
- Needs to release tension
- Wants something and a tantrum has gotten the child what he/she wanted in the past

Immediate Response:

- As long as the child can't hurt himself or someone else, it is best to ignore the outburst
- Give the child space; Move the class away from the child or gently move the child.
- Try to soothe the child by patting him, rubbing his back, or showing him how to take deep breaths to help him relax
- Explain what caused the tantrum in simple terms. You don't want to use too many words. Example: "You were very excited and had to let your feelings out. Soon you will feel calm."

After the Incident (when the child is calm):

- Ask the child, "What were you trying to say?" or "Why do you think you were upset?"

- The child may not have the words to explain what made him upset. Try to give him/her words they can use in the future.
- Allow the child a chance to make amends

Talk with the child about other ways he can cope when he feels excited, angry, frustrated etc. For example, talking, drawing, playing with a certain toy. In this way you are teaching him way to cope with these feelings in the future.

What to do when child is out of control

- Despite best efforts of parents, there are times when a child has completely unmanageable behaviors
- **Discussion Question:** What do you do now if/when that happens?

Some possible alternatives:

- Get help from other adults if possible (spouse, extended family, etc.)
- Separate the child from others
- If the situation becomes increasingly out of control, you can use the 211 Crisis Hotline
- Consider making referral to a community mental health agency for child to be evaluated

More General thoughts about Discipline

It is unbelievably stressful when you have a child with challenging behaviors.

It is important to remember that children ultimately want your approval and do not intentionally misbehave (though it may feel that way sometimes!)

What motivation a child has to behave needs to be considered. If they want attention and get it by misbehaving then why stop?

An important distinction to make for yourself and for the children is that you always love them but you do not always love their behavior! This is important to reinforce because if a child feels that your approval is permanently removed then they will have even less motivation to behave.