

CHALLENGING BEHAVIORS: FACTS EVERY FAMILY SHOULD KNOW

DAUPHIN COUNTY MH/ID
NOVEMBER 2016 RESOURCE SHARING

Every child presents with challenging behaviors at times. Challenging behaviors may increase around the holidays. The information below may help you see challenging behaviors in a different light.

Five Facts Every Family Should Know:

- 1. All behavior is a form of communication.** Everybody communicates through behavior. A child's problematic or inappropriate behavior is a sign that he is upset and that something is not right.
- 2. There is always a reason for problem behavior.** Children sometimes have trouble communicating, because they may not know the words to describe how they are feeling or what to do in a difficult situation. At these times, children may act out their feelings or needs. There is always a reason behind the behavior.
- 3. There can be many reasons behind one specific behavior.** Children with challenging behavior are sending adults the message that something is not right or that their needs are not being met. There could be many reasons for a single behavior, such as being hungry, scared, hurt, tired, bored, wet, sad or angry. A child who has tried several times to communicate to adults about what he needs, but whose needs remain unmet, will often use problem behavior as a way of sending a very loud message.
- 4. Adults can learn to understand and interpret children's challenging behavior.** Since children often use their behavior to tell us what they need, adults can help the child by figuring out the meaning behind the child's behavior. It is equally important for adults to be aware of the meaning in their own behavior.
- 5. Children's challenging behavior can be reduced with support, not punishment.** When children feel respected and have their needs met, there is no longer a reason to use challenging behavior to communicate. When adults use punishment, they are sending the message that anger is a good way to solve problems. When adults help children find positive ways to communicate their needs to others, children learn important social and problem-solving skills that will help them throughout their life.

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Nine Ways to Reduce Challenging Behavior

After you have identified what triggers challenging behavior in your child, you can use that information to respond more positively to your child's needs. Here are some tips for how to get started:

- 1. Change the setting.** Change the room, activity, or people involved, so your child feels supported.
- 2. Respond calmly.** Respond to the situation calmly and without your own anger. If your child's behavior has made you angry, take a few minutes to calm down before deciding how to respond.
- 3. Teach alternate behaviors.** Teach your child alternate and more socially appropriate ways of expressing what he wants or needs. For example, if your child fights over sharing toys with friends or siblings, teach him how to ask to borrow and trade.
- 4. Offer choices.** Offer choices and opportunities for your child to have more control over her environment. For example, if your child is a fussy eater, ask her what she'd like to eat, provide her with one or two options, or make her part of the planning.
- 5. Notice the positive.** Notice positive behavior when it occurs and provide genuine praise. Noticing your child when she is using positive behavior lets her know that you respect her.
- 6. Be consistent.** Make sure there are consistent and predictable routines. Make sure that you are consistent in what you ask and that you follow through on what you say.
- 7. Avoid surprises.** When there is a change in routine or schedule, prepare your child ahead of time so he knows what to expect.
- 8. Have fun.** Make sure there is joy and fun in your child's life every day. Think of what brings a smile to your child's face and make time each day to smile together.
- 9. Practice relaxation techniques.** Using relaxation techniques, such as a deep breathing, has many wonderful benefits for kids (and adults!).

Excerpted from http://www.pbs.org/parents/inclusivecommunities/challenging_behavior2.html

http://www.pbs.org/parents/inclusivecommunities/challenging_behavior4.html