

Some ways to manage tough behaviors



by Lizzy Campbell, LCSW

Keeping calm when addressing tough behaviors.

Children aren't always rational thinkers. They can have strong emotions and can struggle to control their impulses. Their strong emotions cause them to act aggressively, such as yelling, striking, throwing items, and so on.

So what do we do????

KEEP CALM

One of the most important things you can do when your child is acting out is to stay calm yourself.

VALIDATE THEIR FEELINGS

Example: Wow. It looks like you're really upset about this. It's okay to be upset right now. I can't allow you to continue hitting me though.

GIVE CHOICES

Tell and demonstrate to your child what they can do. Teach them how to properly direct their energy. If you stop your child's behavior without telling them what to do instead, they may continue to do what you want them to stop. Tell them they may express themselves by saying "I'M MAD," jumping up and down, stomping their feet, or hitting the sofa cushions.



POINT OUT WHAT HAPPENED

There are many natural consequences to actions. Explain what happened. Say, "When you hit Carrie, it hurt her and she started to cry," or, "When you threw the toy on the floor, it broke."

OFFER AN ACCEPTABLE BEHAVIOR

Assist your child in communicating their needs in a way that pleases you. Present a substitute. Say, "Throwing blocks is not appropriate." It's possible for someone to get injured. These foam balls may be thrown into the basket in its place.

Some things that won't help



A BIG EMOTIONAL RESPONSE FROM THE CAREGIVER

The more upset you are and the more attention you give a behavior, the more likely the behavior will continue. This is because a big reaction—positive or negative—gets your child's attention. That alone can be a reason they repeat the behavior.

NEGATIVE PUNISHMENT

Using positive reinforcement is an approach that seeks to guide and shape behavior by focusing on the positive while also reframing missteps as opportunities for learning. It focuses on catching and rewarding the positive behaviors you want your child to be doing. This also helps establish good self esteem.

SHAMING

When a child is shamed for behavior they cannot yet control, they will only feel worse. Feeling worse will not improve their behavior or ability to self-regulate..

TOO MUCH BARGAINING

When a child is allowed to negotiate often, they learn that it's an effective way to get what they want. Having consistent rules helps children feel safe and secure.



DEMANDING AN APOLOGY

Children who are asked to say “sorry” without fully understanding what they've done wrong, do not learn from their actions. It helps if you point out what happened during a calm moment —“When you hit Kennedy this morning, it hurt her and she started to cry.” Over time, they will start to understand the consequences of their actions. Someday they will make a heartfelt apology. It helps when parents model how to apologize and take responsibility for their actions too.

For more tips on how to help with emotion regulation or how to cope with big feelings, reach out to us at l.campbell@playitforwardcounseling.com