

## Anger/Behavior Management

### Managing Problematic Behaviors

Do not become emotionally disturbed yourself.

- Children are often experts at finding your most vulnerable point
- Try not to become involved in power struggles (no one wins a power struggle)
- Remember that your loss of control over your own emotions may signal to the child that no one is now in control, and that this environment is no longer safe
- Extreme calmness in the face of extreme emotional disturbance often produces amazing results



Be clear and explicit regarding your behavioral expectations

- Never assume that the child knows what you, as the adult, expect
- Try to be as concrete and specific as possible when giving directions or instructions
- Keep your behavioral expectations in tune with the child's ability

Be consistent over time in regard to consequences for specific behaviors

- Many emotionally disturbed children have never lived in a consistent nurturing environment
- Be clear and specific regarding the rules, and consequences for breaking the rules, in your home or area of responsibility
- Once established and understood, try not to change the rules of your setting
- If rules must be added or consequences changed, be sure to allow plenty of time for these changes to be understood by the emotionally disturbed child
- Do not allow your energy level, or other mitigating circumstances, to influence consistent consequences for specific behaviors

Never promise something unless you can definitely deliver

- Try not to bribe children with promises of sweets or other sought after "goodies"
- Remember that children almost always, no matter how disturbed, remember promises
- Failing to deliver on a promise can create a sense of mistrust, which can destroy a good, working relationship

Be aware of physical and emotional clues that signal a child is about to “blow up”

- Most emotionally disturbed children clearly signal their intentions well in advance of a major disturbance
- Train yourself to recognize the signs of an impending emotional disaster
- Determine, through personal observation, which form of intervention is most effective in heading off these emotional outbursts
- Once a crisis has developed, be alert to personal clues that signal that a child is once again in control of himself or herself



Continually reinforce positive behaviors with verbal praise and encouragement

- You can never give an emotionally disturbed child enough praise and encouragement for good behavior
- If a child seems to be having a great deal of difficulty with a particular task, try breaking the larger task down into smaller tasks and then verbally praise the successful completion of each of these smaller tasks
- Remember that most emotionally disturbed children are not accustomed to being praised and so at first they may act either indifferent or even hostile to praise

Talk through problems in your own life and encourage the child to do the same

- Emotionally disturbed children frequently have a great deal of difficulty expressing their problems verbally and will often resort to acting inappropriately to express these problems
- Important adults in the child’s life can serve as valuable role models by talking through their own problems
- Encourage the child to talk with you about their problems when you notice that the child is visibly upset or is about to act out
- Children will only learn to talk through their problems if important adults are consistently willing to listen to them

Always follow through with all previously stated consequences following the child's behavior

- Before stating consequences for a particular behavior be absolutely certain that you have all the necessary resources to implement the consequences (e.g., time, energy, space)
- Once you have started implementing consequences for behavior, do not allow the child's "good behavior" during the implementation of these consequences to deter you from completion of the consequences
- Failing to implement the full consequence for a behavior teaches the emotionally disturbed child that you are inconsistent and that all of the rules are subject to change
- Negotiations with the child regarding consequences for behavior must take place before the inappropriate behavior is observed and before the consequences are set

Do not get emotionally disturbed children excited by playing with them and then expect them to "cool it" when you tire of play

- Emotionally disturbed children, like all other children, need a healthy and constructive outlet for their energy, and need time to play physically with adults
- Problems can arise when you, as the adult, tire of physical play and the emotionally disturbed child is just beginning to "wind up"
- Try to end physical play with emotionally disturbed children by gradually decreasing the strenuousness of the activity and by diverting their energy into other, less physical, activities

Try not to become involved in a personal “power struggle” with the child

- Emotionally disturbed children frequently prove mastery over their confusing world by drawing adults down to their level through unnecessary “power struggles”
- Most power struggles can be avoided by having clear clues, firm limits, and explicit expectations
- When you sense that you are being drawn into a power struggle, step back for a minute, examine the real issue, and then decide what is to be gained or lost by continuing with the power struggle



Remember that emotionally disturbed children frequently relate more to the attention and emotion than to the actual content of your statement

- Emotionally disturbed children are often more concerned with the emotions behind your speech than with the actual words
- Always be honest with these children in regard to your own feelings, as they can usually sense your true feelings anyway
- If you are not genuinely excited or genuinely angry about a child’s behavior, do not fake these emotions
- Remember that you are attempting to teach the emotionally disturbed child that it is a sign of good health to be able to express appropriate emotions

Always be consistent in applying the rules

- Perhaps the most important task in rehabilitating an emotionally disturbed child is to provide a consistent environment
- The emotionally disturbed child must learn that a particular behavior, whether it be appropriate or inappropriate, will result in the same consequences, regardless of the time or place that the behavior is exhibited
- If you cannot apply consistent consequences for breaking a rule, it is better to have no rule at all

Do not expect the child to follow rules that you yourself commonly break

- Emotionally disturbed children, like all other children, learn more by example than by spoken or written instruction
- If you yourself are a heavy smoker, do not expect that your verbal warnings will prevent the child from smoking
- Expecting the child to conform to the rules that you yourself commonly break is teaching the child that you are a hypocrite and unworthy of respect

Always explicitly separate your feelings about a child's behavior from your feelings about the child

- Emotionally disturbed children have frequently been conditioned by significant adults in their lives to view themselves as little more than a set of inappropriate behaviors
- To reverse the damage caused by years of blurring the line between self and behaviors, it is important to let the emotionally disturbed child know that you hold him or her in high regard while still being concerned about certain problematic behaviors
- Emphasize explicitly to the emotionally disturbed child that you are angry about a particular bit of behavior and not about the child himself/herself
- Stressing concern with problem behaviors and not with the child's personal self helps the child to realize that change is possible

Be certain that a child fully understands your instructions, expectations, or consequences by seeking some clear and explicit sign that the entire message is understood

- Never assume that the emotionally disturbed child understands what, to you, may have been a very clear message
- Always insist that the emotionally disturbed child demonstrate understanding of the message by asking appropriate questions, repeating part of the message, or in some other suitable way indicating that the message has been received
- If your instructions, expectations, or consequences are long, break them down into smaller parts and seek some sign of understanding after each section (do not confuse understanding with agreement)

Always hold children accountable for their behavior

- Emotionally disturbed children are frequently masters of the act of assigning responsibility for their own actions to other people, places, and things
- Insist from the very beginning of your relationship that the emotionally disturbed child take responsibility for his or her own behavior
- Do not permit the child to use his or her past history to account for their present actions
- Do not lower your expectations for personal accountability because the child has been labeled "emotionally disturbed"