**Defiance or Anxiety – That is the Question**

**How to Tell & What to Do**

Kids that are anxious can at times demonstrate defiant behaviors. This is because when they are faced with a fear, their anxiety tells them to avoid what they are fearful of at all costs. They may have a meltdown in order to get out of the situation they are anxious about, tell you what a horrible and mean parent you are and refuse to do what you are asking

Know your child’s anxiety triggers to determine ahead of time if this behavior is caused by a usual anxiety trigger or is something else going on. Remember that anxiety shows up in various forms as well and can change from one trigger to another.

If your child is usually afraid to go to bed at night and begins arguing with you that he’s not going to bed, he doesn’t have to listen to you, it’s too hard to sleep etc.… this is anxiety looking like defiance. The child is doing anything he can to not have to face the fear even including getting into an argument. If your child is refusing to get his shoes from upstairs after you’ve asked over and over and is displaying strong emotions for no reason, this can be a response to anxiety – in this case, a fear of the dark or separation anxiety. If your child responds with an over-the-top reaction to something usually accepted, this is a clue that anxiety may be the culprit.

Rather than engaging in what your child is verbalizing, remain calm and if you already have identified the anxiety trigger, respond with “**I know that going to bed can be a scary time for you, let’s think of ideas to help you get to bed”.** Ignore the comments your child made as this is the fight, flight or freeze response to anxiety and don’t take comments personally. If you are unsure or confused by an unusually strong reaction, ask your child “**What is making this difficult for you to do right now?”**  By asking this question, the response may reveal what the child is actually thinking or struggling with.

Tips on how to tell the difference:

**Anxiety** **Defiance**

This is too hard for me This is stupid and boring

You don’t understand I don’t have to do this

This is gross I’m old enough to not have to do this

Something bad will happen I’m going

I changed my mind, I don’t want to NO!

Asking the same question over and over Blaming others for his reactions

Sudden flying off the handle You’re too strict.

Overcontrolling of a specific situation

Watch for more articles on Parenting

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