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Temper Tantrums And Triggers

By Judith S. Bloch

A Most all young children are likely to have trouble from time to time



dealing with everyday

expectations in school or at home. But children who are classified and also explosive or assaultive (throwing, biting or hitting) are especially worrisome. Everyday activities are extraordinarily difficult for them. For these children, friendships are jeopardized or non-existent, and opportunities for placement in inclusionary settings are limited.

The reasons for the child's misbehavior are complex. A variety of factors (many beyond parental control), such as temperament and neuro-biological variables, will help explain this child's low frustration tolerance, explosiveness and inflexibility. The earlier these patterns are identified and addressed, the greater the likelihood of a successful result, which will help the adults anticipate, manage and help this child develop better self control.

A systematic method for collecting essential information regarding the child's reactions and performance in situations and environments in which misbehavior is likely to occur is a useful baseline to collect. Observation of the child's responses and behaviors over a few days in places with adults, peers and specific activities and materials will increase everyone's understanding of the child's learning and coping skills, and offset any inadvertent adult misperceptions. With this comprehensive picture, compassionate parents and teachers will have more data and insight. They can then take the next important step and develop interventions and appropriate expectations for improvement that will help the child acquire new skills and replacement behaviors.

Collecting the following data is a good way to get started. Identify one behavior to target, observe and record:

Triggers: Situations or times of the day the child's most likely to explode, health considerations or hunger or fatigue.

Frequency: How often does the unacceptable behavior occur?

Intensity: On a scale of 1 to 10, how bad is the outburst?

Duration: Clock it! How long does it last?

Your baseline information will help the adults monitor the child's progress and modify the plan as needed. Re-assessments at regular intervals will identify achievements and set the stage for the next set of expectations.



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