

Family Times

NEWSLETTER



A NEWSLETTER FOR ADULTS WITH CHILDREN AGES 5-8

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Identifying Behavior Problems

How can a parent distinguish between “normal” (good) and “abnormal” (bad) behavior? That is a question many parents face. It is normal for all young children to misbehave once in a while. The occasional misbehaving is not something to be concerned about. We all expect children to go through the “terrible twos.” When this type of behavior – the crying, whining, kicking, biting, and hitting – continues past the early ages, it becomes a problem.

Most children will grow out of the “terrible twos” and display age-appropriate behavior. Some children do not. Children develop at different stages, and you cannot expect all children to have the same behavior at any certain age. Also, age-appropriate behavior for a 4-year-old can be a problem if carried out by an 8-year-old. A child is said to have a behavior problem if his or her actions are harmful to the physical, emotional, or social well-being of the child or others.

What did I do wrong?
How many parents have asked this question if they have a child who demonstrates a behavior problem?



Chances are, the parents did nothing wrong at all. Even children from the happiest and healthiest families can have behavior problems.

In a 1994 *Ensign* article, Jan Pinborough points out that there are no naturally bad children. Similarly, all behavior problems are not caused by bad parenting. Some problems, though, can result from inconsistent discipline and failing to reward good behavior (Rehme, 2000).

What Causes Abnormal Behavior?

If bad parenting is not the cause of inappropriate behavior, then what is? Many children misbehave because of some underlying problem or situation they may be dealing with. Most children want to have good behavior, but sometimes outside forces cause them to misbehave. Some causes might be trying their wings to see how far the parent will let them go, having unrealistic expectations of parents, experiencing school problems, dealing with family stress and conflicts between parents, or just trying to get attention.

Children crave attention. If they can't get it any other way, they will misbehave to get it.

Determining the cause of the behavior is one of the first steps in dealing with the problem. When a child misbehaves, parents might think that punishment is the only answer. This is not always true. Some children may get worse if punished. Instead, try talking about the problem and being supportive. Sometimes, problem-solving is the answer to correcting the behavior. Tell your child that you have noticed that something seems to be causing him or her to misbehave and you are willing to help solve the problem. This may open the door for the child to express what is on his or her mind and help both of you to deal with what is causing the undesirable behavior.

If talking with the child and being supportive does not correct the behavior, explain the problem to your child's doctor. Do not try to diagnose your child as having Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD) or Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD). A trained professional should make this determination. Also, be careful not to let other parents diagnose your child. Your child's doctor may refer you to a child development specialist, child psychologist, or psychiatrist. Remember, ADD and ADHD are medical disorders that should be treated only by a trained professional.

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Forces Affecting Behavior

External forces often affect the behavior of children.

Some examples are:

- *Reduced parental time:* Busy parents often do not spend as much quality time with their children as the children need.
- *Challenge of the media:* Having more media in their lives means children have easier access to vast amounts of entertainment, which can lead to negative behavior.
- *Overindulgence from parents:* This can mean either providing too many material possessions or not providing clear boundaries and structure.

Ways to combat these external forces are to spend as much meaningful time with your child as possible, to limit video games and TV viewing, and to set clear and realistic boundaries for children.



The Book Nook

A good book to read with your child:

When Sophie Gets Angry – Really, Really Angry
by Molly Bang

To Make a Difference

- Try to determine what might be the underlying cause of the behavior.
- Demonstrate proper behavior yourself; children imitate parents.
- Talk to the child and LISTEN; let the child know you understand and care.
- Set realistic expectations and explain them to the child.
- Be consistent with both discipline and rewards.



References

Pinborough, J.U. (1994, March). "Lead Me, Guide Me: Dealing with Children with Behavior Disorders." *Ensign*, 46-51. North Temple St., Salt Lake City, UT 84150-3220.

Rehme, C.M. (2000, April). "The Truth of Consequences." *Ensign*, 31-32. North Temple St., Salt Lake City, UT 84150-3220.

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