

DEALING WITH DISRUPTIVE BEHAVIOR DISORDER IN CHILDREN

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Instead of feeling anger, frustration, and becoming overwhelmed when children display disruptive behavior, as parents, role models, and educators we need to be empathetic and feel compassion and love for these children. We love these children, just not their disruptive behaviors. One of the main reasons children are disruptive is due to a lack of boundaries and goals not being set and established with the child. If rules and boundaries are not consistent and are not set clearly at an early stage of life, this lack can lead to disruptive behavior in and outside the home. We need to be specific and concrete on what needs to take place in the home, outside the home, in school, etc. We must model what success and appropriate behaviors look like and show children how to exhibit these positive behaviors.



When talking to your children, let them know exactly what and how good behavior needs to be implemented. Remember to be specific; don't just say "be good today" but state "be good today by not disrupting the classroom and listening to your teacher." Talk about these goals and objectives each day with your child, and if inappropriate behavior follows, consequences need to immediately be followed through as well. Reward immediately and efficiently when your child is effective and responsive. Use eye contact when giving requests, and have your child repeat back to you what you have said in order to ensure that he really understands what needs to be accomplished. Make realistic and achievable goals for your children, and let them know the consequences beforehand to reinforce good behavior. This allows the child to stop and think about actions before reacting! By setting expectations too high for your child, you are setting them up for failure, and they respond by feeling overwhelmed and frustrated. We need to look at the child's capabilities, potential, and unique style of individualism.



It is also very important to remember not to look at your child's "C" grade, but to look at the *progress* made from a failing class. Successful treatment does not happen overnight. So many parents want results immediately and get anxious, which causes the child to feel "anxious." This system does not work. This progress needs to be slow but steady. If a child acts up less each week, that is an example of slow but successful and steady progress, and children need to be acknowledged and rewarded. Gauge success by your own child's standards, not by what is considered "the norm" or someone else's standards. Focus on your child – we will be not be set up for failure if we are not constantly comparing our children or ourselves to others. Remember that each child is special, unique, and responds differently.

I highly recommend star charts or success charts to gauge students' progress in specific behavior, but be sure to include your child in this process. It is important the child sees progress daily to focus on the behaviors and positive feedback and be part of this process. Reward systems work well for students of all ages, not just the younger ones. Success charts benefit the child and get the whole family involved. Older children can also use privileges such as pagers, driving the car, cell-phone usage, etc. The family **must** be supportive and consistent in reinforcing positive responses and outcomes when they occur. Remember: it is essential to set specific, measurable, achievable, realistic, and time efficient goals. This will make a big difference to help **disruptive behaviors** become **deserving behaviors**! This is what we want!



We must avoid being **reactive** towards this resistant behavior from our children. Show your child who's in control by demonstrating self-control and restraint. Always stay calm, controlled, and collected when your child acts up. Remember: act rational to create rational behavior and responses from your child. Time-outs are highly effective for younger children, and a good formula to use is one minute per one year of age, e.g. 6 minutes for a six year old. The child needs to have time out to understand what was done wrong, and what he can do better next time, and should resolve the issue with an apology.

I strongly believe that children are disruptive and disobedient because they are willing to do whatever it takes to get attention, even if it is negative attention. Sometimes children don't get quality time and attention at home or school. I witness this often when children act inappropriately to receive any kind of attention, even if it is negative. Once positive behaviors are reinforced, and the negative behavior ignored, children learn what is acceptable and what is unacceptable rather quickly. Spend quality time with your children, and praise and reward behavior even for the smallest accomplishments. It doesn't always have to be material rewards – usually praise or verbal recognition, e.g. “Good job!” “Great work!” “I’m so proud of you!” etc., is all children need to reinforce their good behavior and smallest, but important, strides and accomplishments. A simple statement such as “I like how you were polite today and said ‘please’ and ‘thank you’” or a pat on the back or a high five can mean a great deal to a child. Imagine how you feel as an adult when your boss, husband, or best friend takes the time to acknowledge you and pays you a compliment. It feels good, leaves an impression, and makes us aware of little things that others appreciate and acknowledge, and reinforces this particular behavior. This is a valuable tool not to be used only on children, but on those we love as well.



Quiet time for the child is also highly beneficial to allow students to decompress, just as we need our own down time. Creative outlets such as journal writing, music, art, or dance are excellent ways for children to express and deal with their feelings. Most children with negative behavior and low self-esteem, show these characteristics of families in which children display antisocial behavior: 1) absence of rules and boundaries, 2) little monitoring of children's actions and behavior, 3) lack of effective contingencies, and 4) limited problem solving abilities within the family. Children may join gangs for the mere factor of the sense of belonging or the need for close-knit relationships not provided at home. These factors can have drastic effects, and can lead to Conduct or Behavior Disorder. (6-16% of boys are likely to diagnosed with Conduct or Behavior Disorder). Take time to communicate with your children to avoid major long-term problems by coming up with short-term/long-term solutions.

Children who are bored and need to be stimulated and challenged will sometimes create chaos, problems, and become disruptive. It is important to have children doing the things they like to do to feel confident and esteemed. It is crucial to hook them into something of their interest and capabilities. Kids will find other ways to create this outlet and it may not be a positive choice, such as conduct disorders, drugs, truancy, theft, gangs, aggression towards animals, destruction of property, etc. Help your children make the right choices – give children **choices**. It is very important to involve your child in a successful plan to be part of the equation to equal success. Parents and educators can put together the most detailed and efficient success plan, but if the child is not in agreement it will not work. Older children do especially well with this strategy. The children learn about accountability, responsibility, and a good sense of expectations and empowerment for oneself. Use a good model and process, or your own system that works.



Let's not always try to solve our children's problems. Have your children tell you what they did wrong; have them think about what could have been done instead for a better result and solution, and have them be accountable for their behavior. Usually the child will come up with just as good or a better response, solution, or consequence for himself or herself. We want our children to become independent, responsible problem-solvers, not irrational and not reactive problem creators. They need to learn how to not rely on us for the answers, but how to become empowered, esteemed, and confident with their choices and decisions.

As a reminder, Armenta Learning Academy is always available to assist with counseling, mentoring, coaching, and educational expertise for both you and your children. Inquire within for an appointment with Ms. Julie M. Armenta, M., the educational specialist and director of Armenta Learning Academy.



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