

DEALING WITH YOUR CHILD'S CHALLENGING BEHAVIORS

You may have recently been watching some of the “reality” shows on TV about nannies. They make guidance and discipline of young children look so easy. But of course, as you well know, that’s not always true. Guiding and disciplining young children is a complex business that takes skill and focused effort – a lot to ask of you before, during or after a hard day’s work. It’s even more complicated when you add multiple siblings of different ages who all need to be handled differently – all at the same time!

Following are some important foundational tips:

1. No matter what – stay calm! See if you can find a way to not take your child’s “bad” behaviors personally. Remember that whatever you are seeing – yelling, name-calling, melt-downs, whatever – they are just behaviors, nothing more.

Underneath those “bad” behaviors hides the soul of your child, waiting for a loving adult to uncover what’s hiding and help it express itself in the ways it so desperately wants to. Respond to your child’s behaviors with your own consistently calm, firm and loving behaviors time and again.

2. Many of the struggles you face with your child are about power. Your child is just starting to figure out that he/she has some power in this world and the first and best place to test it out is on you. Make sure you are giving your child opportunities to experience power throughout each day, like choosing which shirt to wear or which toy to clean up first.

If and when a struggle starts, remember that you, the adult, are the one who must exert power. Be firm. Don’t repeat yourself. Your child heard you the first time. Be swift in delivering a consequence (no television, no Game Boy®, hopefully something connected to the cause of the problem that started the whole mess).

3. It is also critical that you know that your behaviors may be a result of your own unmet needs, perhaps from your childhood. Make sure you honestly reflect on which buttons your child has figured out how to push and why those buttons are there for you in the first place. The greatest gift you can give your child is to heal your own wounds. If you don’t, you may inadvertently wound the one you love most – your child.
4. Most importantly – remember that whenever you embark on a new strategy designed to change your child’s behaviors it is likely that things will get worse before they get better. Trust the possibility that a different method might work and give your child time to test it out. And test they will!

As they say, “The only way out is through” and once your new relationship with your child is firmly established, you will see that both you and your child are fully capable of being the best you can be.