

# Parenting Strategies for Managing Challenging Behaviour

By Dan Jones

The idea of these strategies is to avoid the situation leading to aggression.

## *Offering support, when someone is beginning to get frustrated*

Often when your child is beginning to get frustrated it can help to offer support. Offering support can make them feel calmer as they can feel that you are working with them not against them.

When you offer support it is best to try to both sit down to talk. This will help to calm the situation down, as sitting is a calming action whereas standing is more active. You can start by feeding back what your child says to show that you understand them. If what you feed back is wrong then they have the opportunity to correct you.

## *Distraction*

Distraction is a useful way of stopping the build up of aggression. Everyone has had the experience of having something on their mind that they are about to say and just as they go to say it someone cuts in and says something else or they say something like 'hang on a minute I've just got to do this'. And when they ask you what you wanted to say you find that you have forgotten.

To use distraction effectively it works best to be a non-threatening distraction and one that your child would be happy to accept. It also works best if you do it by timing an interruption well.

## *Reassurance that you will do what you can*

Offering reassurance to someone that is becoming aggressive is a useful technique for seeming to come alongside your child and show that you will do your best to help them sort out their situation.

Remember though that you don't want to take away any of their developmental opportunities. You only want to do what you can based on what your child says they would like you to help them with.

Many parents get told something by their child and respond by trying to solve the problem even though the child hasn't asked for that. You want to give them the chance to do what they can and only help in the areas they want help with. Obviously this will vary depending on the child's understanding of a situation.

For example; if a child comes home from school saying they were bullied many parents respond by trying to sort it out, contacting other parents, teachers etc. Yet the child

hasn't asked for this. So although the parents are doing all this because they love their children they are taking away opportunities for the child to learn for themselves.

It may be that the child was bullied but that by the end of the day they get on fine with the other child and that by rushing in there to sort out the situation it has a negative impact. It is more important to just ask 'is there anything I can do to help?' or 'how would you like me to help?'

Often even if you fail to resolve the situation or are unable to help the fact that they have seen that you tried your best will lead to your child being grateful for your help.

### ***Planned ignoring like walking away with a reason***

When someone is angry they are very focused and one-minded. This means that they don't always listen or see alternative points of view. If you take yourself out of a situation leaving your child alone in the situation they have no one to be angry with and so they often will begin to calm down.

When they are calm enough they will be more likely to listen to what you have to say.

Planned ignoring is a key strategy to use whether it is saying 'I'm just going to the other room to give you time to calm down. I'll come back in five minutes to see how calm you are' or whether you say something like 'I've just got to make a quick call then I'll be straight back. It should only take about five minutes' or 'When you have calmed down so that we can talk about this then I will talk with you'

With children and young people it is important that you make them aware that you will talk to them when they talk to you calmly and not when they are shouting, swearing and demanding from you. There are times when you may let swearing slide a little for example when they have received bad news and are angry and not in control of what they are saying.

If you try to stop them swearing then it won't work. You need to show you are listening and use other strategies and when they have calmed enough to respond to you then you can mention not swearing.

Planned ignoring based on the behaviour when the child or young person is in a high state of anger is less likely to work than giving an excuse to temporarily remove yourself from the situation.

It is important to make sure that the child still feels you care. Planned ignoring isn't the same as just ignoring. You are conveying the message that you want to talk with the child and help them and that you care about them, while at the same time letting them know that some behaviour is acceptable and other behaviour isn't.

### ***Removing an audience***

Removing an audience helps to calm down situations with young people and children. With children and young people if there is an audience they are more likely to play up to it so by removing the audience they are likely to calm down more.

Removing the audience can be done by having everyone moving from the situation. It could be by saying something like 'why don't we go to the lounge and get ready to watch the film'.

Or you can move your child to a different room. To do this you could just simply suggest something like, 'why don't we move to the other room. It's a little quieter in there so we can talk properly', or 'why don't we go just round the corner to get out of the noise'.

### *Offering some time to calm down*

Sometimes it can be useful to offer some time to someone to allow them to calm down before talking with them. When people calm down they begin to see more rationally.

If you are going to offer time for someone to calm down remember to say how long you will be away while they are calming or where they can find you when they are calmer.

This is a technique that works well for children. Giving them time to calm down before you will talk with them.

It could be that you suggest they sit in a room perhaps like the dining room to calm down.

It is important with children or young people not to send them to their own room if possible because they will build the association between being anxious or aggressive and being in their room.

You want them to associate calming and sleeping with their own bedroom.

### *Choices*

Whenever you create choices in your child's mind you start breaking down any anger. This is because when they are angry they are in a focused state of mind and only see black and white. By creating choices in their mind you start creating greys this brings the rational part of the mind back into play which starts to dissolve the anger.

Choices often aren't readily taken on board when offered to someone that is highly aggressive but it does work well to start to prevent anger from continually escalating.

You want to make sure that there are positive choices that can be taken and preferably options that allow your child to not lose face or feel they had to back down.

### *Negotiating*

Another strategy is negotiating with your child before they become too aggressive. Being prepared to perhaps compromise like rather than demand that your child cleans their room and have them continue to argue and get more aggressive about not wanting to, you could offer to help them.

### *Setting boundaries*

By having boundaries in place that are all agreed and stuck to by the whole family the children know what they can and can't do. If there have been no boundaries in place then to start with the children may become more challenging as they try to fight against the new boundaries to find out if they will be maintained.

After a short period of time the children will be used to the boundaries and will accept them. Without boundaries children may be difficult at bedtimes and not settle they may ignore everything that they are told. It is important that any response to broken boundaries doesn't remove choices.

### ***Changing the parent***

Sometimes your child being aggressive may be aiming all of their anger at one parent. In these situations it can be useful to find a way of changing to the other parent dealing with the behaviour.

This also works to cause a little distraction. It can also work using other adults like a Grandparent or a close friend or relative.

### ***Maintaining or setting routines***

Routines are important for aiding stability. When people don't have a set routine they can begin to feel uncomfortable because they feel a lack of security and structure. With children especially they are much calmer when they receive meals at regular times and get woken and go to bed at regular times.

If they have ADHD or Asperger's or OCD they are more likely to behave better when there is a clear set routine.

By creating regular routines you will minimise anger build up. Without a clear routine there can be an increased feeling of uncertainty which can lead to increased anger and frustration.