



Grit it Out or Get a Grip?

Mental Health & Children Series



■ by Janet Irvine, PsyD, Licensed Clinical Psychologist & Clinical Coordinator

Many adults who come into my office ask, “Do you work with kids, too?” A dollhouse, blocks, and pictures on my door are give-aways that I do. Many ask, “Why would a child need therapy?”

Children and adolescents face difficulties growing up. From the terrible twos to late adolescence, kids seek out independence and a sense of identity. It is typical to have children challenge a parent, complain about everything, struggle with bullying and peers, strain under the pressures of school, and engage in busy routines with a bit of bored tolerance. Cleaning up their rooms, doing homework and pitching in to do chores are common complaints, and kids who are even seen with their parents by friends or classmates can be embarrassed or humiliated!

Despite well-intentioned parenting and comments that “it’s just normal”, there are times when such behaviors become intolerable and contribute to an inordinate amount of family stress. Giving in to children, cajoling, rationalizing and even promising excessive rewards may be counter-productive. Overly harsh threats and punishments may serve to simply make things worse.

While difficulties in parent-child relationships are part of growing up, some behaviors could be a red flag, such as:

- Anger/temper/tantrums
- Fighting with siblings or at school
- Sadness and comments such as “no one likes me” or “I wish I weren’t alive.”
- Driven, compulsive and overly-anxious concern about doing well in school
- Bed wetting
- Poor sleep or insomnia
- Frequent crying
- Lack of respect
- Lack of cooperation
- Shyness or withdrawal
- Difficulty with concentration
- Perfectionism
- Problems with friends
- Frequent reports from school for misbehavior
- Sudden changes in behavior



While all of these behaviors occur over the life span, how much is too much depends on the intensity of the behavior, frequency of the behavior, and the amount of stress it creates for the rest of the family.

It is a complex and complicated process to figure out just why certain behaviors occur. Most harried parents will ask, “Why did you do that?” and often get a shrug of the shoulders or an “I don’t know.” This then creates more frustration on both sides and can even increase behaviors you don’t want. Most of the time kids really don’t know why they do what they do!

If you’re worried or concerned for more than several months, it may be time to call a professional and discuss, evaluate and problem solve. It works! ■



Janet Irvine enjoys working with children and families in our Orland Park location.

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