

WHEN TO SEEK PARENTING SUPPORT?



Often parents wonder when they should seek help for aggressive and disruptive behaviors. Parents often struggle to determine what is “abnormal” behavior and what is developmentally appropriate. Many times, it is hard to determine when to seek additional parenting support because parents are often under pressure to think that they “should know” how to manage their child’s behavior on their own. Just as there are multiple reasons why a child may be acting out, finding a solution to the behavior may not be so clear cut either. It is never too early to seek additional parenting support. If you are among the MANY parents who have questions about your child’s behavior and if you find yourself wondering if a therapist can help, here are a few points to consider:

- How old is your child? Are they engaging in behaviors that are different than their same age peers? Have other parents, daycare providers, or teachers spoken to you regularly about your child’s behavior? Are they hurting other children often (e.g., biting, hitting, etc.)?
- Do you find yourself saying, “nothing works, I’ve tried everything?” Do you feel your parenting skills are limited? Have you considered or engaged in physical aggression with your child in moments of complete frustration? Do you feel unable to manage your child’s behaviors at home or in public?
- Has your child been identified by others as having disruptive behaviors, extreme and dangerous behavior, and/or frequent and uncontrollable tantruming? Has your child been abused? Has your child been identified as having a developmental disability or an Autism Spectrum Disorder and they are not receiving services? Does your child have a chronic illness or significant medical condition?

If you have answered yes to any of the above statements, additional parenting support and mental health services can help and should be considered. It is time to talk to someone, as these can be situations that need specialized support.

Resources

McNeil, C. & Hembree-Kigin, T. (2010). *Parent-Child Interaction Therapy*, 2nd Ed., Springer: New York, NY.

<https://www.aap.org/en-us/about-the-aap/aap-press-room/Pages/American-Academy-of-Pediatrics-Supports-Childhood-Sleep-Guidelines.aspx>

<https://www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-lifestyle/childrens-health/in-depth/children-and-tv/art-20047952>

Recommended Resources

- Child Mind Institute: <https://childmind.org>
- Mental Health.gov: <https://www.mentalhealth.gov>
- UC Davis Parent Child Interaction Therapy Training Center: <https://pcit.ucdavis.edu/>

TIPS FOR PARENTS

What Can I Do Before I call a Therapist?

- Don't be afraid to talk to other parents and find emotional support. You are not alone, and perhaps other parents can share effective techniques that you have not yet tried.
- Pay attention to your child's eating, sleeping, and screen-time habits. These factors often have a significant impact on your child's behavior. For instance, try to make sure your child is eating a healthy and balanced meal throughout the day and make sure your child is getting enough sleep for their age (see guidelines below):
 - Infants 4 months to 12 months should sleep 12 to 16 hours per 24 hours (including naps) on a regular basis to promote optimal health.
 - Children 1 to 2 years of age should sleep 11 to 14 hours per 24 hours (including naps) on a regular basis to promote optimal health.
 - Children 3 to 5 years of age should sleep 10 to 13 hours per 24 hours (including naps) on a regular basis to promote optimal health.
 - Children 6 to 12 years of age should sleep 9 to 12 hours per 24 hours on a regular basis to promote optimal health.
 - Teenagers 13 to 18 years of age should sleep 8 to 10 hours per 24 hours on a regular basis to promote optimal health.

Finally, make sure that the amount of screen time is appropriate for your child's age. Currently it is recommended that if your child is between the ages of 2 to 5 years-old, no more than one-hour of high-quality programming is recommended. For children older than five, reduce the amount of screen time if your child is having a difficult time transitioning away from the screen.

- Remember, discipline strategies are not the same as punishments; don't be afraid to discipline but chose strategies that are developmentally appropriate! As kids grow and change, discipline strategies should change too! For younger children, try different discipline techniques such as ignoring certain behaviors, removing privileges, giving children choices when appropriate, and time-outs. For older kids, try giving natural consequences for bad behavior (ex: until you pick up your room, there will be no telephone) and removing privileges.
- Rather than focusing on bad behaviors, try to identify at least two good things your child does each day and praise them for the good behaviors. You may find that your child is motivated by praise. Set-up ways that they can earn rewards with good behavior rather than losing privileges or toys.
- Model the type of behavior you want to see in your child and treat them the way you would want to be treated when you do something wrong. Consider how you respond to anger; does your child respond the same way?
- When your child is calm, talk to them about their behavior and let them know the consequences of their behavior BEFORE they misbehave. Finally, follow-through with any consequences you have discussed.