

Behavioural Challenges of School-Aged Children

Is your child's behaviour socially inappropriate or disruptive?

Does your child have difficulty getting along or have problems at home, school, or with friends?

This information is intended to help parents to begin to understand their child's needs and behaviours and suggest ways to help.



Define the Challenge

Take some time to think about the behaviours that are causing challenges:

- What is the challenging behaviour(s)?
Be specific; describe it.
- Where does this behaviour occur?
In the family environment? The school? Both? Everywhere?
- Under what circumstances does it happen? When? With whom?
- How do others see this situation— for example, the teacher / the other parent?
- Write down this information and take it with you when you meet with others.

If the challenges are not specific to a particular situation, there may be a cause that requires more specialized support.

Consider the Following Possible Causes

All of the following can influence a child's behaviour:

- Medical conditions.
- Hearing difficulties.
- Vision difficulties.
- Family or school environment.
- Learning difficulties.
- Developmental differences
- Speech & language delays.

What Can You Do Right Now?

You don't have to do everything at once but start somewhere. Consider some of the following:

- Focus on improving one aspect of your relationship with your child:
 - Notice the positive things your child does every day with words, a smile, a wink, or a hug.
 - Spend special time alone with your child (10-15 minutes) to play, go for a bike ride or car ride, have a snack, or read a book together.
- Develop a plan to deal with bedtime or to help your child get organized to be at school on time.
- Decide on routines, rules, and consequences for misbehaviour ahead of time, and tell your child so they know what to expect.
- Work cooperatively with others in your child's environment:
 - Arrange to meet with your child's teacher about your concerns, even if the teacher has not mentioned any problems. Talk about how you can work together to help your child.
 - When you can, participate in your child's activities and be supportive, for example, attend hockey games, take your turn to volunteer for school outings or for car pools.
 - Think about how you can help others understand your child's needs.
- Deal with challenging behaviours by "choosing your battles". Focus only on one or two challenges at a time. For those battles you choose to address, try the following:
 - Be clear and consistent when you deal with challenging behaviours; not just the first or second time, but over and over and over again.
 - Tell the child what you want them to do. Make sure you have eye contact and give simple instructions one at a time. Have the child repeat the instructions.
 - Give the child one reminder about what you want them to do.
 - If necessary, warn the child once by reminding them what will happen if they do not do what you asked.
 - Follow through, immediately, with what you said you would do.
 - Let your child know when they are doing what you asked and praise them

Parent Stress

You may often feel isolated, frustrated and guilty. It's important to do something to take care of your feelings, even temporarily. In order to be able to care for others, you need to also take care of yourself. This may not always seem possible, but it is essential to your child's wellbeing.

- Take care of your physical health – take a walk with a neighbor, take a relaxing bath, have a good meal.
- Try to get someone to take over for you so you can have time out, away from the children – coffee with a friend, a trip to the library, a movie, even a trip to the grocery store by yourself!
- Join a support group – you are not the only parent whose child is having difficulty. Talking with other parents and finding out how they cope can be very reassuring.
- Learn as much as possible about relaxation and stress management. Ask a doctor or a health professional to recommend a stress management or relaxation class. It may offer you a way to step back when your child reacts inappropriately.



Remember:

- Blaming is not helpful; action is. Do not blame your child. They might not know what they are doing wrong and how to correct it.
- It's ok to be a "squeaky wheel". You need to be the advocate for your child.

Learn More About How to Address These Challenges Through:

- Books, videos, and audiotapes on general parenting and/or specific challenges your child may have.
- Workshops on parenting, anger management, social skills, communication or organizational skills for yourself or your child.
- Support groups.

Where to Find Information and Support?

- Call Health Link Alberta at 811 for information and advice 24 hours a day.
- The public library; or some hospital health units or clinics have libraries; Alberta Health Services has resource centres in some hospitals.
- Call 211 Edmonton at 211 for information on social, health, and government services such as counselling, support groups, and skills workshops.
- 211 Edmonton can also provide information on parenting classes including the free Triple P Positive Parenting Program.

Talk to a Professional about Your Concerns.

You can find professionals who specialize in child behaviour through:

- Your Physician/Pediatrician.
- Health Link Alberta: Call 811 for more information.
- Community Health Nurse at the school.
- School Counsellor / Psychologist.
- Parent Link Centres: Call 211 for more information.
- Family Resource Centres: Call 211 for more information.

For More Information

For health advice and information 24 hours a day, seven days a week, call Health Link Alberta at 811 or outside the local Edmonton calling area, call toll-free 1-866-408-LINK (5465).

