

Child and Youth Mental Health Challenging Behaviours

What is the Issue?

Almost all children will be difficult or demanding at times. Challenging or disruptive behaviours are those which persist or become so severe that they cause major problems for families or communities.

Excessive, disruptive or aggressive behaviour at any age should be taken seriously. It should not be dismissed as a "phase" or something they will "grow out of". Such behaviour in children and adolescents may begin with frequent loss of temper, irritability, impulsive behaviour, or becoming easily frustrated.

When a parent or other adult in frequent contact with the child is concerned, contact the general practitioner, community health centre, school counsellor, guidance officer or school health nurse. Health professionals can help parents identify problems and ways to help their child cope with difficulties in positive ways. If more specialised assessment or intervention is required, general practitioners, schools or other health professionals can make a referral to a Child and Youth Mental Health Service (CYMHS).

Aggressive behaviour may include:

- Explosive temper tantrums;
- Physical aggression;
- Fighting, threats or attempts to hurt others;
- Use of weapons;
- Cruelty towards family pets or other animals;
- Intentional destruction of property or vandalism.

Discipline should be about learning and should not be harsh or unfair. Physical punishment will often make children's behaviour even more difficult. Seeing or hearing domestic violence can affect children and adolescents as much as being assaulted. Violent television or video games may also affect vulnerable young children. Violence often leads to violence.

Tantrums

Tantrums happen when children feel frustrated or stressed. Occasional tantrums are a normal stage of development in young children. Parents should be concerned if tantrums become extreme or constant.

Some things parents can do to help children get over tantrums are:

- Spend regular and relaxed time with them;
- Let them know you notice the good things they do, and
- See if there are other stresses affecting the child such as starting childcare, new baby, parents arguing.

Behavioural problems may affect a child or adolescent's ability to solve problems, cope with life stresses, and enjoy normal activities with their family and friends. Their schooling may also be disrupted. Disruptive behaviour can make it difficult for children to form friendships and can interfere with family relationships. Without treatment, children and young people may go on to have problems at school, with the law, in employment and in bringing up families of their own.

Positive Parenting Programs (Triple P)

QLD is developing a statewide approach to implementing parenting programs. These can reduce disruptive behaviours in pre-school and primary school age children. Programs such as the Triple P (the Positive Parenting Program) provide information and counselling to increase parenting skills and satisfaction and promote family harmony.

These programs show parents how to manage their children's behaviour in constructive ways. Parents are encouraged to take care of their own needs and develop ways to make time for themselves and their partners. For more information on Triple P call your local Child Health Clinic or talk with your Youth Health Nurse.

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Schools

Schools can be an important source of support for children or young people with difficulties. The structure of school life and the ongoing professional support of a teacher or school counsellor may help children or young people cope.

A number of programs are available across Queensland. Schools know the dangers of bullying and harassment. They have many resources to help them develop prevention programs.

Where to get help:

- Your child's general practitioner, teacher, guidance officer, school counsellor or school health nurse.
- Community Health Centre.
- If more specialised assessment or intervention is required, general practitioners, schools or other health professionals can make a referral to a Child and Youth Mental Health Service (CYMHS) – for local clinics, look under Health in the White Pages telephone directory.
- Your general practitioner may refer you to other specialists who work with children and adolescents such as a private psychiatrist, psychologist or paediatrician.
- Triple P Positive Parenting Program - Parenting and Family Support Centre Phone: (07) 3365 7290.

Health Information Service

For information on a range of health services in Brisbane and South East Queensland.

Phone: (07) 3236 4833

Child Health Line

A 24 hour telephone information and advisory service, staffed by child and youth health registered nurses who provide families across Queensland with information about child and youth health issues, including positive parenting practices. Nurses also provide information about local community health services for families.

Available 24 hours, 7 days per week.

Ph: (07) 3862 2333 or

1800 177 279 (outside Brisbane Metropolitan Area)

Adapted from NSW Health Brochure

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