

Managing Difficult Behavior in Children and Adolescents

Parenting children or adolescents, who refuse to be parented, presents families with incredible challenges. Each day begins with the parents wondering what sort of traumatic problem they will need to manage today. On the other hand, the child or adolescent often has similar feelings, but is unsure of how to correct the course they are taking.

Many times the addition of a neutral party, such as a psychiatrist, professional counselor, or psychotherapist, can be a beginning toward improving parent/child relationships. Having a neutral party helps to re-establish the balance necessary in a parent/child relationship. A therapist can help negotiate many of the difficult problems that are going on that families have not been able to handle on their own.

Numerous issues need to be explored in order to understand the nature and source of children and adolescent's negative behaviors. They include:

- Is the behavior within the child's/adolescent's control, or is it due to emotional or other issues? (i.e., depression or anxiety, drug or alcohol abuse, ADHD, learning disabilities)
- Does the behavior occur only at home, only at school, only in the community or is it occurring in all places and all situations? If the behavior only occurs in one place, we need to look at what is different in other places in order to understand the circumstances.
- Are we listening to our child/adolescent?
- Who contributes to or benefits from the child/adolescent's behavior? (reinforcement, enabling, inconsistent expectations, changing rules/expectations)
- Are we positive in our approach to problem-solving or do we focus on negatives more than we do on positives?
- Do parents/children/adolescents agree on the definition of success?
- Can all parties compromise and understand the other's position? Which issues are negotiable and which issues are not negotiable?

Professionals are able to help families through these difficult situations by developing behavior management programs, providing education to parents/children/adolescents, helping all parties to better understand each other's needs and desires, improving communication and recognizing that communication is a two-way street, having consistent expectations and consistent consequences, learning to negotiate fairly, equally and positively.

In the event that individual therapy services are not helpful or not able to solve family issues, there are many community-based services available in Lancaster County. These services include family-based in-home services and wrap-around services which are available to many Lancaster County families.

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