

Hot Topics for Parents Do You Have Difficult Child?

Recently Educational Resource Services through a grant provided by the Association of Community Mental Health conducted a survey of 1000 parents of “difficult children. The findings suggested that children identified as “difficult” exhibit specific behavior characteristics. The primary behaviors associated with difficult children were identified as:

- 1. Complaining: Parents indicate that difficult children tend to whine, pout, sulk, and do not seem to be satisfied.**
- 2. Interruptive: Parents indicate that difficult children seem to be impatient, unable to wait their turn in games or activities. They tend to break into conversations, especially when the adult is busy doing something or helping another child.**
- 3. Intrusive: Difficult children tend to lack a basic respect for privacy. They invade privacy by pushing their way into conversations and will put their hands on others, even when they have been told repeatedly that touching others is inappropriate.**
- 4. Verbally Angry: Parents report that difficult children tend to express a great deal of verbal anger and it is not unusual for these children to call people names, swear, or yell.**

5. **Poor Manners:** Difficult children tend to exhibit a host of poor manners. Their behaviors are often unacceptable at the lunch or dinner table, they can be pushy, will talk back, and will take food from other children, tease and taunt others, and are generally rude.
6. **Selfish:** Difficult children tend to be very egocentric. They often notice what others have and what they do not have. They will frequently say “life isn’t fair” and they have difficulty sharing toys with friends or siblings.
7. **Wild Behavior:** Wild behavior is another identified trait of difficult children. These children are easily over stimulated and their behavior is often out of bounds. It is almost as if their motor is “revved up” and they just cannot stop. If left unattended, the difficult child may become destructive, throwing or breaking things.
8. **Impulsive:** The difficult child tends to be impulsive. He or she will often react before considering the consequences of the behavior and can become upset over small things. Once the behavior has started it is difficult to stop.
9. **Physical Aggression:** It is not unusual for difficult children to exhibit physical aggression toward classmates, siblings, teachers, and even parents. They often push, kick, hit, bite, and shove peers and adults.

10. **Temper Tantrums:** Another defining characteristic that was identified in the survey research is the manner in which difficult children experience temper tantrums. Their tantrums are not about getting what they want or gaining attention, it is more out of control. Respondents reported that the temper tantrums of these difficult children are often intense, lasting up to twenty-five minutes. It is often difficult to identify what specific events caused the tantrum.
11. **Low Sensory Threshold:** What appears insignificant to most people can be extremely upsetting to these children. It appears that there is little one can do to stop the temper tantrum of a difficult child once it is full-blown. One participant noted that it is like a snowball rolling down a hill. It will stop when it eventually runs out of gas. This suggests that the only thing that will stop a temper tantrum is for it to run its course.

Follow up with a small sampling of those responding to the initial survey asked, "What happens to cause the tantrum to stop?" The overwhelming response was that usually the child becomes so exhausted emotionally and physically that he falls asleep for fifteen or twenty minutes. When he wakes up he runs off to play as if nothing happened. It is apparent that during this process no learning or replacement behavior has taken place. The respondents report that one can be assured that the tantrum will occur again.