



Family First

A special supplement on Family Living
from the Orangeville Banner

Difficult Behaviour... Bright Future

One of the hardest parts about parenting is dealing with children's difficult behaviour or traits: defiant, stubborn, dramatic, nosy, distracted, unpredictable. The list is long. Not only do some of these push our buttons (think five-year old stamping feet and yelling, "No!" about the reasonable request to put on boots to go out in the snow), but they make us worry. What kind of an adult will this child grow into if we don't "fix" this behaviour now?

Maybe a great one.

"Difficult" behaviour is a matter of perspective. A trait that is labeled as "difficult" in a child can be seen as admirable in an adult. Martin Luther King Jr. was a charismatic leader who challenged authority. Terry Fox was strong-willed and determined. Jim Carrey...well, he kind of still is the class clown. They didn't succeed in spite of these traits. They succeeded because of them.

So maybe the question isn't how to "fix" the child's behaviour, but how to teach children to channel these traits in positive ways. We can help by viewing them and labeling them in a positive light.

Don't think in terms of:

Nosy Curious, Stubborn, Argumentative, Unpredictable, Dramatic.

Try this:

Curious, Persistent, Assertive, Spontaneous, Enthusiastic.

Michael Reist, best-selling author and recognized

authority on the needs of children, writes, "'Difficult' is in the eyes of the beholder. A difficult child is not a problem to be solved but a mystery to be understood." He suggests looking into the deeper meaning behind the child's behaviour. When children say, "No!" or play catch in the house or throw a tantrum or any of those other things that upset us as parents, what are they really telling us?

- Give me choices. Set boundaries, and let them have more freedom and control within those.

- I'm bored. Provide opportunities for kids to explore their interests and creativity: craft supplies, books (including non-fiction, how-to), musical instruments, building toys, etc.

- I have energy to burn. Get moving. Go to the park or, if the weather doesn't cooperate, find an indoor playground or have a dance party.

- I need attention. Don't wait for children to act up to give them attention. Play games with them, do chores side by side, go for walks together. As Reist says, "You cannot spoil a child with love."

- I don't feel understood. Sometimes, kids feel like nobody really gets them. Take the time to listen to your child and nurture your relationship—it's the most important investment you can make.

Want to hear more?

Every spring and fall, Dufferin Parent Support Network (DPSN) offers several free workshops to help you devel-

op your parenting skills. These workshops focus on understanding your child's behaviour so that you are better able to respond appropriately and effectively. They foster stronger relationships through communication skills, mutual respect, and cooperation.

This spring's lineup features Good Discipline, Good Kids; Let's Talk Communication; Positive Parenting from Separate Homes; and Stress Management. These workshops help parents and caregivers build skills, share ideas and resources, and network with other parents.

In addition, DPSN is also offering a special presentation with Michael Reist, "Difficult Child...Bright Future" on Wednesday, April 26 at Orangeville District Secondary School. A classroom teacher for over thirty years, Michael now works in private practice where he is a mentor to young people and their parents. He specializes in working with children who face challenges in school and at home due to issues around attention, control, high sensitivity, sensory processing and cognitive profiles that do not "fit" within the school environment.

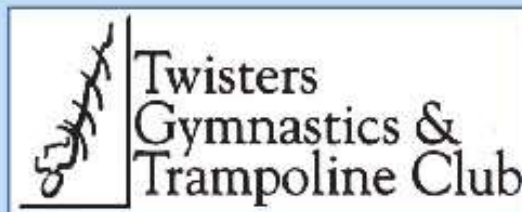
When you are able to better understand your children's behaviour and see how their "difficult" traits will benefit them in the future, you can help them learn to develop their strengths in positive and productive ways. While parenting will still be a challenge, you will both feel better about the journey.

This column was provided by the Dufferin Parent Support Network. For more info go to www.dpsn.ca.

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