

Helping Your Challenging Child A Caregiver Training Program

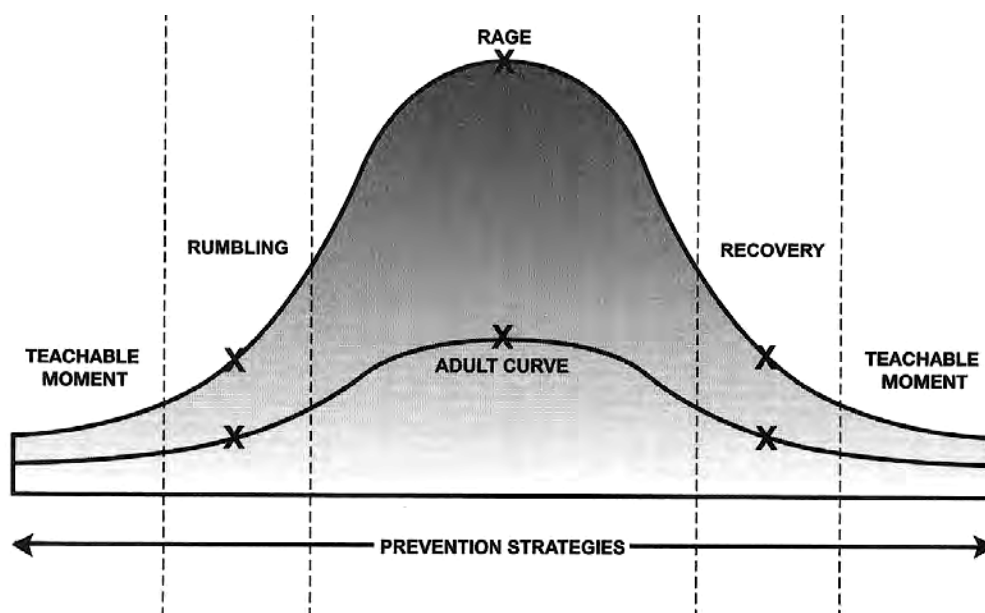
Overview

Some children are more challenging than others. When home or daycare life is difficult, caregivers might blame the child. More often, they blame themselves. But a challenging child is nobody's fault. This ten session program is designed to help parents and caregivers understand where challenging behavior comes from and what to do about it.

Ross Greene's Phases to Explosion

1. Phase I - is when there is an environmental demand for the child to shift gears. The child experiences frustration. This early phase of the inflexible, explosive episode is termed "*vaporlock*," or "*brainlock*," or "*short circuiting*." It represents the beginning of a breakdown in rational thinking.
2. Phase II - represents a *crossroads* where we can either see maintenance of good communication and resolution of the crisis, or a further deterioration in the child's reasoning abilities.
3. Phase III - is *meltdown*. This represents a disintegrative rage or neural hijacking. Intervention at this point is never productive. "Inflexibility plus inflexibility" leads to further meltdown.

Brenda Smith Myles' Rage Cycle



Russell Barkley's Power Struggles

In the all-too-familiar power struggle, the parent or caregiver gives a command. The child resists. The caregiver repeats the command. The child defies. The caregiver increases the intensity of the command, sometimes adding a threat: "If you don't (*command*), then I'll have to (*threat*)!" The child digs in. Back and forth they go with escalating volleys of intensity and counter-intensity.

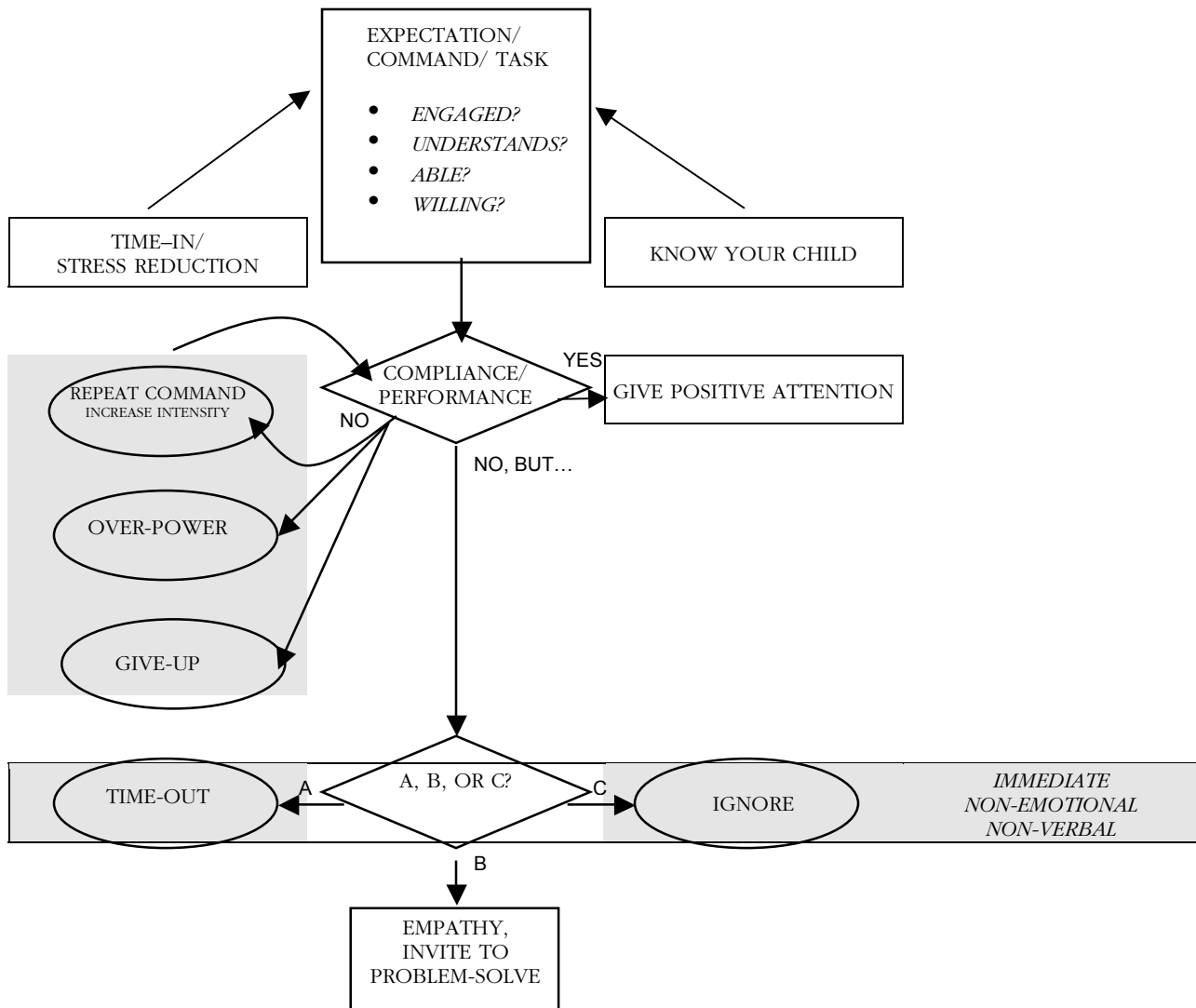
Power struggles can only end in one of two ways - and neither is desirable. Caregivers can *overpower* the child, verbally, emotionally, or physically. This increases mutual animosity and leaves everyone feeling bad - certainly not the kind of relationship caregivers would like to have. Or, when overpowering is just not worth it, caregivers can simply *give-up*. The caregiver drops the command. Peace is restored but at a cost. The caregiver had reasonable expectations, but they are now lowered. Whether the caregiver overpowers or gives-up, the child learns nothing worthwhile and the caregiver has lost some of the child's respect.

Reactive and Proactive Strategies

Instead of repeating requests and getting sucked into power struggles, caregivers have three better alternatives for reacting to non-compliance: 1) *time-out*, 2) *ignoring* and 3) *empathy/ collaborative problem solving*. (See Ross Greene's "ABC baskets / plans" in The Explosive Child.) Time-out is used when a significant threat to person or property makes intervention necessary. Ignoring is used when there is no such threat to safety and the misbehavior is of no consequence. An empathic response leading to collaborative problem solving is always the best of the three options, but not always possible in the heat of the moment or when the child is too immature.

Time-out is very different than over-powering, ignoring is very different than giving-up and collaborative problem solving is very different than power struggles. Time-out and ignoring are immediate, non-verbal and non-emotional. Both create physical and emotional distance. The caregiver is in control. Overpowering and giving-up occur only after a power struggle. Both lead to more prolonged, negative and intense interactions. The caregiver is out of control. Collaborative problem solving proceeds effectively only if the caregiver and child are mutually and productively engaged. If a child says no, these *reactive strategies* are to be used instead of getting caught up in a power struggle. Careful attention to effective technique is very important.

Proactive strategies complement and usually lessen the need for reactive strategies. Proactive strategies are designed to set-up the child for success and lower the chance that he or she will say no or misbehave in the first place. If proactive strategies work well, the need for reactive strategies will change for the better.



“STEPS” TO PROBLEM SOLVING:

1. **S**ay what the problem is. Define the problem situation in specific, solvable terms: Who? What? Where? When? Why? Avoid pessimistic generalizations such as “never” or “always.”
2. **T**hink about all possible solutions. Brainstorm. Make a list. Anything goes; but try to be practical and preventive. Include compromises.
3. **E**xamine each possible solution. Ask, “What would happen if...?” for each of the possible solutions.
4. **P**ick the best solution.
5. **S**ee how it works. Modify if necessary.

This ten session course is designed to help parents and caregivers to help their challenging children.

- Session 1: Overview and Know Your Child
- Session 2: Time-in
- Session 3: Engagement and Understanding
- Session 4: Motivation through Positive Attention for Compliance
- Session 5: Self-motivation and Learning from Experience
- Session 6: Motivation through Rewards
- Session 7: Time-out and Ignoring
- Session 8: Empathy
- Session 9: Problem Solving
- Session 10: Ability, Accommodations and Interventions

The concepts and strategies presented in this course are not original; rather, built upon the work of many professionals and the shared experience of many more parents. The content of these sessions is summarized graphically on page 3. At the first session, parents and caregivers should complete the problem inventory on page 5 to identify their child's specific behavioral targets. At the last session, parents and caregivers will be asked to complete the problem inventory again to assess progress.

Sources:

- Ross Greene, [The Explosive Child](#)
- Russell Barkley, [Defiant Children](#)
- Stella Chess and Alexander Thomas, [Know Your Child](#)
- Martin Seligman, [The Optimistic Child](#)
- Howard Glassman, [Transforming the Difficult Child](#)
- Brooks and Goldstein, [Raising Resilient Children](#)
- Daniel Goleman, [Emotional Intelligence](#) and [Social Intelligence](#)
- Mel Levine, [A Mind at a Time](#)
- Stanley Greenspan, [The Challenging Child](#)
- Stanley Turecki, [The Difficult Child](#)
- Brenda Smith Myles and Jack Southwick, [Asperger Syndrome and Difficult Moments](#)

Problem Inventory – initial assessment

Name: _____ Date: _____ Rater: _____

Circle best answer:

0= no problem; 1=little problem; 2=medium problem; 3=big problem

Problem Situations

0	1	2	3	Getting ready to go in the morning
0	1	2	3	Riding in the car
0	1	2	3	Arriving at school
0	1	2	3	During class
0	1	2	3	In school hallways/ bathrooms
0	1	2	3	Recess at school
0	1	2	3	Lunch at school
0	1	2	3	School field trips
0	1	2	3	Pick-up at school
0	1	2	3	School bus
0	1	2	3	Arriving home
0	1	2	3	Meals
0	1	2	3	Playing with other children
0	1	2	3	When visitors come
0	1	2	3	When visiting others
0	1	2	3	In public places
0	1	2	3	With Mom
0	1	2	3	With Dad
0	1	2	3	With siblings
0	1	2	3	With babysitter
0	1	2	3	Doing home-work
0	1	2	3	Doing chores
0	1	2	3	Getting ready for bed (washing, bathing, teeth-brushing, etc.)
0	1	2	3	Getting in bed

Problem Behaviors

0	1	2	3	Actively defies/ refuses to comply
0	1	2	3	Loses temper
0	1	2	3	Argues with adults
0	1	2	3	Deliberately annoys people
0	1	2	3	Blames others for his or her mistakes or misbehaviors
0	1	2	3	Is touchy or easily annoyed by others
0	1	2	3	Is angry or resentful
0	1	2	3	Is spiteful or vindictive
0	1	2	3	Bullies, threatens or intimidates others
0	1	2	3	Initiates physical fights
0	1	2	3	Lies/ "cons" to obtain goods/ favors or to avoid obligations
0	1	2	3	Skips school
0	1	2	3	Is physically cruel to people or animals
0	1	2	3	Has stolen items of nontrivial value
0	1	2	3	Deliberately destroys other's property

Other problem behaviors and situations:

0	1	2	3	_____
0	1	2	3	_____
0	1	2	3	_____
0	1	2	3	_____
0	1	2	3	_____