



RAISING
CHILDREN
CONFIDENTLY



OVER-THE-TOP BEHAVIOUR IN THE UNDER TENS

Normal Childhood
Behaviour or
Problem Behaviour?



Children in Wales is the National umbrella children's organisation in Wales, bringing organisations and individuals together to:

- Make the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child a reality in Wales
- Fight for sustainable quality services and fair shares for all children and young people
- Ensure special attention and treatment for children in need
- Give children and young people a voice

Children in Wales works in partnership with the National Children's Bureau in England and Children in Scotland, and works internationally with Eurochild and The International Forum for Child Welfare.

Children in Wales has worked in partnership with the National Family and Parenting Institute.

The National Family and Parenting Institute is an independent charity set up to enhance the value and quality of family life.

Original text by the National Family and Parenting Institute.



Llywodraeth Cynulliad Cymru
Welsh Assembly Government



National
Family &
Parenting
Institute
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Teulu a Rhieni

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Introduction



We want our children to behave well, and:

- To be polite to others
- To know how to behave in different situations
- To be able to concentrate and pay attention
- To share and to take turns
- To know how to win... and how to lose

But children often behave quite differently, and we may feel annoyed, frustrated and embarrassed. If they keep behaving in ways we find difficult, worries or doubts might begin to creep in. Is my child's behaviour over the top or is it just normal childhood boisterousness and high spirits? Has it gone too far? Has my child got behaviour problems?

This leaflet tries to show some of the differences between normal childhood behaviour and when there are more serious problems.

Parents of disabled children may face additional challenges and pressures, which cannot be addressed within this booklet. However, there are details of organisations that may be able to help in the Contacts section.



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Growing up with 'Dennis the Menace' or 'Minnie the Minx'

All children sometimes behave badly.

They:

- Have tantrums
- Shout and scream
- Hit siblings, parents, friends
- Don't do as they're told
- Break things, spill things, squash things
- Don't listen or concentrate

This is normal behaviour. Children are finding out what happens when they have a tantrum, hit another child, say rude words.

Children take risks. It is part of growing up. They take risks physically, and they take risks in behaviour. They are checking out what their parents will draw the line at, what they can and can't do. Taking risks helps them understand what is acceptable.

Parents develop their own ways of looking after their children. There is no simple recipe; it takes time for children to learn how to behave, and for parents to work out the best way of getting the best out of their child.

What makes children behave in challenging ways?

There is often a reason behind a child's behaviour; children do not usually misbehave just to upset their parents.



Some reasons might be:

- They are trying to find out what they are or are not allowed to do
- They might be upset or anxious about school
- They might feel jealous of their brother or sister
- They want their parent to watch them or listen to them

Behaviour patterns can get stuck in a spiral. Most children at some point will misbehave to get attention. If a parent is troubled, or doesn't pay much attention when children are good and quiet, some children will decide that being noisy and behaving badly is a good way of getting attention, even if it results in a telling off.

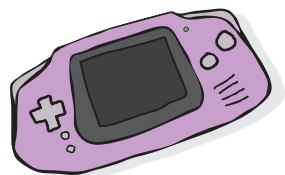
Dealing with Pressure

Trying to deal with your child's behaviour can be stressful. Sometimes it can seem like you're about to reach boiling point.

Children and parents need to find ways to reduce the pressure in the home, but in today's society, that can be much harder than before.

Why?

Children are much less likely to be allowed to play out, or to roam the streets and parks. They are more likely to be kept indoors, and spend far more time watching TV and playing on computers. But they are still energetic, and need a way of releasing their energy. If they are cooped up inside, then the pent up energy can



overspill into aggression, tantrums and difficult behaviour.

When children have the chance to play safely outside or participate in games or sports, they'll be able to use up some of this energy. If possible let the children go out and play, it is a parent's responsibility to ensure that their children play in a safe environment. When this isn't practical, you could check out the local leisure centres for sports activities and clubs.





When does 'bad' behaviour become a problem?

There is no simple answer. Most of what people consider bad behaviour remains just that – bad behaviour. Many children grow out of their misbehaviour as they get older. They learn to negotiate, to share, to control their temper, to do things which will please their parents and teachers. Children may go through patches of difficult behaviour as they grow up – but it doesn't make them difficult children. Behaviour problems can sometimes be obvious from an early age, but sometimes something can happen in a child's life which leads to their behaviour becoming more extreme. A child's emotional response to these kinds of situations can cause out of control behaviour if:

- Parents are having a hard time, and if there is conflict in the home
- The child has some learning problems
- There has been a major upset in the family, for example, a death or divorce
- The child is on certain medicines (this is rare and the doctor should be consulted)

Some signs of behaviour problems developing might be:

- Consistently refusing to do as they are asked and ignoring rules of home and perhaps school. Being defiant
- Not learning from experience, but repeating the same behaviour, no matter what the parents might do



- More than ordinary misbehaviour which is beginning to affect education
- Unpredictable behaviour, which can swing between extremes, sometimes leading to the child having few friends and feeling isolated at school and home
- Aggression and fighting
- Lying or stealing with no remorse

It is also important to consider:

- Whether it has been going on for a long time
- Whether your child is behaving in extreme ways
- When the out of control behaviour occurs – at inappropriate times

Dealing with this kind of behaviour day in, day out can put a huge strain on family and friends. Parents have reported being exhausted and at their wits end trying to cope with their children.

"Ordinary tasks of the day, like getting up, washed and dressed, or going to bed, became mountains to climb."

Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)

People are constantly referring to children as “hyper”, but children with ADHD show extremes of behaviour such as fidgeting and talking non-stop or not being able to wait their turn in games, or in a queue.

Just because a child is naughty or aggressive does not mean that they have ADHD. No child should be thought to have ADHD unless they

have been assessed by a child and adolescent psychiatrist. Once diagnosed, treatment could include a number of different options: therapy, medication, changing diet and avoiding additives.

For more information:
www.addiss.co.uk

Attention Deficit Disorder Information Service 020 8906 9068

Autism and Asperger Syndrome

Autism is a developmental disability affecting social and communication skills. Children have difficulty making sense of the world in the way most people do. Children may also have a learning difficulty. Asperger Syndrome is a form of autism that occurs at the more able-end of the spectrum. Your doctor can refer your child for diagnosis and assessment.

There is a wide range of views on the best way to treat people with autism. Approaches include behaviour programmes and exclusion diets. It is important that any treatment plans are discussed with your doctor or specialist.

For more information: www.nas.org.uk
Autism Helpline 0845 0704004

Dyspraxia

Dyspraxia is an impairment of the organisation of movement, and is sometimes called Clumsy Child Syndrome.

A child may also have problems with language, perception or thought. They may not be able to hop, jump, catch or kick a ball as well as other children,

have difficulty walking up or down stairs, be poor at dressing, have poor pencil grip or fall over frequently.

For help or more information speak to your health visitor or GP or contact:
Dyspraxia Foundation 01462 454986
www.dyspraxiafoundation.org.uk

What can parents do? Managing 'normal' bad behaviour



Parents can do a lot to help their children's behaviour through positive parenting. In fact, parents can make the difference between their child's behaviour spiralling out of control, and helping them manage everyday life in better ways.

Thinking about and understanding your children

It may seem too obvious to say, but all children are unique. Getting to know your own child, and knowing what



makes them angry or agitated can help you prevent angry or upsetting situations before they happen.

Talking and listening to your child.

Tell them you love them, and show them by smiling, cuddling and kissing them. Tell them when you are cross, or when you are not happy with their behaviour. They need to realise that it's the behaviour you don't like, not the child. Encourage your child to talk to you – help them find the words to describe how they are feeling, even if it is an uphill struggle. If they are angry, for example, at the birth of a new baby, give them an opportunity to

tell you without them worrying that you will criticise their feelings. Children who have communication difficulties may find it difficult to talk about their feelings and this may bring frustrations.

Making rules – getting it about right

Be consistent. When you say no, mean no. Keeping to this can be hard work, but if you have a few clear rules, it helps you and your children. Both parents need to agree the rules. It will help the child if both parents take a consistent approach even if they are separated. The same is true of step parents or another carer that looks after the child a lot of the time. The reality is that most parents walk the line between being "too harsh" and "too soft" every day. It may be that there are particular situations that you find hard to manage – at the supermarket? Going to bed? Or when they won't sit still and listen?

Setting up regular routines and rewarding progress a little at a time will help with these situations. For example if the supermarket is a stressful experience, start with short visits to get just a few things, with the

promise of a treat at the end for desirable behaviour. This could be playing a game when you get home or getting the paints out. With bedtime routines it's easier to settle a child if there has been a slowing down of activity towards bedtime, such as bath time, story time then sleep. When trying out a new routine or a new approach don't expect overnight results. Give it a month and then assess if you are making progress. Also try one new routine at a time and get that working before moving on to the next area to tackle!

Reward and notice good behaviour

Sometimes it is easy to ignore your child when they are playing quietly or behaving well, and only notice them when they are misbehaving. Children love their parents' attention, and if they have to behave badly to get it, they will. Give them lots of praise when they are behaving well, rather than focussing on misbehaviour. An example might be "Jane, you are cutting up your food really well," rather than "Jane, don't throw your food on the floor."

Ignoring bad behaviour

Hard though it is, ignoring the small niggles can help change a child's behaviour. If you are praising things they are doing well, and ignoring the irritating and attention seeking behaviour, your child will learn that 'bad' behaviour no longer gets them the attention they want.



Self Confidence

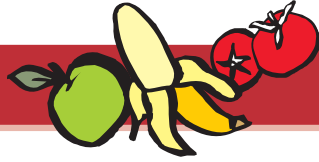
Building your child's self confidence will help them to try out new things, make friends and manage the upsets and problems they meet as they grow up:

- Finding out: Give your child the chance to face new experiences and challenges with your support.
- Love: Tell your child that you love them and show them by smiling, cuddling and kissing.
- Independence: Don't try and solve every problem for your child – sorting it out for themselves can be a boost to their confidence.
- Praise: As a general rule, try and give five times more praise than criticism.

Have realistic expectations

Children are children. They will be messy, noisy and, at times, disobedient. A two year old will behave differently from a seven or ten year old. Give them the freedom to make mistakes and take risks.

Healthy Eating



Children grow fast and are very active. Children's energy and nutrient needs are high in relation to their body size, so they need a healthy, balanced diet, which is rich in fruit, vegetables and starchy foods.

Remember to include these sorts of foods:

Calcium - milk, cheese, yogurt, soya beans and nuts, tofu and green vegetables.

Iron and protein - meat, particularly red meat and liver, fish and pulses (beans and lentils). Iron can also be found in egg yolks, dried fruit like apricots and fortified breakfast cereals.

Vitamin D is important and is found in margarine, eggs and oily fish such as mackerel, salmon and sardines.

Vitamin A is important for good vision and healthy skin, and is found in milk, margarine and butter, green vegetables, carrots and apricots.

Vitamin C is essential for health and can be found in citrus fruit (such as oranges and lemons), tomatoes and potatoes.

Drinks

Keep drinks such as fruit juices or squashes to mealtimes, and try to encourage your child to drink water or milk in between - a carton of semi-skimmed milk can be a convenient choice.

Foods to limit

Eating sweet and sticky foods frequently between meals causes dental decay. Snack foods such as cakes, biscuits, crisps, chocolate and sweets, are often high in sugar and saturated fat, and low in certain vitamins and minerals.

- Try to make sure they eat them only occasionally or in small amounts
- Help and encourage your child to clean their teeth every day
- Try picking a weekly sweet day, or choose the weekends as a time when your child is allowed to eat sweets

Watch out for salt

There's no need to add salt to your child's food. If you're buying processed foods, even those aimed at children, remember to check the information given on the labels to choose those with less salt.

Healthy weight

If you encourage your child to eat a healthy balanced diet with restricted amounts of foods containing sugar and

fat, and you encourage your child to get plenty of physical activity, they should maintain a healthy weight. But if you are concerned contact your GP for advice before starting any sort of diet.

School meals and packed lunches

As your child grows older, they will tend to follow the eating habits you've established at home. If your child has school dinners, talk to them about what they eat and try to encourage them to vary their meals. If you choose to give your child a packed lunch, sandwiches can be a good choice. To make them healthier choose wholemeal bread or rolls, or use different types of bread such as bagels, pitta or chapatti

- Lower-fat fillings include lean meats such as ham or turkey, fish, cottage cheese, edam or mozzarella, mashed banana or hummus
- Other foods that could be included are pasta, rice or potato salad, slices of deep-based pizza topped with lean meat, fish or vegetables or breadsticks or crackers

We should all be eating at least five portions of a variety of fruit and vegetables each day. So include salad and vegetable sticks (e.g. carrots, celery, cucumber, pepper) in your child's packed lunch, but go easy on the mayonnaise, which is high in fat.

Add fresh fruit or some chopped fruit salad. Dried fruit such as raisins or dried apricots are a good addition to a packed lunch.

Vegetarian diet

If you want to give your child a vegetarian diet, it's important to make sure their diet is balanced. You'll need to:

- Make sure you find an alternative to meat and fish as the main sources of protein. These could include pulses, milk, cheese and eggs
- Make sure your growing child is getting enough iron. Remember it's easier to absorb iron from our food if it's eaten with foods containing vitamin C

Some children may react to certain artificial additives in foods and drinks. This may affect their behaviour and certain colour additives in particular are avoided by many parents for their children.

For more information see www.food.gov.uk/healthiereating/ or contact the various organisations listed on the back page.



Getting some support for yourself

If you make sure you get a break to relax, or to go out, then you will be in better shape to cope with everything. Get together with other parents – children often feel happier if they have a friend for company. Don't be shy to ask for help. Nobody gets it right all the time. It can help to talk things over with family or friends, and they will often be able to help out in practical ways, too.

Parenting workshops and courses

Parenting courses are run all over the country. The courses are usually for groups of parents, who meet weekly for between six and 12 weeks, to share information and experiences, as well as learn skills to improve their parenting. They cover topics such as dealing with conflict and understanding children's behaviour. Most courses are suitable for all parents; there are some which are for parents experiencing particular problems, for example, for living with ADHD children.

For information on courses in your area contact Children in Wales on 029 2034 2434 or visit the website on www.childreninwales.org.uk. You can also call Parentline Plus on 0808 8002222, 24 hours a day if you would like to talk through your parenting concerns or visit their website on www.parentlineplus.org.uk. Home-Start UK is an organisation which offers support and practical help to

parents with children, when at least one child is under five. For more information phone 08000 68 63 68.

Ten steps when things are getting difficult:

- Stay calm
- If it is impossible to stay calm, leave the child in a safe place and leave the room for a few minutes
- When you return, talk to your child about what is going on
- Try to get them to pay attention to you
- Describe as exactly as possible what you want them to do
- Ask positively not negatively, "I want you to pick up your toys and put them away now" rather than "stop making such a mess"
- Explain the consequences of their action "If you don't tidy up there won't be anytime for a story afterwards"
- If the behaviour doesn't stop, follow up on the consequences
- After the crisis, talk with your child about what happened
- After it is all over, think about what happened, what set off the behaviour, has it happened before and what could be done differently

If the behaviour continues, and nothing you try seems to work, get help now.

More serious problems - the next steps



School

It might be worth speaking to your child's school to see if they are worried about your child's behaviour. Parents and school can work together to help the child's behaviour and ability to learn. The local authority employs educational psychologists, who can help your child.

Try visiting the *Advisory Centre for Education (ACE)* website www.ace-ed.org.uk, for advice and information on school issues, or you can visit www.bbc.co.uk/schoolgate or www.learning.wales.gov.uk/parents

Health Visitor or Doctor

If you fear that the child's behaviour is more serious, speak to the health visitor or doctor. They will be able to advise you if more specialist help is needed. If they agree that more help is needed, they might make a number of suggestions. They may suggest counselling or family therapy to help the whole family. Details of organisations offering these services are on the back page.

Your doctor may also suggest that you and your child go to a Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS). CAMHS are a partnership

between health and social services. If a child has some problems with their behaviour, they may be able to give help early to prevent more serious problems developing later on. The doctor can also refer you to a nutritionist or dietician or to an occupational therapist or speech therapist.

For more information on children and mental health visit www.youngminds.org.uk



There is a lot of information and advice available for parents, here are a few suggestions:

LEAFLETS

Encouraging better behaviour - A practical guide to positive parenting NSPCC, 2002
0808 800 5000 www.nspcc.org.uk

The Good, the Bad and the Irritating: A practical approach for parents of children who are attention seeking Dr. N. Mellor, Lucky Duck Publishing, 2000

Attending to difficult behaviour published by the Child Psychotherapy Trust **0207 284 1355**

The Behaviour Directory, listing leaflets, booklets, books etc for parents on children's behaviour and misbehaviour NFPI, 2003 **0207 424 3460**

USEFUL CONTACTS

Attention Deficit Disorder Information Service
020 8906 9068 www.addiss.co.uk

The **Royal College of Psychiatrists** have produced a very good factsheet about ADHD
0207 235 2351 www.rcpsych.ac.uk/info/mhgu/newmhgu5.htm

Adders (the UK ADHD website)
0870 950 3693 www.adders.org

Dyspraxia Foundation **01462 454968**
www.dyspraxiafoundation.org.uk

Barnardo's Cymru run several parenting projects **029 2049 3387**
www.barnardos.org.uk/wales

SNAP Cymru is an advice centre for families of children with special educational needs
029 2038 8776 www.snapcymru.org

NCH Cymru support children, young people and their families **029 2022 2127 www.nch.org.uk**

NSPCC operate a bilingual child protection helpline for children and parents **0808 100 2524** (calls are free) **www.nspcc.org.uk**

Children in Wales manages and supports the Fforwm Magu Plant which aims to support voluntary and statutory agencies to develop and improve support to parents in Wales
029 2034 2434 www.childreninwales.org.uk

British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy can give you information about therapists in your area. Send an SAE to: 35-37 Albert Square, Rugby CV21 2S9
www.bacp.co.uk

Home-Start Wales **029 2049 1181**

The Family Institute in Pontypridd, provides a therapy service to individuals, couples and families with a wide range of mental health and behavioural problems **01443 483820**

Parentline A telephone helpline open 24 hours a day for parents to talk about any worries or problems **0808 800 2222** (textphone 0800 783 6783) **www.parentlineplus.org.uk**

Gingerbread bringing lone parents together for mutual support **0800 018 4318**
www.gingerbread.co.uk

Disabled Parents Network Helpline **0870 241 0450 www.disabledparentsnetwork.org.uk**

YoungMinds Parent Information Service
0800 018 2138 www.youngminds.org.uk

Contact a Family helping families who care for children with any disability
029 2049 8001 www.cafamily.org.uk