

It's More Than Energy: Get Support Early

Young children are fascinating. They have an imagination larger than the sun and energy that could last for days. Sometimes that energy can seem like a little too much, though.

LaDonna* experienced something similar when raising her son. Her first child, her daughter, had been smooth sailing when it came to parenting her as a young child. She behaved well in school, listened to instructions and had a positive attitude. Her son was a little different, though.

Even though they were raised in the same house, LaDonna's son was filled with that extra energy. While her son was in kindergarten, LaDonna started receiving phone calls nearly every day to notify her of negative interactions and behaviors that were taking place.

"At first I just thought, 'oh he's a boy and he's young, so maybe he just has more energy'" LaDonna said. "But then we started getting phone calls every single day for minor things. Something wasn't right. We got him evaluated and started therapy."

LaDonna's son received the needed attention because she knows that children can have mental health problems. She knew that ignoring it might make it worse. "If you don't try to take control of something early, it gets harder to break once it becomes like a habit," LaDonna said.

LaDonna has been in the early childhood education field for almost 20 years. As owner of Diversity University Childcare* in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, LaDonna sometimes cares for children that present negative actions and behaviors toward themselves or others. In those cases, LaDonna gives referrals and suggestions to the child's parents with hope that they will get the child evaluated to give them the support they need.

Children are trying their best, which is why LaDonna never resorts to negative reinforcement or discipline when trying to correct unwanted interactions and behaviors. Children don't misbehave 'just because.' In most cases, the child does not understand what is being told to them and will continue with what they believe to be right. Depending on the situation, LaDonna may give an example to put the behavior in a different perspective: *If somebody did this to you, how would you feel about it?*

"A lot of the times when a kid misbehaves, people may not understand that it's because of a mental behavior. The child may not understand that what they're doing is negative or hurtful," LaDonna said. "If kids are able to overpower these behaviors, they can act in a more positive way."

Kids should be encouraged to express themselves in a more positive way instead of continuing with negative or aggressive behaviors. How you respond to those behaviors in the first place will shape how they progress into the future.



“Sometimes you feel like you use every method under the sun and the child still doesn't change their way, but that doesn't mean you stop trying. It can be a struggle, but patience and positivity can go a long way.”

**Names have been changed to protect the storyteller's identity. **

Resources

Work together to name your kids' emotions:

<https://www2.ed.gov/about/inits/ed/earlylearning/talk-read-sing/feelings-families.pdf>

Understanding Child Development Milestones:

- <https://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/actearly/milestones/index.html>
- <https://agesandstages.com/>

Local Organizations/Community Resources for Families:

- Betty Brinn Children's Museum: <https://www.bbcmkids.org/play-cloud/>
- The Parenting Network: <https://www.theparentingnetwork.org/>

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