

Not Your Normal Tantrums

[INTRODUCTION]

[0:00:06.7] ANNOUNCER: Next is Dr. Charlene Wrighton to discuss everything early education about your children or students in our new show, Ed. Talks with Dr. Char.

[EPISODE]

[0:00:21.4] CW: Hello, this is Dr. Char and I happy to talk with you again. Today's topic is, it's similar to what I've been discussing in the past about raising, you know, preschoolers, toddlers, preschoolers, helping change behavior, making sure that their behavior is appropriate. And my, my talks, my focus was basically on, on normal naughty behavior, normal. And sometimes it's not even naughty as just child exploration. It's just children, you know, pushing their borders or, or children just navigating the world and to our, to our senses it might be naughty, it might be what we don't want them to do, touching things that don't belong to them, etc. Tantruming just part of that toddler life.

But that has been normal. And, and my concern was for parents, teachers and grandparents, always my concentration that what I picture the learner, the listener on these radio shows is how to help you just, there are ways when, when you're in the educational world for a really long time, it's like talking to a parent who, you know, a parent who's parented a long time ago has grandchildren and somehow they just know how to do things because they've done it for so long and they did it well and made plenty of mistakes along the way and learn from those mistakes.

So that was my topic of the past. This topic today is definitely more serious. They're all important because, because parents, as I've said before, definitely teachers, parents, grandparents, definitely have to be the authority. They have to be the last word, the final word for safety as well as child wellbeing and child training. And so I said, you know, you must put yourself in that position.

The child must understand that position and don't feel guilty over it. It is okay for you to be the boss. So this topic is different in that you're going to hear a lot of same, but you're going to hear

some different because this is the — children who have very aggressive, angry, sometimes careless or thoughtless or lack of caring, lack of emotion, lack of empathy, lack of sympathy for others. And it's these toddlers who bite toddlers do bite, this is what they do, especially when they're frustrated, it's impulse. But when the behavior continues and there they hit and they hurt to hurt, that's the type of aggression that I'm talking about today.

[0:03:08.1] CW: This is definitely a challenge for teachers and parents and grandparents because this is so much harder to deal with than just a typical two, three, four year old child who basically is a great, great child. And it's just feeling their oats a bit as a young child exploring the world. This type of child may have a chemical imbalance. It may be wiring in the brain. There are as — I'm an ex special ed teacher and so obviously children have come to me over the course of my entire career and the one thing I couldn't do and shouldn't have done ever is to say, well, the child has poor behavior because the parents have done a poor job parenting. You find out in special education that's just not so.

Children are often born with an aggressive behavior for some reason. Like I said, it could be how the brain is wired, how it's, you know, how it's put together. Chemical imbalance. There are, there are so many different reasons why a child response aggressively and certainly we do have children in our schools where they are aggressive because they have been treated aggressively by their parents. And when you're a teacher, you have all of those, you, you and you really don't separate them apart and you don't say, well, this parent cost it, put this parent, didn't you just work on the behavior because you love the child.

And, and it, it's counterproductive to even second guess if a parent is causing the problem. And I want to really qualify that so that you understand exactly what I mean. If a child has an organic, aggressive issue because they're, you know, have perhaps hyperactivity. And so therefore there's a lack of control and there's a lack of body control. There's an impulsivity. So a child grabs or a child bites where a child hits that is one thing.

If a child wants to hurt another human being for the sake of hurting another child, that is something that you have to look at and you have to wonder why. And so that is something certainly to consider if a child has had a hard or challenging background that I've seen in my teaching career. I've seen abuse, I've seen neglect. I've seen, you know, children born from drug families or you know, fetal alcohol, is not necessarily creates aggressiveness, but it can.

But it's, it's the, it's the, the child who, who just, they're in your, they're in your school, are there in your classroom. You know, me, acting as the director. I acting as a director and then the teacher has having the child in the classroom, two different arenas, same issue. What do we do with a child who is constantly hurting?

[0:06:23.9] CW: A good example as a child that came in yesterday four different — we have a — we have a behavior, I create the behavior charts there at the school, but just because of what I did in my own special ed class with a lot of different behavior issues. And they have seemed to work very, very well with us. And we use different behavior charts for different children because no two children really are alike. I mean certainly behavior charts work with many children, but you really want to work on the right approach with different children.

So one thing that I came up with, you know, as a three strike, I drew a picture. I didn't do the drawing. I had our wonderful graphic artists draw a baseball and it has three sections in it and it psych one strike, two strikes, three strikes and different things happen. The first strike the child still gets to participate in the classroom, in the classroom activities. The second strike, the child now has to come and talk to the director and say, what's going on? Why are we getting in trouble?

And it might not, not necessarily at that moment be for hitting, biting, hurting another child. It could just be not minding the teacher, not listening. So we still use the same, the same chart for the child. The third time that we have an infraction, then a note goes home. Well the note goes home anyway, but the note goes home and the teacher or the director meets the parent at the door and they sit down and they talk.

Because once we have called that three strikes, then that tells us that the child is having no, is taking no control over their own body, their own impulses. And so, and we're talking beyond a typical child and examples is a child I had yesterday, as I stated he was on his fourth strike. So that means before he's — and it wasn't even that we had three quarters of a day, the day wasn't even over yet. And he was at the fourth strike point. So he sat with me in my office and he and I talked and he's very verbal and very adorable.

And we love him, no matter what. We love him and our job is to help him grow. But I asked him, I said, you know, I always ask why I want to know what's inside of a child's head and heart. And so often a child cannot answer. So if, if you're asking them, why did you do this? Don't expect to really well analyzed and verbalized answer, cause it's not gonna happen.

[0:08:56.2] CW: So often they'll blame somebody else or they'll just say, I don't know. And often they just really don't know. I think that's probably as true an answers you're going to get. And this little guy, just so cute with these huge dimples, he had literally, he had bitten, he had pinched and he had hit and he had kicked. And so his job really was to hurt people. That was his goal in inside his head.

And, and so you have to understand, you know, why is that, why? And so when you see this, this is a, this is a child that has chronic issues and so our job is to help them out. Those chronic issues. Research clearly states over long longterm that if a child is aggressive as a toddler, they're going to be aggressive as a preschooler. If they're aggressive preschooler, they're going to be an aggressive kindergartner.

If they're aggressive kindergarten, they're going to be an aggressive first grader, etc. Now picture the child, an eighth grade, picture, the child in high school, and it's very frightening. So we know that the behavior has to stop when they're very young and the behavior is to be taken very, very seriously, this is why parents and teachers and directors have to work together in harmony to change this child's behavior and the child has to buy into the way the approach and the child has to really work hard to change his behavior because we can do all the talking in the world and never change the child's behavior.

We have to understand what's inside the child, what, what causes the child and an award about parents. Frankly, I, we do meet with our parents and we do talk about what's happening in the home. And we do ask questions and we add first ask, "what do you do when you see this behavior? What is your response?"

And we try to understand how the parent copes. If the parent is not coping, what can we do to help the parent? Because again, there is such a difference between aggressive and just typical naughty. We're not — I'm not talking about typical naughty right now, typical kid. I'm really talking about the child that seems to have some kind of need to injure or hurt or take something

away from somebody else that might not hurt, but it's still not okay behavior and it's still aggressive.

So when I'm dealing with a parent, I'm not going to sit down there and say, "What have you done to cause your child to be like this?" First of all, the first thing that would happen as the parent would be angry and walk out the door. And so I've made no progress whatsoever. They would either grab the child and take them with her, with him or her, or they would leave them with us and walk out the door.

[0:11:47.8] CW: And, and we have gotten nowhere. And so we have to be very careful how we approach a parent parent. And we love our parents, our parents. We don't just love our kids. We love our parents, we love our grandparents. We want them to have a happy home as well as a happy child in the school. And so often if the child is angry and aggressive or even common aggressive, which is sometimes even even more worrisome because it's harder to read the child, is we want them to be happy at home, we want them to grow and change at home, especially if there's a younger sibling.

So we, so this is things that we take all this very, very seriously. So working with a parent is really important and it is really important parents to talk honestly to the teachers and the director. Usually we'll always sit down with, with both teacher and parents because the teachers are the ones that see the behavior all the time, whereas the director sees that on that third strike or fourth strike.

And so of course we know about it, we know what's going on through the teachers, but we do need to sit down with a parent and then we're going to bring that child in and then we're going to set up a behavior plan for changing this behavior. This little guy sat in front of me yesterday and his knees were almost touching my knees as we were, you know, sitting knee to knee, eye to eye. I was taller of course.

But we're talking close, when I was talking to him softly and I said, I ask him why he had hurt his friends four different times. He did not have an answer. He didn't say that they had done anything to him, he did not blame them. He didn't really know why he pinched and bit and kicked and hit. So then when he is not explaining things to me that I have to then talk with him and I have to be the one that is going to verbalize clearly and simply.

So I always start off, "You may not hurt your friends." And then we talk about the reasons why. I feel like if you don't explain the reason why the child is just going to go onto the next situation where they're hitting, biting and kicking and because you haven't really cognitively reached the child's understanding and you have to do that. You have to get to the child where they actually understand the seriousness of it. And I, I told him that, you know, basic, I asked him, I said, "Do you have friends?"

[0:14:26.9] CW: And he kind of shrugged and I said, "You know that if you want friends, you have to be nice to friends. You have to take good care of them, you cannot hurt them." And I said, "Now, if someone hurt you, if they bit you or hit you or kick to you, next time you saw that person coming towards you, would you want to be a friend? Or we do try to move away?" And he said, "Move away."

So he understood that when a person that is a hurter, someone who's going to hurt, then they run away. They literally don't want to be with you. And I said, "This is what is going to happen with you. People are not gonna want to be close to you. They are going to be afraid of you. They're going to stay away from you." And I said, "And you are going to be so sad because you're going to be alone and you don't want to be alone."

I said, "Right now, all your friends are playing on the beautiful playground and you're not." And, and so we discussed what being a good friend is. So I asked him, I said, "You know, you and I have been sitting here really close and you could have reached out and hit me. You could have bitten me. You could've kicked me and you could have pinched me. Why didn't you? You could have done it." And he looked at me quizzically like, hmm.

And shrugged his shoulders and said, "I don't know." And I said, "What I'm saying to you is that you had self control and you did a really good job of looking at me and talking with me and you didn't hurt me in any way, but you could have." I said, "You're certainly close enough." And so we both realized at that time that he could indeed have, have injured me or attempted to injure me, which meant he didn't. He chose not to, which means he has the ability not to do it.

Remember, we've seen our children who kick and hit teachers, so we know that they do it, at times. Remember, not often, but we do it and we have to deal with it very seriously because a

child may never ever hit a teacher or kick or any kind of aggressive towards an adult, but also, you know, children as well.

But, so I saw in that moment and I, and I helped him to see in that moment that he did indeed have control. He had strength, he had inner strength. He could go out and play with his friends and not hurt them because he had the ability not to pinch, not to bite, not to kick, not to hit. So we'll see in the coming days and we want to make sure that he gets plenty of praise for, for excellent behavior.

[0:17:27.2] CW: Remember, we always catch the child in the act of being terrific if teachers and directors have not said today, "What a great job you've done being a friend," when he has been a good friend today or even if it's for short term, he's been a good friend and we miss that opportunity to reinforce what we want him to be and we don't say, "Good job. I like the way you've taken care of your friends. You are being a good friend." And reinforce those concepts. We've lost, we've lost, we've lost foot.

We've lost, you know, that what we've gained in that short time. So it reminds me to go back and say, "How was his day in the afternoon and how was his day to day?" Because I need to know and I need to be able to go up to him and say, "I hear that you are doing a really good job with your friendship and your friends."

And so aggressive behavior, we can, we can work on different things in different ways. Remember, it is can be a very long process. It isn't one conversation by the director or the teacher. If it is truly an aggressive child that has either for whatever reason that child is angry, aggressive and hurtful. It takes time. They have to be worked out of behaviors.

So this is not an overnight thing. Number one, you got to start early. If you see it in the toddlers, you've got to stop it as a toddler. And so time is critical. The other thing to think about and to ask parents about or if you're a parent, analyze your parenting in this respect, what are the children watching on TV? Are they watching over aggressive cartoons? If you sat down, I'm sure you have because you've watched cartoons yourself all your life. I know I have.

Bugs Bunny. Those were my favorites. Daffy Duck. They weren't always, they, they were funny to me, but they weren't terrific in so many ways. And we have changed. They were actually very

over aggressive. But there is still hitting over and over and over and over again with an implement some kind of, I mean, this is what cartoons do. They'll punch, they'll do all sorts of things and we laugh at it because they're cartoons and most of us don't take it seriously. And most children can watch things and not take it seriously.

[0:19:54.7] CW: But for that child who is an aggressive child in, inside, inside the brain and the heart, you know, that, that be that little being, then we have to stop the aggressive cartoons and the aggressive videos, whatever they're watching, you need to analyze and you literally have to say "No, no more."

So that is really, really critical. Children need to, again, it's that passive — we have mentioned it so many different times before. I'm going to do a radio show on, on technology and how much time children should be spent in front of a TV and iPad, iPhone. I'm going to be doing that probably next, next one because I feel like that's really important. But I think that you need to, to really analyze how much time is this child spending with technology and watching the aggressive animation because I think that is really important.

Children should be outside playing. They should be running, they should be in the sunshine, they should be in, you know, you know, moving their muscles. So really look at that and just making sure of that. We are not feeding their aggressiveness through cartoons and aggressive games.

Also be very careful, you know, I remember one time I put on a Walt Disney movie thinking that Walt Disney could do no harm. This was obviously, this was about 30 years ago because I put a video in that my daughter, my older daughter had watched. And so she was familiar with it and I put it on for my younger daughter who was about four.

So my older daughter came up and said, "Mom, that is not appropriate for her." And I went, "What? It's all Disney movie. What's wrong with it?" And she goes, "Watch it." I watched it and I was outraged. I was so mad because it was so adult in the content of it. And the aggressiveness that I immediately wrote to Walt Disney and of course didn't get anywhere because they don't listen. They don't change. They don't really, they just don't. It's a huge corporation and they do lots and lots of wonderful things for children and for families.

However, they had missed the boat big time on that one. But so I had literally taken for granted that if it was Walt Disney had had to be safe, it isn't. So please always preview the cartoons, the type of cartoons that the children are watching before you let them watch or radio, I mean a iPad, things that they're watching on iPad, you absolutely have no idea if you're off doing something else. And they're on that, that you have no idea what they're watching.

[0:22:39.2] CW: And again, if it's, if they're watching it over long periods of time, they're just reinforcing that aggressive or that inappropriate behavior over and over and over again in the brain. Remember, everything we take in stays there for a very, very long time. We need to, we need to evaluate how we handle our discipline. I've talked to you several different times about harsh voices and harsh facial expressions and harsh words. Especially spanking.

I have never been, I've never really been much of a spanker. I have spanked my children, my child occasionally when I just felt absolutely warranted it. But I really, I'm very actually uncomfortable with it because I truly feel like there are other ways of dealing with it that are far more effective and quite honestly, faster, quicker. Because I feel like a child wants to behave. And I feel like there are ways that are far more punitive, that actually create a sense of dissatisfaction for the child without causing pain.

And I just, I don't like a child to feel physical pain. I don't like that. And I am very uncomfortable with that. So there are so many different alternatives of spanking. If you take an aggressive child who is already a biter, hitter, spanker I mean, you know, hitter, kicker, a pincher then treating them aggressively is just the opposite thing that you need to do.

It doesn't, it just doesn't make sense to apply physical injury. You're not, even though it might be a swat, to a child who's already practicing that because to me it just reinforces that. So I think that there are so many different ways of changing behavior without having to resort to physical.

I know that often we are, we use the same type of discipline our family, our parents taught us because that's where we learn our parenting as through our parents. And so, I would urge you to look into different methods because, well, one of the most important ways is number one, I told you before, stay calm. No power struggles. Do not argue with that child because you are not equals. You are not peers. You're not best friends, you're not spouses.

You need to tell the child what the message is, and then quietly and calmly put them in their room with very few distractions and say, "You may not come out here and participate until you're ready." And so it's very, very important with a young toddler or preschooler who is being aggressive in any way, shape anything, throwing things as an aggressive act.

[0:25:30.2] CW: And anything they need to be separated out for a short time and they need to have a sense of calm, but they need you to be calm as well. Teaching a child empathy is so critical in this. There are so many wonderful children's literature books that teach all different kinds of, of ways of being kind and being good friends.

Berenstain Bears is just an old standard that has been around for, I don't know, 30, 40 years. And they do, they have stories on every single topic where the brother and sister have to get along and they have to clean their room. They have to, they have to mind and all the reasons why. So that's one. There are so many though. You can go to the library and ask your librarian and then definitely read to the child and talk about it with the child and listen.

But the child needs to learn empathy. So therefore they have to be shown empathy and sympathy. It's empathy and sympathy are two different things. They need to learn both. We need to have empathy and sympathy for others. But you, you need to stay calm and you need to make sure, they're getting the comm message that again, you are in control the way it should be and that they need to gain their control. You definitely don't want to get in a power struggle with a child. And what I like to just let that child now is, "I love you, but what you have done is not okay and so you're going to have a set apart for a while."

And then make sure that it's not too long. Because I'll tell you, you put a child in timeout, they've forgotten. Within less than a minute. They're already entertaining themselves by talking or by fiddling with whatever they can find, even if it's a shoelace or whatever they can touch.

I was thinking of like the rainbow, *The Rainbow Fish*, the book, *The Rainbow Fish* is a wonderful one on sharing and, and not hoarding toys are, not hoarding. It's a beautiful book. There are so many wonderful books out there, so definitely I'll look those up. You can look for good valuing good emotions, self image building, etc. You can look online for that. You can talk to teachers,, others. So, you know, definitely do some research on that.

[0:27:51.6] CW: So there's so many wonderful books around. You have to be consistent with the child's behavior. You have to catch it every single time and you have to stop it. We're not going to ignore, inappropriate, angry, hurtful behavior. You cannot. And if you're a teacher or a director, it may come to the point where you are going to have to ask the parent a couple of things.

One, you can say, "If your child's going to be here, you're going to have to be with them until the behavior changes." Or you are going to have to say, "I am sorry but I cannot have the child here when he or she continually hurts other people." Because the other, the children, the parents of the children that are getting hurt, they're, they have a right to come in and say, "I don't want my child around that child," because they need to protect that child and you need to protect them as well.

And so it's really, really important that you have to make sure that they know that is not okay and that the you are not going to permit it. The other thing is just to make sure that you talk to your pediatrician about this. You know, find a, if you see that it's not changing and if you see that you've tried everything and your teachers tried everything or in the school, you've tried everything, then his ti.e to consult with a medical professional, whether it's a psychologist or your pediatrician is always your first, first place to go.

Because they can, he or she can suggest, make suggestions on how to interact with the child and also where to go should you want to have counseling. There has to be many different things that you're going to try to help change that child's behavior. The most important thing is that child number one needs to feel that they're loved. Even the biter hitter pinscher and kicker has to feel loved. They have to feel approved up. They have to feel appreciated.

[0:29:45.1] CW: So really analyze your teaching and/or your parenting and just to make sure that they are feeling good about themselves because they're going to grow up with all the 'don't and nos'. And I told you that you know and stop it. That's all they hear because of the behavior so chronic and they don't hear enough positives. And so be really, really careful that you're making sure that you're building them up at the same time as you're working on the negative behavior.

And so hopefully this has helped. You can always ask questions. You can always write to us and you can always write to me char@zoophonics.com. Happy to answer your questions for you. You can always call us you can talk to us at the school and you can call in on the radio station and ask questions. So anything we can do to help you. We are here for you.

[OUTRO]

[0:30:41.3] ANNOUNCER: That was Ed. Talks with Dr. Char. You've been listening on KAAD-LP Radio, live on 103.5 FM, or streaming online at kaad-lp.org. If you would like to have Dr. Char answer any of your questions, please email your question to dr_char@zoo-phonics.com.

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