

Not Your Normal Tantrums Part 2

[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 Wrighton. I welcome you to our radio show today. This is a part two, taking off from where we left off last week. Last week, we were talking about not your typical preschool toddler behavior, but more serious behavior and what to do with it. In every preschool program, toddler program, or kindergarten and all the way through school, there are always some children that just have additional – there are always some children that just have additional behavioral problems that are far more serious than typical.

This is what we do when we're a certain age. When we're three, we have a density to bite and grab and hit, because that's what we do. Then we learn not to do that, because of the help that our parents and our grandparents and our teachers give us. We learned that that's not okay behavior. This is the behavior that is brought about, because of either something organic in the brain that has caused more aggressive behavior, of higher level of frustration, less of a regulatory system in the brain, where the executive function works, where there might be I call it faulty water wiring, where something is just not quite right in the brain, and learn behavior has taken root and that learn behavior come from watching, observing or experiencing rough and harsh tones of voice, harsh words, harsh facial expressions, or physical discipline, or physical abuse, emotional abuse.

We are what we observe. When you're a little child and you observe a behavior that is either harsh, or tough, or callous, or even neglectful, then the behavior either comes out in very, very, very aggressive behavior, or can be very withdrawn behavior, or can be attention-seeking behavior. This behavior is far more difficult to change them. A typical hitting your friends is not okay behavior, which we see on a daily basis, because that is just toddlers and preschoolers learning how to navigate social worlds.

This is something is so much deeper, because they've done a lot of studies on that physical, sexual, emotional abuse, actually hardwires children's brains, poverty hardwires children's brains. It takes a lot more than just a few lessons in how to make friend. Although that's pivotal to this, but it's just – you need so much more than this in order to be able to change behavior. Our focus today will be on how to change behavior with children who have far more deep-seated behavioral issues.

I have to say, it takes a lot of patience and understanding on the – from teachers and parents and grandparents, anybody who take care of this, anybody who takes care of this child, or these children have to be very, very patient, but there's a lot more to it than that. We want our children to grow up, to be able to self-regulate, that is where they're able to stop their own behavior, or even the urge to misbehave is dimming. It's no longer there. It's not there as strongly as it was before.

This is what we do every single day with children is try to help them self-regulate. They need to self-talk. Nope, that's not a good idea. No, stop. Don't do it. It's that type of self-talk, where children change their mind in the middle of just about to take something from another child, or swat somebody, or whatever children do. Just a poor inappropriate decision, that is again, typical toddler, or preschooler behavior, kindergarten behavior, whatever.

I'm talking about the kind that is definitely more serious. Children still, even with that, have to learn how to self-regulate. It just takes longer. It's a different process. It's a longer process. A while back, I had mentioned something that I had seen in a restaurant, where I saw a mother being extremely harsh and loud with her children, with her child, with her little boy, not aware that all the tables surrounding her was also listening to this.

My thought process was this child is learning how to become a very harsh speaker to other people. Again, yeah, I don't want to judge over one situation, but it's a pretty good guess. Told you last week that my guesses are based on years of education and experience. Certainly, I may be wrong. Sadly, we are definitely who our parents are, how we're parented, what we see every single day, what we feel every day, what we experience every day.

When children go off to preschool, the hope or the toddler program, etc., the hope is that the teachers are able to use soft voices, even with poor behavior. The expectation is that the

teachers are going to be able to help the child change the behavior. What's most important at this point is that children are loved no matter what; no matter how they behave, they're loved.

Regardless of their inappropriate behavior, that they are respected regardless of their inappropriate behavior, that we approve of them regardless of their inappropriate behavior. Because it's not the child, it's the behavior that we need to address. Instead of saying, "Good boy, bad boy, good girl, or bad boy," we address the behavior, not the child. The child is wonderful no matter what. The behavior may be very poor, very inappropriate and absolutely not okay, but the child is wonderful. That's something that we always have to remember.

When teaching, sometimes you deal with a child's constant negative behavior for so long that you start the day by already bristling before the day has even started, because just knowing that you have to cope with it, well, you have to not have that type of a response to children, because you have to first of all realize, that's why you're there in the first place. You are there to help children. You are there to change behavior. You're there to help them grow, to help them to learn, to help them to care.

You have to start off your day as a teacher and a parent, because I know how frustrating it is. I totally understand being parent, grandparent and teacher, that you have to go in with a mindset that says, child is wonderful, behavior maybe not so good. Then work from that, because then, you can stay calm as you are working to change the behavior.

I know teachers out there, if anyone's – teachers are listening to this, when you have 6 to 12 other children that you're working with, or five to eleven, because that one child makes up the 12th through the 6th ratio in preschools, you have other very bouncy children that also need your love and attention. Then here's this one child who's literally not minding hiding under tables, running on the equipment when you're trying to lineup, making noise, tearing books.

I mean, it could be whatever the behavior is, you have other children that you're dealing with. We know that that it's really, really difficult at that point to remind yourself that you are here for that one child, as well as the others. Some of the things that are really important, it is just first of all, is just to remember that we are – we're here to love, we're here to guide, we're here to grow.

For this is your calling. This is why you're here. Whether you're a parent, whether you're a grandparent, whether you're a babysitter, whether you're a friend watching someone else's child, or whether you're an early childhood teacher, this is your calling. This is what you're to do at that moment, whether you're babysitting, or whether you're teaching, whatever it is, is that this is what you're called to do at that moment, is to love and care and protect for that child.

You have to have that mindset, that regardless of the behavior, that you're going to stay calm and you're going to stay focused and you're going to remember that we're addressing children, not behavior. I mean, it is the child that comes first and the behavior has to be dealt with. I think sometimes, we get so frustrated with inappropriate behavior that is constant, that we only think about the irritating behavior. Then we get discouraged. I've seen teachers literally have tears running down their faces, because they just don't know how to cope with a child.

It's just this feeling of helplessness. It's either helplessness, or it's frustration. It can even turn into anger. Then that is absolutely no time to deal with that child. It's better to say, "I need help here." Even the director, or call a friend and just say, "I need a break from this." If you're getting to the point where you're having that frustration. The one thing we don't want to do is either hurt the child physically, or emotionally just by harsh words, or voices, or any physical approach to them.

We need to meet the needs of the children with very aggressive behavior by again, loving them, respecting them, proving them, but we need to set the limits. I find that especially very young children, it is really hard to tell a child who's a year, a year and a half, two years, three years that the behavior – why the behavior is not okay. They are so young. Their vocabularies are very, very limited.

I remember discussing a while back that children have even one-years-old, two-years-old, they have something called receptive language and they have something called expressive language. This is very important to remember when caring for children is that their vocabularies are very limited when they're little. Therefore, you have to make sure that you are using vocabulary words that the children understand. You're going to need to keep it very simple, very clear.

Receptive languages, all the words and concepts that the child has inside and understands, but they can't talk about it. They can't express their feelings, but they understand. In fact, if you tell a one-year-old child, go get a diaper, the child understands what go get a diaper means, because they've got the language inside the brain. They might not be able to say, "I'm going to get a diaper," because they're not ready yet. They don't have expressive language. That's expressive language is talking. They do have vocabulary inside the brain where they understand meaning.

The important part is that when you are talking to a child about his behavior, her behavior, that you have to be very, very simple in your words. Over talking does not work. I find that a lot of words that we as adults use with children, it just goes right over their head. Even stories, I'm always amazed when I read literature book to children, is that they use so many words that children have absolutely no concept of what they're listening to, and so they're missing maybe every 5th, 6th, 7th word. Meaning is skewed.

We want to make sure that when we're talking about behavior, even positive. When we're giving them compliments, we need them to understand what we're saying. Please choose your words very, very carefully. When you're setting a limit, you have to tell them clearly, "No, you may not do that. No, that is not okay." The name, what is not okay. If they're throwing sand, you want to make sure you're saying, "Throwing sand at your friend is not okay."

I've heard parents and I've heard teachers just say, "No, stop it," and leave it at that, but the child's already moved on probably mentally from the behavior, if not the behavior itself. Now the child doesn't really even understand what you're asking. You really need to make sure that the child fully understands what you want him or her to do and what you want him or her not to do.

Number one, set the limits, make it clear. Making it clear is probably one of the most important things that we need to do. It's also probably the very thing that we don't do well. I think we take it for granted that children's vocabularies and understanding are larger than they are. Remember the age group with whom you're working. You need to explain. Again, you got to keep it simple, but you need to explain if a three-year-old, or even – we take it so far at learning academy, we take children – well, babies now, which is very exciting. We have our toddler program and they started 18 months, and most of them are non-talkers. They have vocabulary words, but they don't have sentences. They can't express their feelings. They can't even tell that what just happened to them if they were even hit or interest, so they can't even speak up for themselves.

If you have a child who is hitting, or grabbing, or taking a toy away, or doing something that is not okay, then you have to show them. You actually have to show them. You have to almost roleplay the situation. Then you have to say and make it clear, "Not okay." Then you want to make sure that if their child has been injured, or hurt, or offended, you want to make sure that that child is brought over, so that they can look each other in the eye and say, "You need to say you're sorry, or you need to give a hug," or whatever you the expectation is, because we certainly don't want to force hugs when they're not ready, or even apologies when they're not ready, because then it's not sincere. They do need to own up to their own behavior.

Even little guys need to realize that if they have injured another person, or torn a book, or made a mess, they need to be brought to that and they need to see it, because again, your words might not have any meaning, or sufficient meaning. They need to see what they've done. They also need to see if a child, another child is crying, they need to even see that effect that the child is crying, that the child is sad. You can use those words with them.

Your friend is hurt. Your friend is sad. Your friend is crying, and so they can understand. Because otherwise, boy, not only do they not necessarily understand what you're saying, in less than 60 seconds, they'd forgotten about the issue. I mean, that's why timeout sometimes is a bit pointless, because you put a child in a timeout and they say put him in if – well, if they're 2-years-old, 2 minutes, but then they just don't really even have a concept of what they're doing. Timeout is just used as what it is. It's a timeout. It's a time of separation. Then you bring them back in immediately, because you always have to explain things and discuss it with children. They need to understand what they have done that is not okay.

Now, from this is when you start building what is okay. You want to make sure that you're not just saying no to the child, or that is not okay. You want to replace that with, "Here's what you need to do. Here's what is okay. You can share the toy. You can play with the toy over here. You can read a book, but you must be careful with the pages." That they need to not only hear what they can't do, or they shouldn't do, but they also need to hear what they need to do. They need to learn. They actually have to be taught.

I find that that sometimes, we place higher priorities on things where really, they shouldn't be. For instance, I would prefer children to learn how to line up quietly and respectfully, of the

teacher first of all, who's leading the children down to the playground, or to the cafeteria, whatever, or back to the room, or to the restroom, then learn an academic skill, especially at this age. I fully believe that children need to learn concepts and about their world. That's one of my greatest joys and when I develop curriculum, I just love that children learn wonderful things.

Practice. Take your children when you should be doing teaching them shapes or colors, first take them out, have them practice sitting at tables, have them practice pulling up their chair, pulling in their chair, and when they're done with it, pushing in their chair, how to put away their own toys. These are all very, very important skills.

Parents, grandparents, when you have young children at home, you want to be teaching them and I'm calling this positive teaching, because instead of saying, "No don't do that, or no, that's not okay," you're actually saying, "Here's what I want you to do. I want you to put your toys away. I need you to put the cars with the cars. I need you put the dolls in the doll clothes with the doll and the doll clothes bin," so that they understand that there's a place for everything.

Positive teaching is not saying, "No, that's not okay." It's actually showing them how to do things well. Then following that, then that's where they need the praise. They need thank you for putting your chair back under the table. Thank you for cleaning up your messes. They need to know that they have done the right thing.

I also know that the vast majority of need, kind words, happy voices and faces if it's a boss, or a loved one, we our like pats on the back, we like our checks that we get for when we're working. We like our rewards. Children are no different. Children need to know that they're on the right track. That is where this complimenting and just giving them words of, "You did that well. You're a good boy, you're a good girl." That really almost has no meaning. First, good is moral. I don't like really using moral type words when we're really talking about behavior. I want them to know very clearly, number one, what you want them to do, number two, what you don't want them to do, number three, when they do the right thing, you need to tell them specifically what they did that was exactly what you want.

Now I've said this in many other radio shows and I'm going to say it again and I'm probably going to keep saying it, because I think it's so important. At Safari Learning Academy and I

believed in catching the child in the act of being terrific. I'm going to say that again. Catching the child in the act of being terrific. If you see a child doing the right thing, you got to say so.

Now you can do that as a class if you – today, let me just tell you this. This is so cute. We have been learning how to walk down. You picture in California state licensing, the rule is that you have 12 children to one adult teacher. If you're in the toddler program, it's six children to one adult teacher. When they're walking, or whatever they're doing, you might be just giving the whole class a compliment. Here's what I saw today, because the teachers have been practicing walking down the hallways to get to either the cafe where they're going to have their snack or lunch, or the playground. They have a pretty good walk, now that we're in our new Safari building that is so much bigger than the other one.

We're walking on, and so we have lines on colored lines on the floor, so that they know that preschoolers go down the blue. Once they hit the brown, that takes them to the cafeteria or the playground. The primary line is green and the toddlers and the infants are yellow. What we want to do is we want to stay on that path. We have fun doing it. I told the teachers seeing while you're walking down the path, do some phonics while you're walking down the path, say if you step off the line, you're walking in hot lava. Make it playful and fun and you've got children's attention, because if it's novel and interesting, they're going to do it. They're going to want to do it.

One of the teachers today was saying to her children, and it was so effective, because I've been watching every day as the children are getting better and better out there. The teacher, they're singing, walking in line songs. Teachers are making it up or whatever. It's just so cute and so much fun. Today, one of our teachers was saying, "Hand on the hip and fingers on the lips." They're all doing that finger on the lip. It's so cute. Here they are walking down with their hands on their hips and one finger on the lip and doing it just so well.

Well, I had to come out and because they were so quiet, I had to come out and give them a group, "Great job." I want to make sure that I am recognizing every great thing that I see. I want to make sure I'm spelling it out to them, because they need to hear it. I also want the teacher to know that I noticed her great teaching. I want her to notice as well, because it's as important to her, as it is to the children, believe me.

You want to catch the child in the act of being terrific. In my many years of teaching and also my many years of teaching other teachers, I have noticed that there's that one or two errant children in the group, that are just – they act out constantly for one reason, or the other. They're either bouncy, or listening is just difficult for them, or there could be more serious learning disability, hyperactivity. There could be a more serious reason for it.

All they hear is, “No, stop it. Don't. That's not okay,” they keep hearing. I mean, it's just non-stop negativity. Then the one time that they're sitting, I have such a memory of this. This is one of our one of our precious little boys of the past. This little guy couldn't hold still and he had such difficulty doing the right thing. He was such a great kid. I'll tell you, his start in life was so rough. No child should have to go through what he's gone through.

It's like, we had to remember, no wonder this child acts the way. However, we're not going to stop with that. We are going to change behavior, because we want this little guy to be as great a citizen of our community as possible. Here's this little guy that's in trouble all the time. I'm saying all the time. He was sitting on the carpet, crisscross applesauce, and he was actually calm and quiet, when everyone else was running around. It's right after that, after teeth brushing, lunch, washing hands. Now we're getting on our bedding for nap time and he's sitting there quietly and not one person noticed that he was sitting quietly.

The one time he's doing something right, we missed the opportunity of giving him a compliment. Of course, I saw it. I made a big deal of it. I said, “I am so impressed with how you're sitting, just the way we all need to be sitting.” What a great leader he is. I wanted him to make sure that he knew that sitting crisscross applesauce quietly was the right thing to do. I had to verbalize it and I also wanted him to get a little credit for that, from his other teachers and from his friends.

Now, dopamine is this wonderful chemical that the brain pours out onto the neurons, on to the brain. It's just a happy drug that the body produces. When we get a compliment, or a kind word, or a pat on the back, or a little present, or whatever it is, dopamine secretes our brain and it just makes us peaceful. It makes us feel good. It affects the amygdala, which is in our executive function. You have a frontal cortex, it's right under your forehead. Picture where your forehead is. That's your executive function. Exemption or function in little children is just not very well-developed, especially in little boys who are just so filled with testosterone. They're fast-moving,

they're created this way, they're supposed to be this way and they have to learn when to be fast-moving and when to be calm and quiet, and it's not always easy to do that.

Those compliments are wonderful ways to create that feeling of when the dopamine actually secretes the brain, it feels just – it just feels good. There's a sense of happiness. There's a sense of peace. What we want to do is have that stimulated often, so that they want it more and more. We want them to actually become a little bit addicted to that, because what's going to happen, it's going to change their behavior. It's going to be saying, "I get in trouble, I get this. I do the right thing and I get happy voices, I get happy faces, I get a hug, I get a pat on the back, I get a happy note, I get a note home to my parents."

We want them to replicate that good, appropriate, not good, because again, that's a moral. We're talking about that appropriate behavior that we want to change. I am a real strong believer in reward systems and notes home and those type of things. I know that there are different theories behind that. A lot of people do believe and I'm not sure a lot. There are people believe that when we give rewards, reward systems and the child's only acting to get the reward, for me and the way that I have worked in with my special ed kids and now our preschool children and my own kids at home, it's a temporary. A reward system is a temporary. It's right at that moment saying, "Good job. You did that well."

You want to be specific. What was the behavior that you liked because you want them to replicate it? Therefore, I like reward systems. I like that praise. I love that note home. We've developed a lot of fun rewards and reward systems at Safari Learning. I would have so many in my classroom. I also noticed that after about a month, you got to change it up, because children need and love novelty.

The reward system that you were using before, it needs to be changed and you need to use a lot of creativity and come up with new ways of reaching children. You do need to be clear on what you want them to do. You need to be clear on what you don't want them to do. You have to be really careful on the words that you're using, so that you're not over talking, so that the frustration is not coming through in your voice, that you're not using words that are too big, so that they don't understand. You want to be able to give a compliment and let them know that they're doing the right thing.

There's nothing more wonderful if you're teacher than a note home to parents. I know parents who have come to our doors absolutely terrified that they're going to get a naughty note, your child did not behave today. We want to change that up and we don't want parents to have that feeling. We want kids to be able to do just feel terrific about themselves.

We'll continue working on this, because there's still so much more to say. If you have any questions, you know you can write me at char@safarilearning.com, char@zoophonics.com. You can call us. We'll take your questions and we'll give you some answers, or talk on topics you're interested in. Bye-bye.

[OUTRO]

[0:27:49.6] 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 e-mail your question to dr_char@zoophonics.com. Thanks for listening and stay tuned for what's next on KAAD-LP Radio.

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