

Level: advanced

Pre-reading discussion

1. Some children seem to be born with an inclination to behave more badly than others. Try to recall one particularly badly behaved child and describe some typical examples of their bad behaviour.
2. Have you got any idea what their bad behaviour sprang from?
3. Have you ever thought about how the experience of being the older brother or sister differs from that of being the younger sibling? How could you describe the differences? How could these experiences shape the child's future character?

Reading

Read the passage and then in pairs discuss the answers to the questions that follow.

All children need attention, but there are some who demand it much more forcefully than others. Both with their peers and parents or carers, they will insist they get their way. They readily infuriate other kids by laying down rules that everyone else is supposed to follow. Oblivious of the irritation they cause others, they are quick to lose their temper if other children don't fall into line with their demands. When parents intervene to set reasonable limits the overly demanding child quickly becomes agitated and angry.

This exaggerated sense of entitlement may spring from an early experience of being wounded – an experience that destroys an earlier sense of security and arouses feelings that the child cannot cope with. One trigger might be the birth of a younger brother or sister, leaving the older child feeling neglected or abandoned. Other potentially wounding experiences include a mother's return to work, moving to a new town, parents fighting or the child being left for long periods of time in daycare. Each of these could initiate a sense of loss accompanied by an emotional arousal that the child can't handle.

The type of child in question is one with a predisposition to react aggressively when it does not receive what it has come to expect. When the child's expectations are not met an initial sense of hurt is immediately replaced by a feeling of anger and the child has a tantrum.

Child therapists have a saying: Trust the wisdom of the child. Children have temper tantrums for a reason. The angry behaviour sends out a signal that the child needs something different from what it is being given. However, it is important not to take the behaviour at face value. The child may be screaming to be bought a new toy, but these explicit demands may only be the beginning of the story – in other words, they may conceal as much as they reveal. What the child might really need is neither the toy nor getting his own way, but reassurance. The child may have the deeper and more urgent need to be reassured that it still has the parents' unconditional love.

Questions

1. What sort of child does the passage focus on?
2. How does the passage account for the bad behaviour of these children?
3. Looking at its use in this passage, the word "tantrum" probably refers to
 - a. an experience of being wounded
 - b. a predisposition to act aggressively
 - c. when the child starts shouting and screaming
 - d. a sign that the child is wise
4. What is **not** true according to the passage?
 - a. Overly demanding children don't always realize how much they irritate other people.
 - b. Some children can feel neglected when their mothers return to work.
 - c. Children with wisdom know what they really need.
 - d. Child therapists believe that the reasons for a child's behaviour are not always obvious.
5. What is true according to the passage?
 - a. Parental intervention will always make a child angry.
 - b. Children are certain to feel wounded if they are left in daycare.
 - c. All tantrums have a rational explanation.
 - d. A child who screams may want to be told a story.

Vocabulary

Look for the following words and phrases in the passage and look them up if necessary. Work out how to explain the meaning in English to the rest of the class.

get your way
fall into line
intervene
to be entitled
arouse
trigger
potentially
initiate
predisposition
take something at face value
conceal
reassure

Language extra

A. First have a look at these example sentences and then try to transform the sentences that follow using a structure from one of the examples.

Having a parent who is alcoholic is a sad but common reason for a child to become confused and insecure.

Not knowing how to calm their children down, many parents quickly lose their temper.

Being exposed to peer aggression at a daycare centre can cause the child to become more aggressive.

Having learned how to read the signs, parents are more able to deal with their difficult children.

1. It is a recipe for disaster if parents simply give their children what they want.
Simply
2. What you have to do first of all is learn how to read the signs.
.....
3. Children are more likely to lose their tempers if they have a low emotional intelligence.
(Clue: use the phrase "... means that ...")
.....
4. It can aggravate the situation if the child is blamed for difficulties between the parents.
.....
5. He abandoned his wife because he wasn't ready to accept the responsibilities of parenthood.
.....
6. Because he had already moved house once, he knew how lonely he was going to feel.
.....

B. Use your vivid imagination to complete the following sentences.

Not having any brothers or sisters

Feeling lost and alone

Never having seen a frog before,

Having been brought up to believe that I deserved to be the centre of attention,
.....

C. Here are some words and phrases for talking about things parents might do to their children. Use a good monolingual dictionary to make sure you know how to use them and then come up with your own interesting examples. Share them with the rest of the class.

scold
reprimand
tell off
discipline
instil
console
allay a child's fears
set an example
boost a child's self-esteem
crush a child's self-esteem

Discussion point

How and to what extent do the media influence the behaviour of children? When debating this issue many people have pointed to hugely popular programmes such as the **Simpsons** (a cartoon series that took off in 1989 in the US). This was one of the programmes that really broke the mould. It completely rejected the idea that a TV show should portray positive role models and promote wholesome family values. The son of the family, Bart (a name which is actually an anagram of "brat"), cheats, has no respect for authority figures, does not obey his parents, do his homework, or clean his room. His motto, "underachiever and proud of it," together with exclamations like "I'm Bart Simpson, Who the Hell Are You?" were printed on T-shirts that were eagerly bought and worn by millions of kids across the country. Some parents and educationalists have been vociferous in their opposition to characters like Bart who do not convey the values of obedience, honesty and hard work which parents hope to instil in their impressionable children. What do you think?

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