

## **Family Experiencing Mental Health Issues can be Frightening**

When children are unsure of their safety, which includes a sense of deteriorating mental health within themselves and or within their family, they may act out through some type of behavior that has a depth of expression that far exceeds the actual situation. On a subconscious level some children are expressing their fear through this type of behavior. In these situations they unconsciously create a difficult situation as a call for help. If it doesn't achieve this outcome the next episode may be more intense. They may also act out in school and or the community to make their call for help public.

In regards to the emotional episode the incident may start out with a simple misunderstanding, which quickly escalates into a full-blown tirade. This experience of expressing their repressed sense of anxiety is empowering as it moves them from the overwhelming fear of being alone and abandoned to one of a form of assertion. This behavioral pattern may well develop into cycles of such behavior until their call for safety is heard.

### **THE CYCLE OF BEHAVIOR THAT IS A CALL FOR HELP**

Calm  
Disturbed  
Emotions accelerating  
Explosive or Implosive episode  
Let-down  
Recovery  
Calm

### **THE TIMING OF INTERVENTION**

It is critical to recognize that likely there is a cycle of such behavior as in doing so it allows one to anticipate the challenge that arises from it and to be prepared to utilize effective interventions.

It is helpful to have strategies or interventions at each stage of the cycle.

- a. Keeping calm as a result of understanding the source of the behavior
- b. Decelerate the situation by staying neutral and empathetic
- c. Remember the history of the child
- d. Being nurturing during the Let-Down by keeping close but not intrusive
- e. Promote safety during recovery by not making a big deal out of the episode

It is meaningful to have a ritual for processing the episode after recovery.

- a. Explore the episode a day or two later so as to keep the positive vibes of recovery
- b. Revisit the strategies after an evening meal when everyone is more relaxed
- c. Evaluate, Brainstorm and Modify the strategies for greater effectiveness
- d. Examine the benefits of the behavior from the child's point of view.
- e. Explore the subconscious meaning of the behavior.
- f. Journal the episode with the child to begin to assert a cognitive engagement.

### **Interventions to Explore with Child:**

1. Parent can assist the child to identify feeling words to describe the build-up.
2. Teach and practice self-soothing techniques

3. Charts/Logs
  - a. behavior
  - b. feelings
4. Modeling positive communication and social skills.
5. Contingency Rewards System, rewards that are contingent upon successful intervention.
6. Praise and Positive Reinforcement
7. Redirection
8. Support child's effort to identify their needs in the relationship
9. Journaling: Experiences, upsetting feelings, new behavior
10. Substitution: Instead of making a statement provide visual cue
11. Understanding behavior as a symbol for unexpressed feelings.
12. Brainstorm with child in developing a list of triggers and coping skills.
13. Explore Coping skills:
  - a. Talk to peers
  - b. Physical activity
  - c. Drawing feelings
  - d. Journaling
14. Calendar to highlight time line goals and their successes.
16. Looking at family album and allow client to tell "stories" about pictures.

**Interventions for Parents:**

1. Charting
2. Journaling
3. Learn and utilize Empathetic Communication Skills
4. Planning and use of a Planning Form
5. Boundaries:
  - a. Telephone calls may be monitored, timed, and interrupted. Set schedule.

**Intended Reaction:**

1. Child was receptive and responsive:
2. When redirected, client apologized.
3. Communicated positively as to why being upset.
4. When parent praised, client smiled and appeared happy.

**Family Roles:**

1. Parent:
  - a. Protection
  - b. Nurturing
  - c. Teach social skills
  - d. Teach self-help skills
  - e. Establish reasonable boundaries and explore this need with the children
  - f. Provide Family Time at least once a week to review family concerns
  - g. Role-Model the sharing of Feelings
  - i. Teach teamwork by asking child for help when engaged in home activities

2. Child:

- a. To be a team member
  - 1. To learn self-help skills so as to be able to assist family in household chores
  - 2. To be helpful with younger sibling
- b. To seek answers to life questions
- c. To help support the family when old enough
- d. To share their feelings and thoughts
- e. To share skills in technology learned from peers and at school
- f. To develop hobbies and to share them with the family