

HOW TO COPE WITH CHALLENGING KIDS

Claire always expects the unexpected when it comes to her 8-year old son William. Within seconds, he can go from sweet-tempered and happy into a vicious tantrum. She's grown overwhelmed by phone calls from teachers, relaying how William hit another child in class or got into a fight on the playground.

After almost spanking her son when he threw a fit in a grocery store, Claire realized she needed help. She reached out to a friend who had dealt with similar challenging behaviors from her own child—yelling, punching and talking back—typical acting-out that didn't necessarily constitute a psychological disorder.

Claire's friend recommended *The Difficult Child* by Dr. Stanley Turecki. According to Dr. Turecki, while some children suffer from psychological ailments that respond to medications like Ritalin, too many parents turn to drugs without examining the root causes of their child's behavior.

Those causes may be as simple as temperament. For instance, Claire was making William play soccer because his brother did. When she asked him what he preferred to do, to her surprise, he said he wanted to visit the library. Once they started going a few days a week, his behavior at school began to improve. The library seemed to allow William the downtime he needed to gather emotional resources.

In addition to allowing your child's temperament to guide activities, here are some other tips for coping with emotional and behavioral issues in children.

1. Set specific and clear expectations for your child. Parents who are disorganized or without clear boundaries tend to create more of a struggle for themselves. Be reliable and loving, while maintaining consistent rules and expectations.

2. Apply the “Positive Parenting” approach. Psychologist Georgia DeGangi, author of *Effective Parenting for the Hard-to-Manage Child*, recommends that parents “catch” their kids being good, and then reward them through acknowledgment and actions. She advises against rewarding bad behavior with attention.

3. Recognize your stress signals and take care of your own well-being. Finding appropriate ways to cope with the behaviors of a

challenging child is essential. Take time out to relax in healthy ways whenever possible. Be sure to process any feelings of guilt before they become toxic.

4. Seek professional help if needed. Do not be ashamed of reaching out for help if the behaviors continue to seem unmanageable, especially if they are having a negative effect on the family or on your child's successful development.

With a few other parenting "tweaks" (and a couple of "Mommy" spa afternoons), Claire began to see a distinct difference in William's interactions with the world, and in her own ability to work with his more challenging behaviors.

