

## **Tips for Helping Children Who Act Out**

Children who have been through highly stressful times will sometimes act out, doing things you wish they would not do. Often, they act out in public places or around other people, making the situation even worse. Here are some tips to redirect children when they act out, or to prevent them from misbehaving in the first place.

### Communications Tips

A child may not understand certain directions or tasks that an adult may give him or her. Often, this results in anger and frustration. You can:

- Speak in a calm voice, trying not to yell even when you are frustrated.
- Provide the child with more choices or some options. This gives the child more control over the situation. For example: "Would you like to play a game or would you rather take a break now?"
- Create bridges for talk and communication. For example, if you are on the bus, just begin to talk about what you see outside the window. At first, you may be talking to yourself, but in time, the child may join in with his own words.
- Try to make talking with the child simpler. Use language that is clear and to the point. Speak in shorter sentences. Use easy to understand words and ideas.

### Tips for the Child's Surroundings

After a disaster, children may react badly to different sights and sounds around them. They may hide in a corner, cover their eyes and ears, or shy away.

- Identify specific sounds or sights that are bothering a child, and do your best to remove them.
- If you can, reduce background noises as much as possible.
- Playing familiar music or sounds can be comforting. Change the channel or turn off the TV if that helps.

### When the Child Wants Attention

Children will seek comfort from adults when they are scared. Behaviors they may use to get more attention include laughter, staring, and fishing for reactions.

- Sometimes, ignoring attention-seeking behavior is the best and easiest way to stop it.
- Distract them and try to change the subject or focus. For example, asking for a child's help on a simple task such as grocery shopping can make her feel wanted and may decrease attention-seeking behaviors.

### When the Child is Bored

It is easy for children to become bored and not interested. If bored, they may avoid tasks and delay their responses to them. You can:

- As much as possible, introduce fresh new tasks or activities for the child to try.
- If you see that children are becoming bored, change the way the task is presented, or give them a break. For example, if you are playing a game, allow the child to change the rules to suit his or her own self.

### When the Child is Angry

A child may become angry and react too much to a stressful situation. When this happens, you can:

- Ignore small examples of bad behavior. Often, the argument is not worth winning. When you let children “win” small battles, you avoid future arguments and fights.
- Stay in control of your own emotions and feelings. Adults who get upset easily usually get themselves in many future arguments and confrontations.
- Give the child a little personal space. Don’t hover over him or stand too close.
- Set limits, but avoid backing the child in a corner. Offer children a choice or option whenever possible. For example “Jonathan, either you can stop yelling or you will not get to visit your friends tonight; it is up to you to decide.”
- Try to figure out what “sets the child off.” This helps you to prevent the outburst the next time, because you see it coming and can calm the child or remove him from a bad situation before his behavior gets out of control.