

Hand-out for Parents

EXTREMELY CHALLENGING BEHAVIOUR

ALL CHILDREN have challenging behaviour at times. However, some children are prone to more extreme behaviours, such as frequent screaming, hitting or throwing things. Though these kids are commonly seen as needing “more” discipline, conventional discipline strategies often do not seem to be very effective with them.

Dr. Ross Greene, author of *The Explosive Child*, has a different approach to dealing with very challenging behaviour. Here are some of his ideas:

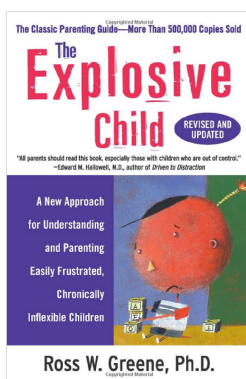
Rethink the reasons for your child’s misbehavior

Dr. Greene says that extreme behaviour occurs when the demands of a situation exceed the child’s ability to handle it. The main reason some kids are more reactive than others is that they lack certain skills that would enable them to be more flexible and adaptable, to handle frustration better and solve problems.

In fact, Dr. Greene’s motto is: **“Kids do well when they can,”** meaning, when kids have the skills to behave well, they usually do behave well.

Identify problem areas and skills that are lacking

Easily frustrated children often lack skills such as handling transitions or changes of plan, considering a range of potential solutions to a problem, or being able to start conversations or enter social situations.



Greene’s book and his [website](#) have a [worksheet](#) that will help you pinpoint the areas where your child is lacking in skills. Once you identify these trouble areas, you are better able to predict when challenging episodes are likely to occur. That will help you prevent some outbursts and also handle them better when they do occur.

During extreme behaviour, focus on defusing

But what should parents do in the heat of the moment, when their child seems out of control? Dr. Greene says the immediate goal is to defuse and de-escalate the situation, while keeping everyone safe. How to accomplish that will depend on the child and the situation, but Greene says it usually requires setting aside problem solving or further discussion of the issue until a later time when you and your child are both calmer.

Learn to solve problems collaboratively with your child

Problem-solving with explosive children has several benefits, says Green. You will develop a clearer idea of how to respond to your child in ways that don’t make explosive episodes worse, so confrontations and conflict will be reduced. Most importantly, this process helps children develop the thinking skills which, in time, will allow them to avoid and/or manage the situations they can’t handle right now.

Dr. Greene teaches a three-step problem-solving method that, he acknowledges, takes some time to learn. It starts with introducing the problem with a neutral observation and inviting your child’s viewpoint with the question, “What’s up?”: “I’ve noticed you’ve had trouble getting out the door to school in the morning. What’s up?” It then moves through a process that you and your child work on together, to define the problem and brainstorm possible solutions.

For more info, read *The Explosive Child* or visit Dr. Greene’s website, which explains the process in detail via articles, videos and listening programs: www.livesinthebalance.org