

## INTRODUCTION

Hi and welcome to the Cerebral Palsy Foundation's ParentWise Podcast series. I'm Robyn Cummins.

Today, in the second of four podcasts social work consultant Jenny Griffiths explains the role of parent and child related triggers in managing challenging behaviour.

## TRIGGERS

Hi, I'm Jenny Griffiths.

This is Part 2 of a series of podcasts about managing challenging behaviour effectively.

There are many pieces of the challenging behaviour puzzle. In the first podcast, I defined what challenging behaviour is and looked at some of the reasons it can occur.

The next and perhaps most important part of the puzzle is understanding some of the triggers that can lead to your child's challenging behaviour in the first place

If you can eliminate the trigger or cause, then the behaviour will not occur.

Any behaviour will only continue if it is rewarded by something.

So to stop a challenging behaviour, you need to be able to answer the question: 'What is rewarding the behaviour to make it keep happening?'

Today I will talk about some of those triggers, causes and rewards that are specifically related to both children and parents.

## TRIGGERS – CHILD RELATED

Some of the most common triggers for a child's challenging behaviour include:

- Getting attention - children can display challenging behaviours to get your attention.

I'm sure if you think about the last couple of days, you'd be able to think of times when your child did something deliberately to get your attention when you were busy doing something else.

- Communicating. If your child is non-verbal or has difficulty communicating and comprehending, they might use challenging behaviour to communicate.

A good question you can ask yourself in relation to challenging behaviour is, 'What is my child communicating to me by acting this way?'

- Avoidance of demands, people or settings. Your child might use challenging behaviour to escape or avoid items, activities, tasks or social interactions.

They find the punishment for the behaviour is better than the situation they were in.

- Sensory/Self-stimulating. Your child might display challenging behaviour as a means of self-stimulation, such as rocking, that provides them with a positive feeling.

Self-stimulatory behaviour can be soothing and relaxing in a situation that is overwhelming.

- Illness, Pain and Medication. Your child might display challenging behaviours to let you know that they are sick or in pain.
- Your child might also demonstrate challenging behaviours if they are taking medication, which may make them tired.
- If your child is demonstrating challenging behaviour that is recent and unusual for them, it is good to work out whether illness or pain is involved first.

## TRIGGERS – PARENT RELATED

So far we've talked about some of the child-related triggers to challenging behaviour. It's also possible that you as a parent might do something that inadvertently encourages your child's challenging behaviours to continue.

Some of these things might include:

- Giving your child accidental rewards for displaying challenging behaviour.

For example, parents might reward behaviour by giving it your attention, material rewards, activities or food treats.

- Allowing the child to learn that by escalating their behaviour they will eventually get what they want.

You might eventually give in to their demands and therefore your child is rewarded for their behaviour and you're rewarded because you get some peace and quiet.

In this situation, the challenging behaviour will most likely happen time and time again.

- Demonstrating behaviours which your child learns through watching.

Behaviours such as yelling, talking back, getting angry, swearing and hitting can all be learnt through watching others.

- Giving instructions incorrectly.

The way that you give instructions to your child can influence whether or not your child does what they're told.

Some common mistakes are: too many instructions given too quickly; too few/too vague; too hard; poorly timed or instructions given as questions.

There can also be a disparity between the message and the body language which conveys your instruction. For example you are shaking your head 'no' while saying the word 'yes'.

- Giving your child emotional messages which will affect their self esteem and behaviour.

If you disapprove of your child rather than their behaviour, this will influence their self-esteem in a negative way.

For example, calling your child names or making them feel guilty may shame your child into cooperating but in the long term it could make them angry, resentful and uncooperative.

- Using discipline ineffectively.

Sometimes a child can develop behaviour problems because of the way you use discipline.

For example, discipline may be ineffective if it is used as the only method to manage the behaviour:

- if it is threatened, but not carried out
- if it is not used as soon as the behaviour occurs
- if it is used only as a crisis response, and
- if it is used inconsistently.

All parents can fall into these traps at times and you'd have to be superhuman if you did not give an accidental reward or fall into an escalation trap.

However, your child's behaviour problems are more likely to occur if you are regularly falling into these traps.

So, how often these day-to-day interactions occur, is more important than simply whether or not they occur.

## CLOSE

Thanks for listening. We hope you've found these strategies and ideas useful.

You can download or listen to more episodes in the ParentWise Podcast series at the Cerebral Palsy Foundation's website - [www.cpfoundation.com.au](http://www.cpfoundation.com.au)