Awareness

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Connect Counseling

VOLUME ONE: EPISODE ONE

A research primer for parents

About Awareness. We publish Awareness because parents deserve to know what the research on children does and doesn't show (whether or not they ever need a counselor). Each episode gives one idea, what the research shows, what you can do, and how strong the evidence is. It is education, not treatment or diagnosis.

Most difficult behavior is normal

Tantrums, defiance and moodiness are part of growing up. What matters is the pattern (and how parents respond).

WHAT THE RESEARCH SHOWS

Parents of 1,490 preschoolers reported on their children's tempers. Most of the children (83.7%) had tantrums sometimes. Only 8.6% had them daily. Ordinary outbursts came from frustration in situations you would expect. The worrying ones were unpredictable, prolonged or destructive.

How adults respond shapes what happens next. Harsh reactions tend to feed cycles of escalating conflict, and it runs both ways: difficult behavior also provokes harsher parenting. Parent-training programs work, and the ones that teach consistent responding show larger gains.

Children learn to calm down by being calmed. This is called co-regulation: a child borrows an adult's steadiness until they can produce their own. Teenagers still need it, in new forms.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

- Expect hard days. A tired, hungry or frustrated child is acting their age.
- Watch the pattern: how often, how long, and whether you can see a reason.
- Respond in your best calm. Don't feed it when you are irritable, tired or hungry.
- Look closer when it lasts for weeks, at home and at school, or disrupts daily life.

Evidence: Strong that occasional tantrums are typical in preschoolers and that daily ones are not, based on parent reports. Strong for parent training. Co-regulation is a widely used framework drawn from research reviews, not from a single study.

References. Kaminski, J. W., Valle, L. A., Filene, J. H., & Boyle, C. L. (2008). A meta-analytic review of components associated with parent training program effectiveness. *Journal of Abnormal Child Psychology, 36*(4), 567–589. Patterson, G. R. (1982). *Coercive family process.* Castalia. Pinquart, M. (2017). Associations of parenting dimensions and styles with externalizing problems of children and adolescents. *Developmental Psychology, 53*(5), 873–932. Rosanbalm, K. D., & Murray, D. W. (2017). *Caregiver co-regulation across development: A practice brief* (OPRE Brief 2017-80). U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Wakschlag, L. S., et al. (2012). Defining the developmental parameters of temper loss in early childhood. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry, 53*(11), 1099–1108.