

Suggestions of how to work with Stuck Kids

Preamble:

Children diagnosed with PTSD, RAD, ASD, PDD and LD (Learning Disorder) may exhibit stuck behaviour.

Stuck behaviour is when a child perseverates or 'sticks' on a certain behaviour, thought or perception. They become stuck when limits are set on a behaviour, during times of transitions, stressful situations, etc.

They often exhibit oppositional types of behaviour (e.g., refusing to do as asked, arguing, swearing, throwing articles, aggression, etc.).

Suggestions

The following suggestions may help a child become "unstuck".

- Avoid power struggles
- Adults be willing to be flexible
- Use low-key, supportive, caring, "I'm on your side" approach when dealing with issues
 - "Hey __, what's wrong? Let's fix this problem together"
 - If __ is unable to problem solve give him 2 ways to solve the problem
- Identify, in advance, specific situations that may routinely lead to outbursts or being stuck (problem solve what to do in these situations)
- Provide progressive skills training to help the child gain skills to deal with problems and issues in more acceptable ways e.g. anger management, communication skills, etc.
- Read the warning signals and act quickly to intervene to prevent an outburst
- Early intervention strategies may include empathy, logical persuasion, distraction, humour and downshifting.
- Be aware of how our behaviours may trigger responses in the child
- When an adult observes a 'problem' starting, take him aside (quiet area, away from the situation/problem) using a problem solving approach.
- Focus on problem-solving and communication for the purposes of rebuilding the relationship with the child and setting the stage for improving the deficient skills underlying the child's inflexibility and low tolerance for frustration.
- Decrease situational demands by having all of the adults interacting with the child set realistic and consistent expectations
- Minimize adversarial situations, with the adult recognizing that the child's behaviours are not to be taken personally
- Interpret incoherent behaviours for what they are - a diminished capacity for rational thought

- Giving immediate consequences for misbehaviour may be counter productive as the child may have an outburst (and not learn from the incident/ consequence). Following through with consequences after problem solving the issue may be the most effective (as the child may be more receptive).
- Assigned caregiver should 'check in' with Child at beginning of shift. Give him positive attention (joking and 'connecting" with him)
- Inform Child of what will be happening in the day (appointments, activities, etc.). Plan with Child how he can handle appointments and activities. Help him problem solve ways to make his day go 'better'
- Through out the day check in with Child to determine how his day is going (mood, fun, etc.). Point out to him how well he is doing i.e., positives (be aware that these children may have difficulty accepting the positives. Give them anyways)
- Encourage the Child to take a break when he is feeling angry, worried, over whelmed, etc.
- When the staff are starting shift, going on breaks and when parents/caregivers arrive 'pass on' the relationship in front of Child. Discuss the positive behaviours and activities that Child had participated in.
- Provide consistency and predictability in his life by providing clear guidelines, expectations.
- Be nurturing, caring, supportive and low key as you set limits and as you follow through with consequences
- Have pre-planned responses to behaviours
- Teach him ways to deal with disappointments, frustrations in a healthy acceptable way.
- You must be willing and able to enforce your wishes
- Validate his feelings and perceptions no matter what they may be. When he is yelling, stating you are unfair, he hates you, etc., be matter of fact and neutral.

The treatment goals for the child are:

1. Think clearly in the midst of frustration
2. Stay calm enough to achieve goal #1.

Three goals critical to helping the child are:

1. Maintaining adults as authority figures
2. Teaching the skills of flexibility and frustration tolerance
3. Being cognizant of the child's limitations.