

How to Survive your Child's Reactive Behaviors

Children do not come by mature; appropriate behaviors naturally. Having deliberate; well-thought out responses and behaviors takes time and maturity. A child's very first inclination to being told no to something is to react quickly with exasperation or anger. A child without being taught how to react appropriately and to take a proactive approach to difficulties they experience, will simply react to a problem or being told no, instead of trying to work through a problem. Children react to stress rather than act upon it. Children go through different stages of development and appropriate behaviors are taught. Some reactive behaviors that a parent typically sees are:

- 1.) A child being oppositional-this is a child that is openly defiant and you ask them to do something and they either argue with you or they simply refuse to do what you have asked.
- 2.) The child that throws a temper tantrum. This is a common reaction in children and they have a fit as soon as you tell them, "no, you can't have that toy" when you are in a store. Of course, the normal parental reaction is to give the child whatever they want in order to not cause a scene and everyone in the store thinks you are abusing your child in some way because they are screaming their head off.
- 3.) The child that is impulsive in their reactions. We have all seen this type of child. This is the child that runs ten miles the other way at home or in a store as soon as you tell them they can not have something. They react quickly and do not think about what they are doing.
- 4.) The child that whines every single time they do not get their way. This is the child that starts whining and crying as soon as you tell her "no" and she carries on for minutes or sometimes hours.

In all of these cases, these are children that are reacting to situations instead of acting on them. Each one of these children do not have clear-cut boundaries and it is up to the parent to teach their child the difference between simply reacting to problems by lashing out at them and to responding to a problem in a more mature manner. Some common elements in children that are reactive are: they are usually oppositional and usually have no basic reasoning attached to their protesting or oppositional behavior. They argue simply to argue. Reactive children also have boundaries that are not driven by inherent values. Basically, they are reactive to something not out of values or what they believe in and they are not mature in their reactions or decisions. Reactive children are children react to situations or problems that are external and not internal. Of course, reactive boundaries are good when your child is protesting something that is very bad (like a person that is bullying them or when they are in danger), however having a reaction to something is only a starting point in their development of appropriate boundaries and a child needs to be taught to react to situations in a more proactive way. Reactive boundaries are an

earlier stage of development but a necessary stage in order for your child to learn how to protest things when they do not agree with them.

The way to survive your child's reactive behaviors is to teach them proactive boundaries. Proactive boundaries come from a maturing of a child's reactive boundaries, which are an earlier stage of development. It is your job as a parent to teach your child proactive boundaries. As a parent, teach your child that protesting a problem only identifies that there is a problem, however it does not "fix the problem." Having a fit, whining, screaming, arguing, etc... does not solve a problem, the problem is still there. Your child needs to learn what the issue is that they are protesting and think about the responses, such as anger or frustration. You as a parent discuss how they feel about the problem, however it is still your job to encourage responsibility and have your child do the right thing. For example, most children do not enjoy doing their homework. They would rather watch television, play outside, or listen to music. Your child may refuse to complete their homework or start whining, however you as a parent turn off the television and enforce the rules. You stick to your boundary and make them do the right thing. If you acquiesce and give in to your child because they have whined a little, then you are sabotaging yourself because your child has figured out that they can manipulate you.

A child that learns proactive boundaries, which involves making mature; responsible decisions are children that know what they are for and against in life and do not have to depend on others. In contrast, children with reactive boundaries are children that are motivated by others feelings and actions and what others do or do not do for them. Children that simply react and do not problem solve end up being victims as adults because they are always feeling that others "have done them wrong." As a parent, you are trying to teach your child to be in control of their life and be independent of others, but at the same time teaching them that they can have an opinion about what they are for and against.

Letting a child have reactions or protesting to things is part of their development, however a parent needs to teach proactive boundaries as part of their development in order for a child to establish their own identity. This must be accomplished through setting clear boundaries and sticking to them but by emphasizing and communicating to your child why you are doing what you are doing. After your child knows that you are not going to give in no matter how they behave and enforce the rules, their reactive behaviors will slowly change. Children must have boundaries that are consistent as well as have consequences for their behaviors, whether the behaviors are good or bad.

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