

## Case Studies

### HELP FILE

#### Immature Aggressive Boy (7)

*"Hi, I am the mother of a 6 year old boy, (7 in June) Grade 2. He has a 9 year old sister, who is well behaved and pretty much never been in trouble. My husband and I have a good marriage, we are basically what you would call a happy and contented family. My problem is our son Jake, I feel he is a beautiful little boy, who loves riding, skateboarding, swimming anything energetic as long as he is on the go, constantly. He has always been slightly hyperactive and jealous of his sister and it is as if he is starved of attention, which is not true. His behaviour in recent weeks is the same at home but heaps worse at school. Eg: when he gets into trouble at school, he smiles at the teachers.*

*He kicked a girl's lunchbox down the stairs and thought it was funny. He threatened to snap a pencil in class, but made sure everyone was looking first. He kicked a classmate in the groin. He was hitting his soccer ball on a mates head, laughing.*

*He has no respect for classmates, teachers, parents, sibling anyone in general. I believe it starts at home, but I also believe we do respect each other here at home.*

*School detentions, which he hates does, nothing at all. A smack has been ruled out, because it does nothing. Speaking to him, does nothing, which I do nearly every afternoon, constantly explaining right from wrong. When we talk one on one away from his sister, he won't make eye contact and says, "Yeah, yeah, yeah I know all this already".*

*He has just started behaviour management sessions at school, half hour a week and this lady said she can't make any assumptions until after a few more sessions.*

*His little cousins are scared of him, his sister is scared of him. His teacher's have said he doesn't have ADD. I am so sick and tired of people and friends laughing saying he is a normal little boy, all boys are the same. Well I know they are not!!! He does react badly to food colouring and I have cut this out of his diet.*

*He recently hit his father in the stomach in the shopping centre and ran off. As soon as you use authority he runs around the house, so he doesn't have to listen to us, so I make him go to his room to make him listen, but he will put his hands over his ears and won't make eye contact, and when I have finished he says, "Yeah, can I come out now"? I have been called to speak to his teacher everyday this week, and don't know what else to do.*

*Please help. Thanks, K.."*

#### Jenny Replied

It's not always easy, is it? Children develop in various stages and you often find that they may be well able in one area and not coping in another e.g. intellectually but not coping emotionally or socially or vice versa. We are all different but generally when growing you'll find a child will develop at different rates in one area at time e.g. physically or intellectually or emotionally etc.

What is important in managing children is remembering that behaviour is a message of how a child is feeling and coping with their world.

What messages do you think your young Jake is sending?

I would think he is discovering that school is quite a difficult place in which to find where he belongs; but more importantly how to belong ... his relative emotional immaturity - quite common at this age, even with girls, makes it difficult for him to relate to others .. it is all a learning process. Our and the teacher's role is to teach him to be able to cope ... i.e. he knows what to do. We need to be very firm, step in immediately when he goes too far & ensure consequential learning; acknowledge him and catch him when he's doing it right - describing what he does with pleasure - so he can feel able and pleased with himself. He also needs help in managing his feelings - give him the words to use - start with 4 basic words - mad bad sad and glad and build a vocabulary from there so he can learn to use words instead of e.g. 'fists'.

I would like to recommend a couple of books for you ... they are simple and practical and excellent, by Adele Faber and Elaine Mazlish ... "How to Talk so Kids will Listen and Listen so Kids will Talk", "Siblings Without Rivalry", and especially for school and you may like to recommend if for his teacher too - "How to Talk so Kids will Learn at School and at Home". These are in most libraries. Above right you will see a link to my own book, "Coat of Many Pockets", for teachers which has just come out - I think you will find that they will find this really helpful too. Also, "Try and Make Me", by Ray Levy and Bill O'Hanlon ... may also be helpful.

When youngsters act like Jake they're a mix of emotions and actions and just feel and act with little thought or emotional self-control - they just are, they feel and then do. He is really not sure how he should behave and his behaviour reflects his emotions and needs. He needs guidance (sometimes quite firm but I say gently firm), for him to learn about himself, his behaviour and how to relate well to others. He needs ....

1. A few firm guidelines - ground rules that are consistently applied ... e.g. We do not hurt or hit each other. We use words not fists ... if we are cross we only say so e.g. "I am really angry with you". If we have a problem we tell someone and ask for help.
2. One of our tasks is to teach him self control e.g. when he is angry or feels like hitting someone or is excited and needs to calm down, give him steps to follow - things to do so he can take control, i.e. don't just tell him not to be so angry or excited or whatever - that is meaningless to a child ... but ... e.g. to stop, put his hands by his side and say, "I am really angry...", etc.
  - When he is not allowed to hit, he then has to learn what to do - this has to be taught.
  - I suggest that you together draw up a list of the things that he finds difficult and gets him into trouble and then make a plan taking one at a time and letting him practice how to get it right. It may take a few weeks to just get

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- one thing right. This first success is vitally important, he'll be able to build on it and gain confidence.
- When he gets it right let him tell you exactly what he did ... that will help him next time.
- He will make mistakes .. but that's okay ...we learn through our mistakes. He needs to learn this but also needs to learn that mistakes are okay only if you go back and put things right.

3. To learn that every action has a consequence and if he acts in a certain way there will be certain consequences - negative or positive consequences. It is not the severity of the consequences but the certainty of them that is important. Consequences need to teach him about himself and his relationship with others. I call it consequential learning and all consequences to be effective need to....

- **relate** as closely as possible to the behaviour,
- **make sense** to children (they don't have to like it - that is not the issue) – so that they see the reason for it. Again, they don't have to like the consequence - that is not the issue ( at his age he may put up a bit of a fight because he will tend to react emotionally - realise this but stay with the consequence - he is having to learn about his behaviour and how it affects others and himself);
- **learn** that when they misbehave, a consequence happens because of the choice they made, but if they choose to 'behave', the consequence (outcome), is different and that they can choose to behave differently and therefore choose to feel happier ... but if they choose to 'misbehave' then they are choosing an unhappy/negative consequence ...this is learning to take responsibility for their words and actions. NOTE this is best learned by experience ... don't try and explain.
- **learn** to 'put right the wrong', - make reparation (where possible), and make this part of the consequence too.

DON'T USE THE WORD 'CONSEQUENCE' with him, JUST DO THE ACTION ... APPLY THE CONSEQUENCE. (There is too much talk and explanation with children ... they need parents and teachers to show them what to do and to act when they get it wrong so that they can learn to do it right).

The outcome of all this is that this is how youngsters learn respect for others, which in part is being modelled by the parent and the teacher by taking the time and effort to teach these things, - the underlying message being, "You are important but so are others".

4. For his emotional needs to be met, which invariably takes away much of the need to act-out and misbehave, give attention to the following.....

- Organise a special time with Dad, with Mum, and as a family - where you do fun things together like chat and listen to each other. He is an active little

boy so doing something outdoors and active could be fun for all, as can reading a story and sharing some quiet time together.

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- Be firm, enable him to feel safe because he knows what behaviour is expected of him.

5. You mention authority and his reaction to it; your aim is to teach him to control himself, not for you to be in total control of him. He has much to learn and the first thing we all have to learn is that we have to consider others' needs along with our own, and if he doesn't then certain results/actions occur. He needs to get the message that you will not put up with certain misbehaviours - when he steps too far, but the emphasis needs not to be on you or his teacher controlling him but on teaching him how to control himself and his own behaviour. A subtle but vital difference, - it is not a power game - which is the message he has got at present. This is all learning about himself and how to get along with others.

I hope this helps and enables you to start working on helping him get it right ...

**Jenny Mackay**