

## **H.U.G.S.**

### **A Dramatic Change ebook for Parents of Kids**

- **Introduction:**

Sara and Aliza bring you another Dramatic Change™ product, this one a handbook to help parents learn how to deal with the issues and conflicts that arise while parenting their 2-7 year olds. We know how helpless and overwhelmed you can feel at times and we want to change that. Starting with the terrible twos and learning how to balance teaching autonomy while providing a framework with boundaries and accountability is a full-time job and we want to make it a little easier for you.

We offer some basic tools and techniques that will enable parents to feel more capable and compassionate towards their children, so that they feel better equipped to deal with the various challenges and issues that this age range can present.

From tantrums, boundary testing, fighting, sulking, crying, constantly negotiating, learning a tremendous number of skills, and a variety of major transitions, this period presents a number of challenges that test parents in many ways. Despite the desire to remain calm, cool and collected, even the best of intentions can be swept away with the screams of a pissy preschooler. Learning how to understand, respond, resolve and cope with these and more, will provide for a happier, healthier home environment.

Dramatic Change™ delivers tools for solving conflicts at home, in social relationships and in the workplace. Our original methods combine Cognitive Behavioral Therapy, Dialectical Behavior Therapy, Non-Violent Communication and other concepts. We use psychodrama in our live workshops to help people practice our different techniques through role-playing. We believe that all people, even sleep-deprived and overwhelmed parents, are capable of change. We know, because we are sleep-deprived parents, too. And often overwhelmed.

- **Does this ever happen to you?**

While the term “kids” can be fairly encompassing, the issues ranging from ages 2-7 are vast, so we’re going to provide you with two - one common at the lower end of the age range, and one common at the higher end.

Scenario #1: You picked out an outfit with your three-year-old the previous night, in order to make your morning go a bit smoother. Then this happens:

You: Ok sweetie, time to get dressed.

Kid: I don’t want the blue shirt, I want my purple shirt

You: This is what you picked out last night! We don’t have time to start changing outfits!

Kid: I WANT THE PURPLE SHIRT! THE BLUE SHIRT IS STINKY!

You: we don’t have time for this, and I have no clue where the purple shirt is right now. We can find it tonight.

Kid: WAHHHHH! NO! Ahhhhhhh!

You: WE’RE GOING TO BE LATE, STOP IT ALREADY!

Scenario #2: Your 6 year old is playing with a younger sibling. Cue the screaming, cutting short this brief moment of idyllic co-existence. Both come running, shouting accusations of “he/she’s being mean” and stating general feelings of foul play. How do you deal? Who do you punish? Who needs your attention first?

- **Why you're not achieving the results you want**

Why do we do what we do? Why on earth does our kid pick a fight about something that hadn't bothered them previously, or throw a tantrum despite being given strict instructions to be on their best behaviors? In a nutshell, our thoughts are the way that we process the world, and our behaviors are the means through which we implement that understanding.

**Our behaviors all serve a purpose and are a product of our needs and the environmental responses to that behavior.**

Understanding this concept will help you better understand why your child does what they do. Behaviors can be the result of a variety of factors but they serve to gain us a result, every single time. Even if that result appears to be negative. For example, when a child throws a tantrum and ends up getting mom and dad's sole attention, even for a moment, that result is what they craved, but lacked the ability to verbalize it and request it in a more productive fashion.

**Behaviors can be modified by using consistent, clear and reasonable boundaries.**

You need to figure out what your house and family rules are. This is not the same for every family, nor the same for every child's stage of development, so it's up to you to figure out boundaries that are acceptable, enforceable and reasonable *to you*. Don't set yourself up for failure! Discuss the rules during a calm period, not when your little darling is losing it.

So, if your child pitches a fit every time they're asked to clean up, then you need to remind them what the rules of your house are, and what the consequence will be if the rules are not followed. If you create a boundary and don't enforce it, then your child sees that they are not being held accountable and there is no need to hold by the rules.

**With practice and reinforcement it will cause a shift.**

If every time they refuse to clean up, toys are put away until further notice, with the explanation that if they can't clean up, then the toys need to be put away until they're big enough to play with them responsibly, then they'll cotton onto the fact that no clean-up = no toys. You'll need to practice this concept and be prepared for some rebellion if you're making changes, but this is normal and part of the developmental process.

Now that we've discussed that behavioral changes are possible, how do you do it? How do you stay calm in the face of the yelling, screaming, rebellion and absolute absurdity that is preschooler logic or seven-year-old hysterics?!?!?

Instead of getting annoyed, defensive and then angry, you need to give them **HUGS**:

**HEAR what your child is really trying to tell you**

When a child throws a tantrum or acts out with siblings, it's not personal, it's a coded message. Our job as parents is to break that code and figure out what's really going on. Is your child just hitting their sibling for no reason, or are they struggling with ways to get your attention? Is this really about what color shirt they want or about the fact that their small needs are actually huge, and having those needs respected is tremendous for them.

**UNDERSTAND what they actually need, not just what they're saying or showing you**

Once you get the subtext of the message (or it could be overt, sometimes they call it like it is), your next challenge, Agent 007, is to figure out the best way to meet that need. Do you need to be firm with boundaries and consequences, or is the behavior a symptom of something else, that needs a different response. Unfortunately, our kids don't come with a manual, so much of this deduction is a case of detective-work and attempted application. It's also important to remember that similar behaviors can work towards different goals, depending on the situation, so be alert to that.

**GIVE them security, with boundaries, and appropriate responses**

Code cracked — check.

Needs understood — check.

Now it's time to be consistent. If your child is engaging in negative, attention seeking behaviors, you need to work toward not rewarding them with attention. If your child is throwing a tantrum at 7pm in the supermarket (admit it, you've been there...), they need a hug and perhaps a little something to eat, until you get home, as they're probably tired, hungry and done for the day. If they're hitting siblings, you need to make sure family rules are clear, and be ready to follow through with consequences, even if it's tough.

**STICK with it!!!**

I said it above a number of times, and I'll say it again. Practice makes perfect, and the more consistent you are with boundaries and responses, the more behavioral changes you'll see in your child and the calmer your house will be. I'm not saying it'll be an oasis of calm and happiness at all times, but by giving yourself, and your family, consistency, you will end up with a household that runs smoothly and plays by the rules.

Most of the time.

Welcome to Dramatic Change's™ original H.U.G.S.™ method. Try it out! If you would like to learn more about H.U.G.S.™ or Dramatic Change™, check out our e-learning modules, join our user forum or book us for a workshop in your city. We look forward to hearing from you!

Dramatic Change™: Delivering conflict solutions for everyone.