



Behavior Management Series–Issue #11

Why Children Blame Others for Their Problems

Academic Possibilities: In general, frustration usually leads to anger. In some children who suffer from academic frustration, they will displace their anger towards others in the form of blame because they cannot succeed at schoolwork they know others can. They blame everyone else for their problems because they either do not want to accept the reality that it is their problem or that their problem is based on the teacher's inability to teach properly.

Environmental Possibilities: Some children may blame others because of the pressure or stressors experienced at home. These may include unrealistic expectations from parents, poor parenting skills, not being able to live up to a sibling's success or in the most serious of cases, physical abuse at home, which results in the child having to release his frustrations by blaming everyone else for his problems.

Intellectual Possibilities: There are cases when limited intelligence can lead to blaming behavior. Some children may feel very inadequate as a result of this limitation, and become very upset with their situation. They externalize their problems by blaming others for their inadequacies rather than dealing with their limitations.

Language Possibilities: Children who have difficulty communicating as a result of language limitations may release their frustration through their words. They blame all others for their language problems, especially their parents, if the child comes from a home where English is not the native language.

Medical Possibilities: Some children with medical problems may blame others for their problems. This may especially affect the parents whom the children blame for all of their problems. They have a great deal of difficulty handling the fact that they have a medical problem, so rather than try to look at it from a perspective of how to deal with it, they spend their time blaming the world for all of their problems.

Perceptual Possibilities: Some children have difficulty perceiving the world as others do, and frustration may be high due to this fact. This frustration can lead to blaming others for all of their problems, especially when they feel as though no one understands them and what they are going through in life.

Psychological Possibilities: Certain psychological possibilities (i.e. low self esteem, anxiety, depressed mood, etc.) can create a state of inadequacy in some children and increase their levels of tension. They may deal with this by acting out their tension through blaming others. They feel

as though they have been dealt a bad hand in life, and decide that the only way to psychologically cope with the situation is to blame others for all of their problems.

Social Possibilities: Some children may feel socially rejected, socially inadequate, and feel as if they do not fit in. They may deal with these feelings by acting out their frustrations by blaming others for all of their problems. Because of their inability to function socially as everyone else, they blame the world for their problems and consistently complain about others, rather than focusing on their own problems and how to make them better.

What to Do When This Happens

- Sit down with the child in a private session with no other students around and discuss what you have been noticing about the child's behavior.
- Ask the child his opinion of the behavior to get his perspective
- Determine whether or not the child realizes what he is doing. Some children will have a thin layer of denial and when confronted will own up to the behavior. If this is the case, the situation may be more workable. However, other children may have a deeper level of denial, and in that case, do not push for insight or admission. Instead, discuss this with the school psychologist since this denial may be covering a more fragile ego.
- Assuming the child understands what he is doing but is not sure how to change it, explain to him the reasons why his behavior is detrimental to making friends and succeeding in school. The child needs to become aware of how his behavior affects others.
- Try to offer the child ideas, options, and alternatives about what to do when he needs to blame others. For instance, have the child sit closer to you in the classroom so that he may feel more secure and connected. Also, let the child know that if he needs to blame others he may want to come to you first and discuss his motives.
- Try to find out specific patterns where this behavior is used by the child. There may be a theme to the issues, experiences or situations in which the behavior occurs since blaming others is an attempt to refocus the "spotlight", especially in situations where the child feels inadequate.
- Verbally praise the student when you notice a time when blaming others would have been easy to do but the child used some other method to solve the problem. Let him know how proud you are of his behavior and that you appreciate his effort to handle the situation in a different way.
- If the situation does not get better over time, have a conference with the parents to discuss whether there are any extenuating circumstances which may be causing the child to blame others.

Why Children Suffer From Fatigue

Academic Possibilities: Doing school work involves great mental energy for most children. Even those who do well in school have to exert some mental energy to do well most of the time. However, for those children for whom school does not come easy, it takes much more energy to complete assignments. After a while, their energy is drained, leading to general fatigue on the part of these children.

Environmental Possibilities: Unfortunately, many children do not get enough sleep at home. They do not have a set bed time or their parents do not enforce the one that is set. Also,

environmental factors such as an unstable family, impending divorce, etc. can be so emotionally draining for a child that he has no energy by the time school starts each day.

Intellectual Possibilities: Those children with low intelligence will require much more energy to successfully complete assignments. After a while, trying to complete the work takes its toll on these children, and they begin to tire out from the emotional fatigue. Also, for those children who are gifted, their fatigue may actually come from boredom because they are not being challenged by the work they are required to do.

Language Possibilities: Because some children cannot understand the English language, they become rapidly bored because they do not know what is going on in the classroom. Their fatigue is due more to the fact that they are not following what is required and are lost and frustrated rather than actual fatigue due to physical tiredness.

Medical Possibilities: Some medical conditions can create a great sense of fatigue in children. Furthermore, many children need to take medication throughout the day at school. In many of these medications, one of the side effects is drowsiness. The effects of the medication may be what is causing the fatigue for these children. While other medical factors may result in fatigue, they go beyond the scope of this series.

Perceptual Possibilities: Because some children can not perceive what everyone else sees or hears, they become rapidly bored because they do not know what is going on in the classroom. Their fatigue is due more to the fact that they are not following what is required rather than actual fatigue due to tiredness.

Psychological Possibilities: Children suffering from depression, low self-esteem or anxiety may experience fatigue. Being psychologically consumed with many problems becomes emotionally draining for anyone. Also, those suffering from psychological problems may also be on medication. These medications may (as was stated in the Medical Possibilities section) create drowsiness.

Social Possibilities: Some children try to be everywhere doing a million different things at one time. They are truly “social butterflies”. However, trying to be socially involved with everything will eventually wear anyone down. For these types of children, their over-involvement can create a general state of fatigue and exhaustion.

What to Do When This Happens

- Meet with the school nurse to see if there are any medical possibilities for this pattern in the classroom.
- Meet with the school psychologist to determine whether there are any extenuating circumstances for patterns of fatigue (i.e. home issues, trauma, and previous academic failure).
- If the fatigue is the result of avoidance, withdrawal, or some other psychological problem, then building confidence is crucial. Building confidence is a process that is accomplished over a period of time. The child who uses fatigue as an avoidance mechanism needs a foundation of successful experiences as well as the appropriate social tools in order to be an active participant in the classroom.

- Meet with child on a one to one basis in a comfortable setting. Explain to the child that you are aware of the difficulty he has in both academic and/or social situations and that you want to help.
- Have the child work in groups so that the group energy creates excitement in him. Have the group work on some simple goal oriented task that will ensure success. This will give the child the feeling of unity and group accomplishment.
- Provide the student with different types of small group activities so that he has the opportunity to work with all the members of his class. For instance, have the child work on a social studies project with one small group of children, and then work on a science project with a different small group.
- Keep in mind that you need to assign these groups and monitor the interactions to ensure protection and success.
- Speak with the school psychologist about having the child join a small group for social skills to increase activity levels. These types of controlled groups can help the child learn to interact and build skills in a safe and monitored environment to overcome hesitancy.
- If the problem persists to the point where it is affecting the child's everyday functioning, his situation should be brought up to the Child Study Team in the school so that his situation is appropriately evaluated.

Why Children Are Fearful Of Adults

Academic Possibilities: Some children have a general fear of authority figures. Teachers represent something very frightening for these children. It is very possible that academically, they had a prior teacher who was extremely hard on them. These children have now generalized from one academic teacher to all teachers.

Environmental Possibilities: There are homes where parents are incredibly strict and have extremely harsh guidelines and rules to live by. Unfortunately, some children are also neglected and abused by cruel parents. Either way, these children learn very quickly to become frightened of authority figures because they only see them as powerful individuals who create fear in them.

Intellectual Possibilities: Some adults expect children to excel at everything. Unfortunately, some children with low intellectual abilities can never succeed to the level of what their parents or teachers expect. For them, their low intelligence creates a sense of failure because as hard as they try, they never succeed. This leads to a sense of failure on the part of the authority figures, whereby the children become scared.

Language Possibilities: Children with language difficulties may be afraid of teachers because they are concerned about their speaking ability. If they believe the teacher will make fun of them or be overly critical of every word said, there will be a sense of impending doom, leading to great fears and anxiety.

Medical Possibilities: Children with medical problems may be afraid of adults because they believe that they are the cause of their problems. The doctor, who cannot "cure" the child, may be looked upon as the enemy, as the child becomes more afraid of the future pain which may be inflicted. Also, for those children who are medically frail, they may have an adult in their lives who is neglectful or abusive and does not know how to handle this situation.

Perceptual Possibilities: Children with perceptual difficulties may be afraid of teachers because they are concerned about their overall academic ability. If they believe the teacher will make fun of them or be overly critical of every word read or spoken, there will be a sense of impending doom, leading to great fears and anxiety.

Psychological Possibilities: For various reasons, some children may be afraid of adults and authority figures. Low self-esteem can significantly add to these feelings. Adults can create great psychological damage to children. When children have been told that they are worthless and no good, it can have a tremendously negative impact on them. Furthermore, for those children with depression or anxiety disorders, they may be afraid of the authority figures in their lives because they believe that no one understands them.

Social Possibilities: Children who have parents who expect too much may not want to be involved in numerous social activities. Their fear of social situations or indifference to them can lead to a hatred of those adults who try to force them to “play sports, get in the school play, etc.”

What to Do When This Happens

- Try to understand that a child who fears authority cannot just stop it. In order for him to not fear you, it will take time, patience, and the belief on his part that you are a person to be trusted.
- Meet with the school psychologist to determine whether there are any extenuating circumstances for the child’s fear of adults (i.e. home issues, trauma, and previous academic failure).
- Understand that a child who fears authority must feel comfortable in the classroom. Confidence is a process that is built over a period of time. The child with anxiety needs a foundation of successful experiences as well as the appropriate social tools in order to be an active participant in the classroom.
- Meet with child on a one to one basis in a comfortable setting. Explain to the child that you are aware of the difficulty he has and that you want to help. Try to explain that all adults need not be feared. Try to help him define why he fears certain adults in his life.
- If the problem persists to the point where it is affecting the child’s everyday functioning, his situation should be brought up to the Child Study Team in the school so that his situation is appropriately evaluated.

Why Children Are Fearful Of New Situations

Academic Possibilities: Some children experience failure in so many areas of academics. No matter what they do or how hard they try, they just cannot seem to grasp certain concepts. After a while, they begin to realize that all of their effort is not worth the struggle. Consequently, they become afraid to take chances in new situations because it normally just brings on failing results.

Environmental Possibilities: There are children who live in homes where either everything is done for them, they are completely afraid of their parents, or do not feel protected by the significant adults in their lives. In any of these cases, these children do not have the confidence nor the self-esteem to take chances. They fear risk because the new situation is too frightening for them. Their fear of what may happen will supersede the good that might come out of it.

Intellectual Possibilities: Children with limited intellectual abilities may be afraid of new situations because they have difficulties adapting to newness. Their intelligence levels create a sense of complacency with habit. Newness means change, and when you do not have the coping mechanisms for change, it brings on fear when you must step up and begin a new project.

Language Possibilities: Children with language difficulties may be fearful of situations involving their speaking abilities. If they have to do something in class that they believe will cause embarrassment or ridicule, they will become quite anxious. In the process, they begin to start having fear about any and all new situations, especially those involving language skills.

Medical Possibilities: Children with medical problems may become afraid of taking chances when they fear it will affect them physically. For example, a child with bad asthma may always be afraid to do things outside because he had a very bad asthmatic attack once. Also, children with diabetes may be fearful of going on school trips because they have concerns about what will happen if their sugar level drops too low.

Perceptual Possibilities: Children with perceptual difficulties may be fearful of situations involving their reading, writing, or speaking abilities. If they have to do something in class that they have great difficulties normally perceiving, and think it will cause embarrassment or ridicule, they will become quite nervous. In the process, they begin to start generalizing fears to any and all new situations.

Psychological Possibilities: Children with low self-esteem normally question their abilities. They have doubts about what they can and cannot do. Low self-esteem creates a real sense of anxiety in children when they have to do something which they have no experience doing. Their lack of belief in themselves creates a tension which runs very high because they do not want to be put in a situation in which they do not have confidence in at the present time.

Social Possibilities: Some children desperately want to fit in. For some, this need is so strong that they will only participate in activities in which they know they will succeed. They do not want to try new things nor get involved with something risky because they are fearful that if they fail, they will be ridiculed or made fun of by their peers.

What to Do When This Happens

- Remember that this type of child is behaving in this manner for some protective reason. Therefore, attempting to force him into a social situation will only create tremendous conflict, anxiety, and tension.
- Meet with the school psychologist to determine whether there are any extenuating circumstances for the fear (i.e. home issues, trauma, and previous academic failure).
- Understand that in order for a fearful child to open up, he must feel comfortable in the classroom. Confidence is a process that is built over a period of time. The hesitant child needs a foundation of successful experiences as well as the appropriate social tools in order to be an active participant in the classroom.
- Meet with child on a one to one basis in a comfortable setting. Explain to the child that you are aware of the difficulty he has in both academic and/or social situations and that you want to help.
- Realize that a fearful child will need practical guidance which must be taught. It is not common sense for many children to know how to act openly in social situations. Confidence builds out from the center like a flower blooming. For instance, have this

student be involved in small groups and then gradually, if appropriate, increase the size of the group. Initially, pick other students for his group whom you know is more sensitive.

- Have the group work on some simple goal oriented task that will ensure success. This will give the child the feeling of unity and group accomplishment.
- Provide the student with different types of small group activities so that he has the opportunity to work with all the members of his class. For instance, have the child work on a social studies project with one small group of children, and then work on a science project with a different small group.
- Keep in mind that you need to assign these groups and monitor the interactions to ensure protection and success.
- Speak with the school psychologist about having the child join a small group for social skills. These types of controlled groups can help the child learn to interact and build skills in a safe and monitored environment to overcome hesitancy.
- If the problem persists to the point where it is affecting the child's everyday functioning, his situation should be brought up to the Child Study Team in the school so that his situation is appropriately evaluated.

Why Children Are Impulsive

Academic Possibilities: Some children can get very excited when they know the answers to questions. They have great difficulty not waiting to answer or raising their hands. If it is not explained to these children that these types of behavior are unacceptable in a classroom, the behaviors will continue to manifest themselves and become reinforced. The impulsivity then becomes a pattern leading to more impulsivity, a behavior which can then be difficult to terminate.

Environmental Possibilities: Children's home environments may affect impulsivity. If children are desperately seeking attention, they may try to grab hold of it the moment it becomes available. Their impulsive nature is actually used as a method of gaining attention. The impulsiveness assures them that they will be noticed by parents, relatives or siblings.

Intellectual Possibilities: Same motive as Psychological

Language Possibilities: Not applicable

Medical Possibilities: Perhaps the most common reason educators talk about today is attention deficit disorder (ADD). Children with ADD will be distractible and easily influenced by extraneous stimuli. Although we do not know why ADD occurs, there is evidence to suggest that these children have great difficulty focusing on the task at hand or following through with directions

Perceptual Possibilities: Not applicable

Psychological Possibilities: Children who are impulsive may have great difficulty with control. Psychologically, they cannot restrain themselves from acting before thinking. In psychology, this is the idea that for every behavior there is a consequence. Yet, some children do not understand this and act on what they feel like doing rather than processing the outcome of their behaviors.

Social Possibilities: Sometimes in social situations, children want to do the first thing that others say to do. Or, they will follow the group without even thinking about the consequences. Their impulsivity here is due to the fact that they want to be accepted and socially they want to fit in with everyone else.

What to do When This Happens

- Contact the school psychologist to find out whether the child has been diagnosed with Attention Deficit Disorder and has ever been in special education.
- Contact the school nurse just to check that the child is not on any medication for his impulsivity (i.e.; Ritalin).
- Assuming neither of the above, then sit the child down and discuss with him why he acts so impulsively. Many children may be doing this because they are seeking attention in some way. Explain to the child that you recognize what he is doing and set up some way to show him that you will call on him whenever you make a particular move or statement. This way the child will not have to jump all over every questions and/or answer.
- Have a discussion with the school psychologist about how to deal with this situation. Psychologists are usually trained in this area and have numerous behavioral intervention plans to help teachers when a child is impulsive.
- Explain the class rules to the child and what is and is not appropriate. It is possible that this child has not had the type of structure necessary for this grade level.
- Because children who are impulsive often do this consistently, it is imperative that you plan ahead and expect his behavior to occur. You should have a plan about what you will do if his impulsivity affects the class, and then enforce the appropriate punishment if it occurs.
- Contact the parents if the situation gets out of hand to a point where it is seriously affecting the child's social, emotional or academic functioning.
- **DO NOT DISCUSS THE IDEA OF MEDICATION WITH THE PARENTS!!** This is neither your role nor your area of expertise. Although you may feel that medication is appropriate, you are not the professional to make the recommendation.
- If the problem persists to the point where it is affecting the child's everyday functioning, his situation should be brought up to the Child Study Team in the school so that his situation is appropriately evaluated.