



Behavior Management Series–Issue #18

Why Children Are Disorganized

Academic Possibilities: A preoccupation with academic performance or a fear of failure may cause a child to become a single focus individual where his/her concentration and limited energy can only be focused in one area. This leaves very little energy to focus on other areas, sometimes resulting in disorganization or a lack of awareness of the requirements in other areas.

Environmental Possibilities: Disorganization may occur as a result of lax parenting styles which do not offer routines, boundaries, awareness of consequences or implications or present a very disorganized, chaotic home environment.

Intellectual Possibilities: Disorganization may result from feeling overwhelmed by limited awareness brought on by low intellectual ability. Not being able to keep up with all the necessary variables required for organization or a lack of cause and effect, common for such children, may result in this behavior pattern.

Language Possibilities: Language limitations hindering understanding of directions, nuances, directions and so forth may result in a sense of internal and external disorganization.

Medical Possibilities: Children with ADHD will have a very difficult time being consistently organized. The variables exhibited by this disorder include impulsivity, distractibility, lack of attention, and disorganization.

Perceptual Possibilities: Disorganization may be the result of perceptual limitations. Organization is an external and internal process and requires other systems working harmoniously.

Psychological Possibilities: Often times, extreme tension or anxiety may create a “fog” in a child which may impair the implications of his actions. When this occurs, disorganization, which requires awareness of consequence and internal energy, falters. External disorganization in this case is reflective of the internal disorganization the child feels as a result of the tension.

Social Possibilities: Social preoccupation may drain away a child’s energy necessary for many other requirements. Depending upon the age, this social preoccupation or obsession rises to the top of the child’s needs list and renders everything else secondary. As a result, a pattern of disorganization may arise since its importance has been diminished.

What To Do When This Happens

- Discuss with the student why he believes he is having problems with organization. Ask him directly how you can be of assistance to him.
- Teach the student how to be organized. Show him how to put things in their proper place.
- Stress the importance of organization to the student. Explain to him why being organized is critical for academic success.
- Provide the student with organizational tools (e.g.; a container for pencils and pens, a box for storage of homework papers, etc.)
- Give the student time at the beginning and at the end of the day to organize his materials so that he starts and finishes the day on a good note.
- After each assignment done in class, check to student's organization of it so that he never gets too far behind and completely disorganized.
- Have the student write down (he may need you with him to do this) all the materials for a given assignment, especially if it is for homework. This way, he can always refer to his list when he needs something for his work.
- Set up a token economy/reward system for the student for good organizational skills.
- Teach the student how to discard irrelevant and old papers and how to store important ones. Many times, children have great difficulty trying to determine what to throw out and what to keep.
- Send a note home to the parents explaining what it is you are trying to accomplish and give suggestions about how they can implement organizational skills at home.
- Given that disorganization is a possible sign of a learning disability, the persistence of this problem may affect the child's everyday functioning, his/her situation should be brought up to the Child Study Team in the school so that his situation be appropriately evaluated.

Why Children Overreact

Academic Possibilities: Serious and consistent academic pressure and fear of failure which drain energy may result in overreactions on the part of a child especially to peers.

Environmental Possibilities: Family difficulties, struggles, dysfunction, arguments, pressures etc. may all contribute to draining a child's energy. Patience which is based on available energy suffers and overreactions occur.

Intellectual Possibilities: Not Applicable

Language Possibilities: Overreactions for children who have language difficulties may stem from perceived or real feelings of not being understood or ridiculed.

Medical Possibilities: Not Applicable

Perceptual Possibilities: Misperception of social cues is common for some children with perceptual disorders. As a result, an overreaction to a situation may occur.

Psychological Possibilities: Overreaction as a response is in many cases the result of pent up frustration, anger, confusion or fear. Like too much air in a balloon, the tension from these issues

builds up and may come out in response to a minimally stressful situation or comment. Other times, some children may have psychological disorders that exhibit frequent overreactions.

Such disorders like conduct disorders or oppositional defiant disorders may require more professional intervention. The overreactions in these cases can be intense, violent, and consistent and may be directed to both peers and authority figures. Conduct Disorder is characterized by a persistent pattern of behavior which intrudes and violates the basic rights of others without concern or fear of implications. This pattern is not selective and is exhibited in the home, at school, with peers and in the child's community. Other behaviors present with this condition may include vandalism, stealing, physical aggression, cruelty to animals and fire setting.

Oppositional Defiant Disorder usually characterized by patterns of negativistic, hostile and defiant behaviors with peers as well as adults. This disorder is considered less serious than a conduct disorder because of the absence of serious behaviors which violate the basic rights of others. Children with this disorder usually exhibit argumentative behaviors towards adults which may include swearing and frequent episodes of intense anger and annoyance .

These symptoms are usually considered to be more serious and intense than those exhibited by other children of the same age.

Social Possibilities: Overreactions may occur from a need to be in control, a need for the spotlight, or feelings of social devaluation. Some children overreact in very dramatic ways to gain social attention, or be perceived as the victim. Both of these motives fill their need for recognition in neurotic ways. However, if this behavior is reinforced, then the child learns to keep it and refine it.

What To Do When This Happens

- Try to determine what it is exactly that is making the child overreact. With many children, there is a specific event, task or other child which may be setting them off easily
- Sit down with the child and discuss what you are seeing and have him explain to you why he overreacts so often.
- After listening to the child, do whatever you can to make the necessary changes in the classroom so that he can function more easily.
- Try to seat the student at the front of the classroom so that you can keep a better eye on him. By being able to see his behaviors will give you a greater chance of preventing his over-reactive behavior from developing.
- If the student cannot maintain self-control, remove the student from the environment. This must be done for the safety of the other children.
- Contact the parents to see if there is anything happening at home which is creating overreaction on the part of the child.
- Talk to the school psychologist about speaking with the child about developing better coping skills. Often, children who overreact have poor coping skills and do not know how to control their emotions.
- Let the student know that if he feels his frustration, anger, etc. occurring that he does not have to participate in the activities. Come up with an acceptable way for the child to deal with this situation, and a signal he can give you when he feels his sensitivity building.
- Have the student sit next to another student whom you know will not cause anger or hostility in him

- Talk to the school psychologist about the possibility of having the child in a group to work through his feelings.
- If necessary, discuss with the school psychologist about the possibility of setting up a behavior modification program for the child in the classroom so that reinforcement is delivered in an appropriate manner.
- 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 Panic Easily

Academic Possibilities: Children who fear parental reactions, peer embarrassment may panic during academic situations. Also, children who may feel unprepared, or who have a history of failure and may perceive another failure situation may panic more easily in these situations.

Environmental Possibilities: Children who come from parenting styles that do not offer boundaries, protections, direction, consistency or logical consequences may contribute to their panic behavior. Children who do not feel well protected by parents who themselves may be vulnerable, uninvolved, self absorbed etc. panic easily to situations in the fear that any situation could lead to harm or danger. These children have not developed the necessary feelings of parental protection and see themselves as having to deal with the world all by themselves. This causes them to see all situations under a microscope and spend so much of their available energy on self protection that they have very little for other things.

Intellectual Possibilities: Children with low intellectual ability may panic easily as a result of being overwhelmed and lost.

Language Possibilities: Same as Intellectual Possibilities

Medical Possibilities: Not Applicable

Perceptual Possibilities: Same as Intellectual Possibilities

Psychological Possibilities: Children who do not feel a secure protective barrier between themselves and the outside world will as a result of vulnerability, panic easily. These children may possess poor self esteems, a lack of social tools, prior trauma, or some environmental influences that create or reinforce vulnerability. These children constantly feel vulnerable to the whims of their environment and often feel that no one, including adults, can protect them. Children with high levels of tension may also panic easily since energy, required to maintain perspective, is drained.

Social Possibilities: For some children, the need for social connection is so great that any indication, real or perceived, of social isolation or rejection may cause them to panic. This loss of connection may make them feel vulnerable or insignificant. Consequently, they may misperceive the actions of others since disconnection is their greatest fear.

What To Do When This Happens

- Remember that a child who panics easily is feeling very unsure of himself and the situation in which he is in. Therefore, attempting to force him into situations will only create tremendous conflict, anxiety, and tension.
- Meet with the school psychologist to determine whether there are any extenuating circumstances for the panic (i.e. home issues, trauma, previous academic failure).
- Understand that a child who panics easily must feel comfortable in the classroom. At times, this may be like coaxing a frightened turtle out of its shell. If you move too fast, he will revert back inside.
- Confidence is a process that is built over a period of time. The child who panics 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.
- Have the child work in groups so that he can build confidence in the classroom. 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 his coping skills. These types of controlled groups can help the child learn to interact and build skills in a safe and monitored environment to overcome his panic behavior.
- If necessary, discuss with the school psychologist about the possibility of setting up a behavior modification program for the child in the classroom so that reinforcement is delivered in an appropriate manner.
- 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 Inflexible

Academic Possibilities: Academically, some children like to do things their own way. When faced with a new way of handling a problem, these children become very rigid and do not want to change their ways. They have found success in their way to handle the problem and will become inflexible when doing their work.

Environmental Possibilities: Living in a very strict and rigid home can create a child who follows the same style of life. In cases of children where the mother or father is in the military, the homes may be run like a tight ship/army base. Children copy what they see. If his/her parents are rigid and inflexible, then the chances that the child will be rigid rises dramatically.

Intellectual Possibilities: Limited intelligence can hinder the ways in which a child has the ability to do things. Once the child has figured a way to do anything, he may not want to do it any other way because he has finally succeeded in doing it right. Also, gifted children may be very inflexible because they can do things in their head without writing it down like the others do. Teachers want to see all the work on paper but the gifted child decides that this is not necessary for him, so he becomes very inflexible and will only do it his way.

Language Possibilities: When English is not the dominant language used by a child, he may be forced to change the way language is done. For those children who are stubborn and do not want to learn the language, they can be very inflexible because they feel it is not fair that they have to know two languages and are behind in school. Their rigidity is based more on anger than it is a certain way of thinking.

Medical Possibilities: Not applicable

Perceptual Possibilities: Not applicable

Psychological Possibilities: Some children may suffer from obsessive compulsive disorder, may be very anal-retentive or be very fearful. Whatever the reason, psychologically, people choose to be rigid for a reason. Their rigidity creates a sense of security because of the fear of change. These children may have psychological issues when it come to taking chances or risks. The need to do it one way and only one way marks the psychological turmoil which may be exhibited when asked to do something a new way. Consequently, their stubbornness is actually a defense mechanism used for security purposes.

Social Possibilities: Some children do not want to play by the rules. They can be very stubborn because they want to be the ones in charge. Their inflexibility is caused by a social need to “be in control”. Because they feel that they are always right, they may have many social problems because after a while, their social inflexibility may lose them many friends.

What To Do When This Happens

- Remember that a child suffering from inflexibility is feeling very unsure of himself and the situation in which he is in. Therefore, attempting to force him into situations will only create tremendous conflict, anxiety, and tension.
- Meet with the school psychologist to determine whether there are any extenuating circumstances for the inflexibility (i.e. home issues, trauma, previous academic failure).
- Understand that a child who is inflexible 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.
- Have the child work in groups so that he can build confidence in the classroom. 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 his coping skills. These types of controlled groups can help the child learn to interact and build skills in a safe and monitored environment to overcome anxiety.
- If necessary, discuss with the school psychologist about the possibility of setting up a behavior modification program for the child in the classroom so that reinforcement is delivered in an appropriate manner.
- 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 Insecure

Academic Possibilities: Children who lack academic success may feel very insecure. They lack the confidence in their academic abilities that they can succeed in school. Failure in reading, math, spelling, etc. creates a real sense of anxiety on the part of these children. After a while, they become so insecure that they experience learned helplessness, whereby they give up on doing anything at all pertaining to academics because they have always failed anyway.

Environmental Possibilities: Children may be insecure as a result of environmental deprivation resulting from the loss of a parent, inadequate parenting, lack of nurturance or parental reinforcement of immature behavior

Intellectual Possibilities: Sometimes, children with limited intelligence may be insecure as a result of their lack of confidence in their abilities and success.

Language Possibilities: Children with language difficulties may be very insecure when it comes to anything involving speaking projects. These children can become very nervous and scared when they are required to do something involving their language. This fear leads to tremendous insecurity pertaining to their overall abilities.

Medical Possibilities: In some cases, a child who has a serious medical condition may be very insecure about his or her abilities based on the fact that he has never had the opportunity to do anything for himself.

Perceptual Possibilities: Children with perceptual difficulties may be very insecure when it comes to performing tasks with others or in front of others. These children can become very nervous and scared when they are required to do that which they know they are weak at in school or outside of school. This fear leads to tremendous insecurity pertaining to their overall abilities.

Psychological Possibilities: Inadequate emotional development brought on by parental rejection, lack of emotional development, favoritism to another sibling, parental tension in the marriage, and so on can result in children searching out other anchors since they feel like they are drowning. But like someone who is drowning, his/her behavior is intense, impulsive, needy,

and anxiety driven. These children may be very insecure because they have so much to worry about that they just cannot garner enough strength to do anything on their own.

Social Possibilities: Children may be very insecure as a result of a lack of confidence in their abilities in social situations. Some children have great difficulty fitting in with their peers. They are lacking in self-esteem, and in the process, they are very insecure about their abilities in social activities.

What To Do When This Happens

- Remember that a child suffering from insecurity is feeling very unsure of himself and the situation in which he is in. Therefore, attempting to force him into situations will only create tremendous conflict, anxiety, and tension.
- Meet with the school psychologist to determine whether there are any extenuating circumstances for the insecurity (i.e. home issues, trauma, previous academic failure).
- Understand that a child who is insecure must feel comfortable in the classroom. This is sometimes like coaxing a frightened child out of a closet. If you push too fast he will retreat.
- Confidence is a process that is built over a period of time. The insecure 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 and that you want to help.
- Have the child work in groups so that he can build confidence in the classroom. 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 his coping skills. These types of controlled groups can help the child learn to interact and build skills in a safe and monitored environment to overcome anxiety.
- If necessary, discuss with the school psychologist about the possibility of setting up a behavior modification program for the child in the classroom so that reinforcement is delivered in an appropriate manner.
- 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.