

BILL OF RIGHTS FOR BEHAVIORALLY CHALLENGING KIDS

If we don't start doing right by kids with social, emotional, and behavioral challenges, we're going to keep losing them at an astounding rate. Doing the right thing isn't an option...it's an imperative. There are lives in the balance, and we all need to do everything we can to make sure those lives aren't lost.

Behaviorally challenging kids have the right:

- To have their behavioral challenges understood as a form of developmental delay in the domains of flexibility/adaptability, frustration tolerance, and problem-solving.
- To have people -- parents, teachers, mental health clinicians, doctors, coaches...everyone -- understand that challenging behavior is no less a form of developmental delay than delays in reading, writing, and arithmetic, and is deserving of the same compassion and approach as are applied to these other cognitive delays.
- Not to be misunderstood as bratty, spoiled, manipulative, attention-seeking, coercive, limit- testing, controlling, or unmotivated.
- To have adults understand that challenging behavior occurs in response to specific unsolved problems -- homework, screen time, teeth brushing, clothing choices, sibling interactions, and so forth -- and that these unsolved problems are usually highly predictable and can therefore be solved proactively.
- To have adults understand that the primary goal of intervention is to collaboratively solve these problems in a way that is realistic and mutually satisfactory so that they don't precipitate challenging behavior any more.
- To have adults (and classmates) understand that time-outs, detentions, suspensions, expulsion, and isolation do not solve problems or "build character" but rather often make things worse.
- To have adults take a genuine interest in their concerns or perspectives, and to have those concerns and perspectives viewed as legitimate, important, and worth listening to and clarifying.
- To have adults in their lives who do not resort to physical intervention and are knowledgeable about and proficient in other means of solving problems.
- To have adults who understand that solving problems collaboratively -- rather than insisting on blind adherence to authority -- is what prepares kids for the demands they will face in the real world.
- To have adults understand that blind obedience to authority is dangerous, and that life in the real world requires expressing one's concerns, listening to the concerns of others, and working toward mutually satisfactory solutions.

www.livesinthebalance.org

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