

Managing Typical Behaviors

During their early years children develop an amazing array of skills and abilities. Most of the time parents will feel completely comfortable and secure in their ability to nurture their child's healthy emotional development (their mental health), but there are times when even the most confident and competent parent will become frustrated and wonder, "Are these behaviors typical?" Most often, the answer is "Yes!," and in fact, the behaviors are often necessary to healthy emotional development.

The behaviors that give most parents a reason to wonder are those related to control—that is their child's ability to control their world. When a child is born they have many needs and few wants. As a child grows, the balance between their needs and their wants begins to shift. The moment when a need turns to a want, however, is very difficult to determine and very likely will be different for each child—but when it happens, issues of control often emerge. Most children will express their desire to control everyday tasks like sleeping, eating, and playing.

And although their desire for control will often lead to sleep problems, tantrums, and/or power struggles, these are also golden opportunities to help children develop a healthy emotional foundation for good mental health. For example, working through a sleep problem can help a child learn self-soothing techniques; tantrums are opportunities to teach children healthy ways to deal with frustration and disappointment; and power struggles are excellent times to help children learn necessary problem-solving strategies.

Each new generation of parents will address these issues, and countless pages have been written to suggest solutions. Here are a few websites that offer current, reliable information.

- www.education.umn.edu/CEED — The Center for Early Education and Development (CEED) at the University of Minnesota has developed "Questions About Kids," fact sheets that tackle issues of concern for early childhood professionals.
- <http://education.umn.edu/ChildCareCenter/Kamihealingthroughbooks/> — The Kami M. Talley Reading and Resource Center at the University of Minnesota has a great list of books, tapes, videos, and other resources that encourage positive development of children.
- www.nimh.nih.gov — The National Institute of Mental Health has a wealth of information about children's mental health disorders.
- www.mentalhealth.samhsa.gov — SAMHSA's National Mental Health Information Center has many great resources.
- www.zerotothree.org — ZERO TO THREE, the National Center for Infants, Toddlers, and Families, has information for parents and professionals about early childhood development.

Growing Pains

Expressions of control can be great opportunities to teach life-long skills

- Self-soothing techniques can be practiced when sleep problems arise.
- Tantrums offer great opportunities to teach a child healthy ways to deal with frustration.
- Power struggles are excellent times to help children learn problem-solving skills.

