

Parenting Tips
Trempealeau County Promoting Safe and Stable Families
By
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The Spirited Child

Have you seen a child's behavior *erupt into a volcano*? Is the eruption triggered by something as insignificant as a friend looking at him "wrong" or a scratchy tag in the neck of his shirt? These are among several characteristics displayed by a **spirited child**. Parents and caregivers of such children are often at their wits end as to how to deal with such intense behavior. The child IS NOT PLOTTING to get you. This is actually a physiological reaction within the body.

Mary Sheedy Kurcinka, author of *Raising Your Spirited Child*, reminds parents "this doesn't mean that because your child drew the high-intensity card from the gene pool you have to be a victim waiting for the next blow-up." Ms. Kurcinka offers the following suggestions to help the child understand the intensity and how to manage and enjoy the deep emotions that are a part of his being:

- ✓ Note the cues that indicate the rising intensity experienced by the child. Typical cues may be breathing fast, getting loud, throwing things, whining, name-calling, and getting bossy or possibly withdrawing and becoming very quiet.
- ✓ When you learn the tell-tale cues, move in and redirect the child before he loses it.
- ✓ To help a child understand intensity that can become explosive, shake a can of soda pop (you can explain that the pop is experiencing things that are getting it all shook up) and then quickly open the can and watch it fizz over (you can then say "look at how it explodes when getting shook-up.") This image makes it easier for a child age four or older to give words to his feelings. Follow-up discussion may include:
 - What gets you all "shook-up"?
 - What makes you "fizz over"?
 - What does your "fizz over" feel like?
- ✓ When the child gives a cue to indicating a little "fizz", help the child recognize that "fizzing" has started and suggest one of the following activities to help calm the feeling:
 - Encourage physical activities such as running, bouncing a ball, exercising, dancing, or riding a trike.
 - Repetitive movements, especially of the jaw, have a soothing effect. Chewing gum, sipping from a straw, or sucking something can help bring down intensity. Other movements such as swinging, rocking, walking, or hitting a tennis ball against a wall can also be calming.
 - Teach your child to do deep breathing. Get a bottle of bubbles with a wand. Hold the wand and show the child how to inhale and slowly blow out the bubbles. Older children may be encouraged to watch a favorite basketball player take a few deep breaths before taking a free throw shot.
 - Change activity or the surrounding environment. Activities that use the senses such as back rubs, warm baths, pounding or squeezing modeling dough.
 - Be aware of your own cues that bring you to a rolling boil. Find activities similar to those above to help yourself remain calm.
 - PRACTICE the strategies regularly.

If you would like to learn more strategies to help you enjoy your spirited child, plan to attend the *Raising Your Spirited Child* workshop nearest you. Contact Cyndy Jacoby, Trempealeau County UW-Extension Family Living Program, PO BOX 67, Whitehall, WI 54773. Phone: 715 - 538-2311, Ext. 209 or toll free 1-877-538-2311, Ext. 209. Email: cindy.jacoby@ces.uwex.edu



Family Living Program

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