



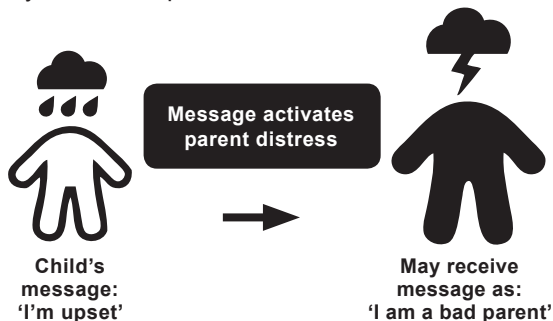
Understanding and responding to children's feelings

when personality disorder gets in the way

The patterns in the way we communicate through words and behaviour can influence the way others respond to us. With personality disorder communication can become difficult, and messages sent can be misunderstood by others. Parents with personality disorder sometimes have difficulty communicating well with their child. Similarly, children can find it hard to communicate their needs and wishes to their parent.

HOW MESSAGES BECOME MIXED UP

Past emotional experiences such as grief, rejection, violence and loss can get in the way of hearing what people are telling us in the present moment. For example a child who is upset may be misunderstood by the caregiver as meaning they are a bad parent.



It is easy for messages to get mixed up. That is why it is even more important to take time to think about what a child is feeling.

Some problem patterns to notice:

- When a child stops talking about themselves because they are worried they will upset others
- Expecting the child to be focused on the parent's problems most of the time
- Treating a child like they are the same as the caregiver – almost like they are a friend
- Treating a child like they are much younger – almost like they are a baby
- Treating a child like they are much older – almost like they are a parent

These patterns can harm children if they are allowed to continue for a long time.

HOW TO TUNE-IN TO CHILDREN

The best time to listen to children is when they are feeling safe and calm. Things to try:

- Ask the child how they are feeling and listen to the words they use e.g. “tired”, “happy”
- Try to see a situation from the child's view of the world, e.g. “exciting”, “terrible”
- Notice what a child is saying by their face, hand movements and stance e.g. “fearful” or “angry”
- Help the child to find words for feelings for example “that sounds disappointing” or “you seem frustrated”
- Let the child know that it is OK to talk about their feelings, even those that feel bad

Children need to be cared for in ways appropriate to their age. Spend time to calmly talk about feelings and thoughts that match the child's age and maturity. Use these tips to help build a strong and secure relationship between the child and caregiver.

Project Air Strategy acknowledges the major support of NSW Health and MH-Children and Young People, Mental Health Drug and Alcohol Office, NSW Ministry of Health. The Project works with mental health clinicians, consumers and carers to deliver effective treatments, implements research strategies supporting scientific discoveries, and offers high quality training and education. Contact us at info-projectair@uow.edu.au or visit www.projectairstrategy.org