

How to divert someone you cannot confront without an explosion?

by
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Example:

Many individuals with organic brain dysfunction experience extreme emotional arousal when they feel “cornered” by an expectation or a question about what they are doing and why.

When confused or uncertain, some people immediately become threatening and aggressive as a means of protecting themselves from the feeling of anxiety and confusion, and not knowing what else to do.

Offering help to such individuals may be interpreted by them as, “I’m a failure and I can’t do anything for myself.” If he or she “shuts down” when upset they may become even more reactive to verbal guidance.

Analysis:

They may be confused by the language used with them or may be unable to resolve the conflict implicit in having to make a choice or answer a question.

Your suggestion or correction may feel like criticism or disapproval and they may react against their perception of being rejected. They don’t know what else to do.

Approaches:

Avoid pressuring a person with FASD for an immediate response.

Always try to give the person a “way out” of the situation.

Instead of reacting to their threats or aggressive behavior, use a variety of methods to divert and defuse the situation.

Use modeling:

It can be helpful for the support person to model self-calming language such as, “I’m ok, but I need a break.”

Instead of offering assistance to the person who may be reactive, try instead to offer the help to someone nearby.

Case studies in Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder

Use a physical prop:

For a person with FASD, it is helpful to remain “in-the-moment” with them and to give them a “way out” with a physical prop.

For example: Appeal to his self-interest:

- Hand a TV guide: Ask, “What is on tonight. Is there any hockey?”
- Hand a blank grocery list: Ask, “What do we need for supper?”
- Hand a pool schedule: Ask, “What time are we going tomorrow?”

- Hand a CD, or MP3 to prompt him to go to a private place to listen to music.
- Hand a box of pens to encourage her to be alone and do a project.
- Hand a box of tea bags to encourage taking a break and to involve in sense of smell and taste.
- Hand a cut out heart or heart shaped pillow to remind her to “come have a hug “when you are ready.”
- Hand him a card with the words, “Come see me when you are ready.”
- Hand him a photo album of pictures doing activity associated with positive memories.
- Ask him to play a piece of music on his keyboard.
- In a school setting, divert to a listening centre.

Use pre-rehearsal:

Use a pre-rehearsed method that you have worked out with the individual for taking the “right way” out of a stressful situation.

For many people it works to print these options onto cards that you can show them the “right answer” rather than tell them to do.

- Go think in your room.
- Go hit the heavy bag in the garage
- Go for a walk by the river.
- Give XXX a phone call.
- Never mind, just sit by yourself for a minute.
- Tear up this card and come have a cup of tea.

Make a catalogue of similar, relevant comments that you can use to interrupt their current disruptive action to successfully redirect them without causing them to feel confronted.

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For use by support persons, make up a recipe box with pictures or lists of “Things to do when I don’t know what to do.” Have this available for the supported person to choose from.

Use positive regard:

Appeal to her sense of being positively regarded and respected:

- So you don’t have to “remind” them, (this feels like nagging) write things down for them to self-remind. Make up “to do” lists.
- What is on her mind is important. Give her a white board so that she can write down what she wants to say when she first thinks of it. Then she won’t be frustrated that she forgot.

Never say “no,” “not allowed,” “not here,” or “I won’t.”

Instead, say what he is allowed, where he can do what he is demanding right now, and what you are able to do. Suggest what he is allowed to do and what you will do with him.

For example:

- Do not say, “Don’t call me all the time.” Instead, say “Call me every day, after super. I want to tell you that I love you.”
- Do not say, “You can’t sleep over tonight.” Instead, say “You can sleep over for two nights every 21 days.”

All of these are methods that have been useful in avoiding explosive episodes in persons with organic brain dysfunction.

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