

Tantrums, Transitions, and Tools: Helping Families Navigate Early Childhood Challenges

Focus: Disruptive Behavior, Emotional Dysregulation, and PCIT

Case Spotlight: Early Childhood Challenges

A pediatrician consulted with the WI CPCP regarding a 4-year-old girl presenting with increased tantrums and aggressive behaviors, including hitting, kicking, biting, screaming, crying, and writhing around on the floor. These behaviors have intensified at home over the past year and usually occur in defiance of parental directives. The patient has started exhibiting these behaviors in her K-4 classroom and at daycare when teachers direct her to engage in nonpreferred activities or when she argues with peers over toys, games, or art supplies. The parents received a call warning them that the patient would be removed from her daycare program if the behaviors continued. The family then sought help from the child's pediatrician.

There was no identified trauma history, though the family did welcome the birth of the patient's baby sister eight months ago, which has been a significant adjustment for everyone. The patient reportedly has a history of 0-3 services for speech delay, but no other developmental concerns.

The family expressed interest in behavioral therapy but was not sure where to go. Additionally, given long therapy wait lists, the family requested more immediate suggestions from the pediatrician, as the patient is at risk of being removed from daycare.

Consultation Questions

The pediatrician asked WI CPCP two key questions:

1. What type of behavioral therapy referral would be most appropriate?
2. What strategies could the family use immediately, given long wait lists for therapy?

Consultant Guidance:

This case reflects a mix of normal preschool development, adjustment to a new sibling, and communication challenges related to speech delay. These factors can contribute to emotional dysregulation and disruptive behaviors.

Evidence-based interventions recommended include:

- **Parent-Child Interaction Therapy (PCIT):** A structured program that strengthens parent-child relationships while reducing disruptive behaviors. [Learn more here](#).
- **Triple P – Positive Parenting Program:** A flexible system of parenting support designed to promote positive behaviors and reduce conflict. [Explore Triple P](#).

Both approaches empower caregivers with strategies to manage challenging behaviors while fostering stronger emotional connections.

Guidance for Families:

While families wait for therapy openings, pediatricians can share practical, evidence-informed resources:

- **Child Mind Institute:**
 - [Complete Guide to Managing Behavior Problems](#)
 - [How Can We Help Kids With Self-Regulation?](#)
- **American Academy of Pediatrics:**
 - [Top Tips for Surviving Tantrums](#)
 - [Childhood Adversity: Buffering Stress & Building Resilience](#)
- **Supporting Adjustment to a New Sibling:**
 - Raising Children Network - [New baby: helping toddlers and preschoolers adjust](#)
 - Children's Mercy Parent-ish - [How to help kids adjust to new siblings](#)

These resources offer families immediate strategies to support emotional regulation, manage disruptive behaviors, and facilitate smoother sibling transitions.

Additional Support:

Additional information on behavioral management can be obtained through our [new WI CPCP clinic staff education module](#), accessed through the WI CPCP website.



We encourage providers to explore this resource and continue utilizing WI CPCP consultations to support families navigating behavioral health challenges.