

I'm Not Naughty!

What's really going on underneath the 'naughtiness', and how to work with it, rather than against it.

Every day, we believe in the power to succeed and shine.

To succeed and shine, we need awareness of our own gifts and strengths, as we become unstoppable, unbreakable & unconquerable.

Is It 'Naughtiness'?

Firstly, to answer this question simply...no, it's not. Yes, you may notice your child being defiant, and you may witness behaviours that really push your buttons! In these heated moments, it's very easy to misinterpret and misunderstand your child's behaviour as 'naughty', and it can be hard to accept that they're not doing it deliberately, just to wind you up. Please don't beat yourself up about this, by the way – you are only human, and certainly not alone.

Actually, children are just mini-versions of us. We experience the ups and downs of life, and have tough days, and this can directly affect our mood and behaviour. We all get tired, we get irritable and we snap at people.

Children are the same – they also have these really challenging days, which may result in lashing out at you, being disobedient and/or lacking energy/motivation. It can even be difficult for us to find the words to really articulate what it is we're feeling. So, imagine how much harder this is for a child. Children are still developing emotionally, socially and cognitively. The part of the brain that is responsible for emotional regulation hasn't fully matured yet. For them to try to process what's going on in their brain, and then successfully label and talk about these feelings, is no small task!



What can we do about it?

We'd like to guide you through 2 of our favourite activities for dealing with these situations. They actively involve your children, so will give both of you the tools to deal with these 'fiery' moments.

Our Fire Drill

The purpose of a real fire-drill is calm preparation and survival. The steps and safety guidelines are put in place *beforehand*, so that everybody knows what to do in the event of an actual fire.

What about fiery emotions? You know those moments when your child is ready to burst and cannot get the words out, when everything has become too big, and you cannot reason with them or reach them? Well, we call these big outbursts and displays of emotion: Feeling-Fires!

This is why we designed our Feeling-Fires Fire-Drill.

The first thing to do is set up your Fire-Drill when all is calm, and when everybody is feeling rational and receptive. There would be no point trying to set it up in the middle of a fire! It doesn't have to be anything too complicated - just 3 or 4 'safety-steps' which outline what everybody needs to do when a Feeling-Fire starts to burn, including your child. For example:

- Your child may need 5 minutes in their room, on their own, with no pressure to do or say anything.
- Then they may need to come and have a hug from you.
- Then they might need to sit and watch a movie.
- The final stage may then be to have a conversation about what happened.

It is about recognising what is right for your child, and family, at the point when they feel out of control.

Why isn't talking about it at the top?

The reason you can't talk about it at the start, when your child is in that heightened state of emotion, is that the part of the brain responsible for rational thought, logic and reasoning, has been shut off. All that is left is the survival part of the brain: flight, fright, freeze or flop. All your child's brain is trying to do is one of those 4 things. If you try to have that conversation with your child at the beginning of that Feeling-Fire, you are not going to be able to get through to them, and you may make the situation worse.

The Fire-Drill gives the brain chance to calm down and return to its high-functioning state. If you then have a conversation with your child about what happened, they're more likely to be able to tell you what went on and what triggered the Feeling-Fire.

When planning the Fire-Drill with your child, you're building up a level of trust between you. You are affirming that they're not in trouble for having a Feeling-Fire, and that nobody is shouting at them or blaming them. They will then learn that the people around them know how to deal with it. It's also going to give you that precious 5 minutes as well, because it's not always easy to step back and not take it personally.

If you are calm, they will feed off your stability. If we join in with a child's meltdown, that meltdown is going to get even worse. The steps are going to help you step back from the Feeling-Fire, and recognise that it's out of your child's control in that moment. It's going to help you be more empathetic/compassionate, and have more patience.

Helping Children Train Their Dragon

What is training your dragon?

When children have big surges of emotion, that rumble up from inside (specifically: anger and frustration), they can feel completely out of control, and this can be incredibly scary for them.

The first step is to help your child visualise a dragon inside of them, which can either be curled up asleep, or awake and breathing fire. From this, they will start to realise that these feelings are something they can teach and control, and not something that happens TO them. The dragon becomes representative of inner-emotions, and your child can start to work on the build-up and 'taming' of these feelings.

Of course, there are going to be times when the dragon wakes and takes flight! It may fly through the house, grabbing and hitting at things with its big claws, and breathing hurtful, fiery words at the people around it. There are going to be times when you point out, to your child, that you think their dragon is starting to wake-up, and have an angry, "no it's not!" thrown back at you.

However, the more that you start to label it as their 'dragon waking up', and the more that your child then experiences it, the better equipped they will be to recognise and label what's going on, especially the initial warning signs, such as frustration. It's at this point that they can learn to do something about it, before it goes too far.

But, how do you train a dragon?

Fantastic question! How do we start to gain control and reduce those Feeling-Fires? We do this, quite simply, through our breath. Easy. We all have access to it, wherever we are. We don't need special equipment or specific tools. Our bravery is in our breath.

We can teach children to do Dandelion Breaths. We've all seen dandelions out in the fields, we've all picked them, and we've all tried to blow as many seeds off as possible. What we're actually doing in that moment is deep breathing. If you ask your child to do 3 Dandelion Breaths, they've already started to put oxygen back into their body, allowing their brain to switch from survival to thinking mode. They then become more able to problem-solve around their emotions, and start reducing those Feeling-Fires.

What does this whole process look like?

- First of all, your child develops an awareness of specific feelings inside them and that they can sometimes feel out of control.
- Your child then learns that they've got to keep up with their dragon-training each day, to manage their emotions.
- If their dragon is feeling particularly prickly, they will be able to recognise this and learn to tell those around them that they are struggling a little bit.
- They will learn to do their Dandelion Breaths. One of the challenges with children in heightened states of emotion, is that they lose their ability to label their emotions, and communicate. Helping them to take those deep breaths, gives them that window of opportunity to access their language to then say, for example, "I'm really worried/scared." Or, "This happened today and I don't understand why. It's not OK, and I'm not OK."

- Your child then learns to step back from their emotions and take action.

We need to learn how to speak to a dragon, too!

The way you learn to communicate with the dragon will be very different to how you speak to your child on a day-to-day basis. Just remember, when the dragon is awake, children are very reactive, so language needs to be very simple. At this reactive stage, you do not need to give your children choices, or negotiate with them, or even help them understand. Your sole job is to remain steady and supportive. The language you do use should contain basic action words. You need to tell that dragon exactly what it needs to do, and what is expected of it: “stop, quiet, upstairs, wait, breathe, dandelion breaths”. It’s much easier for your child to process single words in these moments.

If you recognise that your child’s dragon is starting to stir, you can instruct them to do their Dandelion Breaths, and they can digest and act upon that instruction. If you have practiced it a lot, beforehand, muscle memory can also kick-in. If the dragon is still stirring, you can then use an activity like our Fire-Drill.

Having really black-and-white, clear boundaries gives children the consistency that they’re seeking, to feel safe in those moments. Choices, negotiation, exploration of language, opportunities – absolutely! But, there is a time and place for them, and this is not in the middle of a Feeling-Fire. This is not about squashing emotions – it is about acknowledgement and management.

Children need to know that we are there to comfort and help guide them through these BIG emotions, with clear, step-by-step instructions. Children will see that we are also members of Dragon-Training School and that they can rely on us to be their rock, to be their brick wall to lean against and find their strength.

Final Thought

Children are just not naughty – nothing is deliberate. There is a cry for attention behind the behaviour. Yes, the behaviour can be irritating, yes it can really push your buttons. But, if you can step back and you can recognise that, even in that moment of total chaos, it is your child doing their best, you will help your child become the ultimate Dragon-Trainer!

