

Ep #75 Dealing with angry outbursts and tantrums using Correcting Behaviors

This is episode 75. Let's begin.

Smarter Parenting welcomes you to our podcast series, the Parenting Coach for ADHD. Here to heal and elevate lies is your Parenting Coach, Siopo Kinikini.

Hello, my friends. How is everyone? I hope everyone is doing fantastic. I'm doing great. Today we are going to be talking about [anger outbursts](#) and using the skill of [Correcting Behaviors](#). Now, I've covered this before in the past, but today we're going to take a different look at it and today we are going to look at it through multiple lenses. I'm excited about what I'm going to share with you today because we're addressing this and also talking about cultural differences that are involved with a family from a different culture in using this skill. We're also going to be talking about the importance of parents and the way that they model their ability to focus on something as a way to help their children who struggle with ADHD focus.

So we're going to really delve deep into the details of a family that I worked with and it's a father and a son. They're both from Venezuela. The father had moved to the United States with his son when his son was very small, and he was raising his child here in the United States. This family, the father, his name is Juan, and his son was 15-years-old. His name was Bruno. And as a teenager, as you can imagine, teenagers can be a little more difficult. So in sharing what happened with Juan and Bruno, we're going to learn a lot and I'm going to share a lot of the discomfort that it took in order to bring about the change in using the skill of Correcting Behaviors, but also the ability to see success and the ability to work through it.

This is going to be particularly interesting and helpful for parents who have teenagers who have angry outbursts. And that's fairly common with children who struggle with ADHD. Angry outbursts are a manifestation of frustration and of an inability to cope with things that are happening around them in their environment.

So this is a way that parents who have children with ADHD can respond to these angry outbursts. I'm going to give you the script. I'm going to give you what you need to say, how you need to say it, and how consistent you need to be in order to address these [angry outbursts](#). So let's just jump right into this. As you can tell, I'm excited to talk about it because in revisiting this experience that I had with Juan and Bruno, I was able to realize just how powerful this skill is, Correcting Behaviors. So let me give you a little bit of background on the family so you can be

up to speed and I can tell you what we did as a group together, what we did as a family, and how things worked. So Juan was a father who had moved here with his son.

They just moved here. His plan was actually to move here and then bring his family to the United States. But Juan had been here for probably about 10 years. His family was still in Venezuela. They had some political issues in getting everything taken care of and Juan was working diligently to raise the money to help support and sustain his family. Juan came with his son, Bruno. His wife had passed away, so Juan was raising Bruno on his own with friends that were in the community here in Salt Lake City. He had made connections at the church that he attended and they would help in raising Bruno. Bruno ran into some trouble with the law and so he was referred to the court system. Which is where I came in and I intervened. Now, if you are new to the podcast, I'm just going to reiterate this to make this a little more understandable for you, but my work was going into homes and helping families that were referred by the court system, or by clergy, or teachers, or social workers in helping to maintain and keep the family together.

So, Bruno was on probation for various issues that were happening with friends. He was minimally gang-involved, and I say minimally because they weren't really a gang. It was just a group of kids that were hanging out after school and causing problems. He wasn't going to school. He had all these issues going on and his father would come back from work and address these issues and he'd be really upset. So Juan and Bruno were having some issues obviously, and I was called in to help Juan learn some parenting skills that could help him improve the communication with his child. Now, when I met with Juan initially, Juan wanted to punish his child. That was what he wanted to do. He wanted to go the route of, I'm just going to punish him every time he is disrespectful to me and he has angry outbursts.

What I noticed during the engagement when I visited their home was that whenever Juan would talk to his son, his son would talk back to him immediately. It wasn't a calm way of talking back. He actually would be very angry about it and he would yell and scream back at his father and his father would yell and scream back at him. This just escalated. It looked like it was the cycle of behavior that was happening. That their cycle of behavior was Juan would want to talk about something serious and Bruno would become upset, yell back at his father. His father would get upset and yell back at Bruno. Bruno would then yell back at his father and it would just continue in this cycle. Now, when I initially went into the home, of course, Bruno was well-behaved for the first week, but the intervention that I was required to do, required me to be in the home for roughly around 10 weeks.

During that time period, I actually became part of the family. So I would come in, spend a couple of hours, get to know them, understand their schedule, find out what was happening in the home. This intervention, which is called Families First, continues here in Salt Lake City. In fact, there are workers that continually do this and it's a highly successful program. So that was my job was to come into the home, get to know Juan, get to know Bruno, and then just start teaching them some parenting skills. Some skills that they could both learn in order to

communicate better and to work through these angry outbursts so they can communicate about what their goals were and how they needed to progress and proceed. After talking to Juan, who wanted to focus on punishments, we came to the understanding and he agreed that the better thing to focus on was just correcting his child's behavior when they communicated and to decrease the anger outbursts that were happening in their communication to break this cycle.

In working with Juan, we started to talk about his upbringing and the way that he communicated with his family in order to give me some context of how he addressed it before and how the system was created with his son Bruno. Juan came from a culture and from an environment. Now, I'm not saying this is true of all people from Venezuela, but at least where Juan was growing up with his parents, children were actually not supposed to communicate back to parents. In the environment that he grew up in with his parents, the expectation from his parents was that he was to be seen but not heard. So Juan reported to me that he never talked back to his parents, and so to have his son talk back to him made him even more upset and more angry.

He even focused on that during one of the conversations that, "This isn't who you are culturally. This is not appropriate for you to be talking back to your elders and disrespecting your elders this way." So in working through this idea of what Juan and his expectations were for Bruno, we also explored, "Okay, so this is your expectation, which leads to your additional frustration and your additional frustration feeds into this system of miscommunication. So your anger outbursts are actually modeling for him, a way for him to respond back when he's feeling angry and frustrated." That discussion was a difficult one to have with Juan. However, he recognized that by him responding in an angry way to his son actually invited his son to respond angrily to him and that it modeled that type of behavior. So we had to take a step back and evaluate how Juan was going to communicate with his son in a more effective way.

[Now, in our discussion, we were talking about this whole system of communicating and that, in order to change the system, we just needed to make a change in part of the system first, in order for the entire system to change.](#) That is true of any parent that I work with. When we're dealing with a system that is dysfunctional, even making a slight change in one part of the system affects the entire system. So with Juan, I expressed to him that having Bruno change at this point, because he had been behaving this way for so long and consistently for years, that it would be easier for Juan to make the changes and then to work in helping his son make the changes. So we did that. That was our focus, was helping Juan learn the tools that he needed in order to address the anger outbursts from his son Bruno in a more proactive way.

So we started to talk about anger. We started to discuss anger and how to move that aside and not be the default emotion that he would go to whenever his son was disrespectful. But how to breathe deeply and remain calm and to be in control of his own faculties throughout the interaction with his son. It was an interesting discussion to have with Juan. Juan felt burnt-out. He was tired. He was exhausted. He was riled up. He was angry. So we talked about how anger consumes a lot of energy. Now, in talking with Juan about how anger consumes a lot of energy,

we started to formulate a plan on how we were going to communicate this with Bruno, his 15-year-old, in a way that Bruno could understand. So as you can see, throughout this intervention with Juan and with Bruno, I was working with Juan on helping him identify how his behavior was contributing to these anger outbursts and how he needed to control that. And also the implementation of the new skill, which was Correcting Behaviors. And we were preparing ourselves to teach his son in the future this skill.

So we didn't immediately go to Bruno and say, "Bruno, you need to fix this." Boom, boom, boom. We actually focused on Juan first, as a parent, because that part of the system was easier to change and alter in order to change the entire system. Then we would go to Bruno and work on the skill. Again, we're working on Juan and we will be including Bruno once Juan is able to implement a skill successfully on his own. It took about two weeks for me to get Juan into a place where he could work on the skill and after that, it took another week and a half for us to Role-play and practice the skill successfully. So we decided to use just one specific instance. Whenever his child would be disrespectful and have an angry outburst to a response from Juan, Juan would remain calm and he would go through the steps of Correcting Behaviors.

Now, I'm going to go through the steps so you can be familiar with what I did with Juan in order to work through this. The steps to Correcting Behaviors are the following. There are seven steps. First, is to get your child's attention. Second, is to express empathy. Third, is to describe the negative behavior that you're witnessing. Fourth, is to deliver a consequence for that behavior. Fifth, is to describe what do you want your child to do instead. So a positive behavior. Six, is to give a reason why the new behavior is important for your child to do, using a reason that is important to your child. Then seventh is to practice the new behavior so the child becomes used to behaving in the new way. So let's go back to all the steps.

First, get your child's attention. With Juan, simply having him state his son's name in a firm voice tone and taking a breath afterward without yelling or screaming. But saying it in a firm way was the way that we determined he was going to do that. So, instead of saying, "Bruno!" He would say, "Bruno" and pause. That dramatic pause, I don't think parents realize just how powerful that can be. But silence can be your friend when you want to gain attention because when there is chaos going on and silence automatically happens or suddenly happens, it disrupts the flow of the anger outburst. So with Juan, this was an effective way for him to break that communication cycle. One of the ways. So stating his name. "Bruno." Short, concise, loud enough, not yelling, and then with a pause.

The second step was to express empathy. So saying something like, "I understand that you're upset. I can see that you are frustrated." What expressing empathy does is it tells the child I am paying attention to where you're at right now. I get it. So Juan chose to say, "I can tell that you're frustrated right now." That was expressed empathy. It doesn't take much more than that. It's just letting the child know, "Hey, I'm tuned into where you're at. I get you. I got you."

Step number three, describe the negative behavior. So to help Juan, we came up with the sentence and we actually scripted this for him exactly what he should say in order to help him remember and do it more effectively. So describe the bad behavior. "What you are doing right now, Bruno, is yelling at me." It was as simple as that. One sentence. Describe the bad behavior.

Step number four is to deliver a consequence related to negative behavior. So the consequence was, "Because you are yelling at me, you cannot have time with your friends later today. You will have to stay home and communicate with me better." So we chose a consequence that could be immediate, that would have an impact right away. Chose a consequence that was meaningful for him because he wanted to be with his friends. So we delivered a consequence for that. Now, what we are doing at this point is we are connecting a negative behavior with a consequence. Can you see how powerful that is? You're going to behave negatively, there's a consequence for that.

Now what we're going to do is describe a behavior that he should do. Now we're giving him an off-ramp to this crazy freeway of anger, and we're saying what you should do is talk to me in a calm voice tone. So that's what Juan decided he was going to say, "What you need to do is talk to me in a calm voice tone." That's all he wanted was this calm voice tone. We're starting off small, of course. We're starting with something that is doable for Bruno. So we describe to Bruno what he should be doing instead, which is communicating calmly.

Then we outline why it's important for him to do that. So for Juan, we came up with the option of saying, "Well, if you were able to communicate in a calm voice tone, I will allow you to spend more time with your friends later, although you still have to stay here for a half-hour or 15 minutes." So we didn't take the consequence away for the negative behavior. But we did offer him an apple or a treat to say, "Hey, if you can fix this, you can be rewarded for it still. Even though you still have to pay something for the negative behavior."

Now we wrote down everything for Juan and we actually Role-played it and it took a while for Juan to be comfortable enough to do it on his own.

We printed out the steps. There is a [Correcting Behaviors worksheet](#) on the Smarter Parenting website that you can use to help you write down what it is. And I highly recommend that parents do that. Write it down, write it down so you can see it clearly in your head. What we found during the practice is, as we continually practiced this skill, Juan became more and more confident in his ability to respond to anger outbursts. He knew what he was going to say, how he was going to say it, and what came next. He was also able to recognize that he could not become angry during an interaction because he was so focused on following through with the steps.

And I told him that. I said, "Your child is going to want to behave even more radically initially to throw things off and bring things back to the way that he communicated before. He's going to use anger again as a way to push more buttons to get what he wants, but you need to stay

consistent to the script. Stay consistent to the script because what that does is it models for your child. It shows your child exactly what roadmap you have for him and what roadmap he needs to follow in order to get what he wants."

Now, the seventh step was to practice it. Now with Juan, as I mentioned before, we practiced it for a week and a half. Every time I saw him, we practiced it multiple times during our visits. And the reason for that was to help him build his confidence, help him build his ability to deal with it. The initial Role-plays that I had with Juan were fairly simple and straightforward. We just went through this step so he could be comfortable in saying what he needed to say. As the week progressed, I started to throw things in there and make them a little more difficult for him. For example, in the second step of expressing empathy, Juan would begin the Role-play by saying, "Bruno," dramatic pause. "I see that you are frustrated," or "I understand that you're frustrated," and I would respond with, "No, you don't. You don't know that I'm frustrated. You don't know how I'm frustrated."

Initially, that threw him off. However, in reminding him to stay on the script, he was able to just follow through with the script and be able to go ahead and describe the negative behavior. [Give a consequence](#). Describe a positive behavior he should do instead. And then a reward. An invitation to practice. So I practiced this with Juan consistently for about a week and a half until he felt like, "Yeah, okay, I can do this. I can totally do this and I am prepared." Because our Role-plays actually prepared him for anything that may come up during his interaction with his child. Now, did I have in practice it with his child while we were practicing it? I had him try steps of it to see how his son would react. However, implementing the entire skill during the time that we were practicing in order to get him comfortable with it, I actually had him just focus on particular steps here and there to see how his child would react and then that would inform how we would Role-play it during the week and a half that we Role-played it.

So once we got to a point where I could do anything during the Role-play, throw a bigger tantrum, be even more angry, try and be distracting and throw his attention somewhere else, Juan was incredibly powerful in his ability to stay with each of the steps and to follow each of the steps. Regardless of what I did, he stayed with the steps and if he needed to, he just went back and repeated the previous step. So there were times when I would throw that fit during the second step, which was express empathy, where he would say, "I can see that you're frustrated," and then I would throw the whole, "You don't know I'm frustrated. I'm not frustrated." Then I'd throw something and then he would instead of describing the bad behavior, he would go back and, say, express empathy again, "Oh, I can see that you're upset."

He didn't do this to be condescending. It would be a way to deescalate the situation by telling his child, "Hey, I see you. I understand you're frustrated. I get it. I get it, I get it, I get it." So Juan was a rock star, total rock star parent, and he was able to work through the skills with me, and then we introduced this skill to Bruno.

Now, introducing this to Bruno was an interesting task. I had already started to transform the system with Juan and so part of the system was already changing. Introducing Bruno to this skill was a bigger step because what we were doing is we were consciously teaching Bruno what his father was going to do and how his father was going to react every time he threw a tantrum behavior.

Now, the reason that it's important for the child to know this in my interaction with Juan and with Bruno, was so Bruno could understand that he could cut out the whole first part of the whole interaction and focus on the reward parts if he wanted to. And this actually empowered him to look at it from that perspective.

That's what he took out of it is like, "You know what? I could actually maybe not throw a fit and get what I want because I know my dad is just going to react this way, consistently react this way. So I have more to gain by actually doing what he asks and saving myself the energy than arguing with him and going through this whole process."

So we used rationales like that. We also talked about anger with Bruno and his anger outbursts. In order to communicate what that is like for Bruno, we actually related it to a cell phone. If we were to have a smart phone, on your home page of your phone, you tend to have apps that you use most often on there. I had Bruno imagine that we had emotions as those apps and on his homepage, the only app there was anger.

Whenever something happened he would just open that app and that's how he would respond. So in helping him understand that there are other emotions, we started to talk about other emotions, frustration, sadness, disagreement. We started to look at those different ideas of how he was feeling and I said, "Wouldn't it be more helpful if we had all of those emotions on your home page so you could tap one of those instead of just angry app?"

He thought about it and he's like, "Yeah, I guess that makes sense." I'm like, "The only one you have right now is anger. That's the only thing on your phone. Every time somebody reacts to you, that's what you press." So we started to relate that. How's that going to work for you in the future? How's that going to work for you when you have a boss that tells you something that you don't want to do and you respond with anger? How's that going to work with a spouse? How's that going to work with your girlfriend? How's that going to work with your future child? How is that going to work with your father right now?

Bruno really, really thought about that. I said, "Let's move anger actually away from the home screen of your phone and let's move that over to maybe screen four or five and let's upload some different emotions that can be more helpful and more descriptive for you. Communication would be a skill that you could use to express those things."

So he chose actually to look at it that way. Now, I use this as an example for Bruno because he was 15-years-old and this is something that related to him. He loved his phone. He had a lot of

apps on there and games that he liked to play and so it made sense to him. That's why I used this example for him, but right now I'm feeling it may be useful for you as a parent to relate to your child that if they default, always default to just one app for everything, what's the use of the phone? What's the use of anything else?

We also talked about how he expends his energy and that, like his cell phone, you only have so much energy throughout the day. The app for anger consumed so much energy. It is so difficult to keep that app running because it runs your battery out fast and by the end of the day you're just gone. So learning to move that app out of the way is more productive and helpful for him to get what he wants and to use what he wants on his phone for his own purposes and for his own enjoyment. It's important for kids to understand that and for parents to understand that you are still expending energy throughout your day. Whether or not you're going to focus it on anger or on something constructive is entirely up to you. However, if you focus on anger, anger begets anger and the anger will continually feed itself.

If you decide to focus on something else, you have a lot more options and you can change and you can adjust and you can move forward and you can grow from being able to have options. So don't run your battery out, kids, using anger as your default, don't do that. You don't want to do that. So communicating it that way with Bruno really made sense and I think it can make sense to you too. That's why I shared it.

Anyways, with Juan, we practiced the skill with Bruno. We practice the skill of Correcting Behaviors and getting the child's attention and we practiced the way that Juan was going to say his name, "Bruno," in a firm, loud, clear way, and then take a pause in order for Bruno to understand, "Okay, when my dad communicates to me this way, he's getting into this mode of, okay, he's going to make a correction here and I have an option. I can take the off-ramp and calm down and deal with it in a positive way. Or we can continue down this highway where my dad's not going to change and he's going to address this negative behavior and I have a lot more to lose. A lot more to lose."

So we Role-played it, we Role-played it multiple times, and the reason that we Role-played it with Bruno and with Juan was for two main reasons. The first reason was so Juan could be comfortable doing it with his son. So Juan could be comfortable using these words with his son and interacting with his son this way. There's one thing practicing it with me as a guide, but there's another with actually practicing with his son. The second was to help Bruno understand, "Hey, I have options here. Anger is not my first default. It should not be my first default and I have choices. I can do something other than react angrily to my father when he asks me for something or asks me to do something."

Now, let me tell you what this did for the family. At first, it gave Juan something that he could say and what he could do in a negative situation with his son when his son had an angry outburst. Juan also knew how to respond to his son without getting more angry and feeding this anger machine. Now, because of this, Juan could remain in control of the situation. Juan felt

more resourceful. He felt more at peace. I remember talking to Juan during our last visit and how much more happy he felt because he was able to recognize that his behavior did feed into his son's angry outbursts, but because he was able to pull back and model how to remain in control and be consistent, that his son started to pick up on that and his son started to intervene.

What it did for Bruno is it help Bruno understand that, "Hey, I have choices here and that I don't always have to be angry. Angry is not helpful for me and specifically with my dad." I cannot tell you how powerful this skill is. It is a super powerful skill and I've kind of walked you through this outline of how I used it with his family, with Juan and Bruno. I've given you what we went through in order for Juan to be able to implement this.

Now, one of the discussions that we had with Juan was the cultural issue and that is that, while this Model seems really Western and I'm from a different culture and this is kind of weird. In talking with Juan and why he moved to the United States, he wanted a better life. I get that, and when we talked and delve deeply more into that, he wanted something better for his child. Which is something that all parents do, and the something better meant that he needed to make adjustments in the way that he parents and that this is a good adjustment.

This is something that will be helpful. I did not encourage him to leave behind anything about his culture, but we did talk about what it would have been like if he had the opportunity to communicate with his parents when he was a young child. What would it have been like if he was free to communicate how he felt and his ups and downs and communicate his feelings and things that were important to him to his parents? Juan became very silent at that point. It was meaningful because he loves his parents and the way that they raised him and he's very grateful for what they taught him, but he also realized there are things that he wants to do and that he wanted to do with his own child, and so he was willing to give it a try and I'm grateful for him for that.

[Saw a decrease in the problems in the communications in the home between Juan and Bruno. They were able to talk about deeper things as they progressed and to continually work towards improving their system of communication.](#) A special bond between parents and children, and that's one of the things that motivates me, continually motivates me, is seeing improvement in the communication and the relationship of people.

This sounds like a lot of work. I know it does. Using these skills are meant for long-term change. I'm not giving you an easy fix. This isn't a pill that's going to solve all your problems tomorrow. This is a muscle that requires attention. It requires exercise and it requires discipline. But the more you exercise that muscle, the more you use it, the easier it becomes and pretty soon it's not even noticeable that you're doing it.

Now, at the beginning of this podcast, I had talked about how this is helpful for focus. It is super helpful for focus because if we can teach our child through our example that we are able to maintain focus and control of our emotions, they also will learn how to do that simply by

watching us do that. The discipline that you expect from your child to control themselves should be something that you can actually do yourself. And that was a takeaway for Juan. It's amazing what you can draw from a skill like Correcting Behaviors because you can draw so many things.

If you are concerned about how much work it takes, I will say that there have been times that I have used this skill where it did not take very long. Kids were able to figure it out fairly quickly and adapt to it. However, there are instances where it's going to take a while for you to work through it and that's okay. Understand that pain and working through the pain is a necessary part of growth, absolutely necessary part of growth and pain can be a teacher. It can teach us some wonderful lessons.

We've all seen the example of an egg and a little chick that's trained to break out and if we help that chick come out of the shell and not let that chick struggle, then that chick actually struggles the rest of their lives. Same with the butterfly. You have a caterpillar. Caterpillar forms the cocoon. If we help open the cocoon and not allow the butterfly to struggle and to push and to expand its wings, that butterfly won't fly.

So don't be scared of the pain or the struggle. In fact, embrace it and say, "Hey, if there's pain and struggle here, then our energy is focused in the right area if we are implementing this skill."

Now I'm sharing all of this information because here at Smarter Parenting we want to share this information with you as a listener because we want you to implement this skill. You can find this skill on the Smarter Parenting website. There's a video with two examples of parents using the skill with their children. So go watch it. There are downloadable printable assignments that are free. All of this is free and we're providing this because it's our goal to help you. Help you improve your communication with your child. Help you improve your relationship with your child. So go download that stuff. It's all there on the [Smarter Parenting website](https://www.smarterparenting.com).
[SmarterParenting.com](https://www.smarterparenting.com).

The plug that I want to give for you is that if you find yourself in a place that you need additional help. You need [someone to coach you through](#) it because there are some additional things to consider, call me. [You can set up an appointment for a coaching session with me on the Smarter Parenting website as well under coaching](#). So set up a time. There's a free 15-minute coaching session that we can go through. I can give you feedback and help. Walk you through some things that you can do and implement with your child to improve that relationship, because in the end, that's the most important.

Wow. We have really gone through a lot. I want to thank you for listening. Thank you for being here. I don't take lightly that you're spending your time with me. In fact, I'm so grateful for the listeners who have consistently paid attention and are sending feedback and have signed up for coaching. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you for spending this time with me and use the skill. Again, it's available for free on the Smarter Parenting website, so jump over there and check it out. That's it for me and I'll see you again next time. All right, bye.

PODCASTS MENTIONED IN THIS EPISODE

[Ep #7: ADHD and anger issues in kids](#)

[Ep #11: What is the Teaching-Family Model](#)

[Ep #19: The power of a Parenting Coaching session](#)

[Ep #40: When do I need ADHD Parenting Coaching](#)

[Ep #41: How I coach parents of kids with ADHD](#)

[Ep #48: What it takes to change behavior](#)

[Ep #66: Knowing when to teach behavioral skills](#)

[Ep #67: Consistency creates change](#)

[Ep #68: Following through with consequences with Jonathan Mendoza](#)

[Ep #73: Preventing temper tantrums using behavior skills](#)

RESOURCES

[Behavior Skill: Correcting Behaviors](#)

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[Correcting Behaviors Worksheet: Child](#)

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