



The Explosive Child: A New Approach for Understanding and Parenting Easily Frustrated, Chronically Inflexible Children

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Screaming, swearing, crying, hitting, kicking, spitting, biting...these are some of the challenging behaviors we see in kids who are having difficulty meeting our expectations. These behaviors often leave parents feeling frustrated, angry, overwhelmed, and desperate for answers. In this fully revised and updated book, Dr. Ross Greene helps you understand why and when your child does these things and how to respond in ways that are nonpunitive, nonadversarial, humane, and effective.

Dr. Greene describes how best to:

Understand the factors that contribute to challenging episodes. Identify the specific situations in which challenging episodes are likely to occur. Reduce or eliminate challenging episodes by solving the problems that cause them. Solve problems collaboratively (rather than unilaterally) and proactively (rather than reactively). Help your child develop the skills to be more flexible, solve problems, and handle frustration more adaptively. Reduce hostility and antagonism between you and your child.

With Dr. Greene's practical, expert guidance, you and your child will forge a new relationship based on communication and mutual respect.

The Explosive Child: A New Approach for Understanding and Parenting Easily Frustrated, Chronically Inflexible Children Details

Date : Published May 20th 2014 by Harper Paperbacks (first published October 1st 1998)

ISBN : 9780062270450

Author : Ross W. Greene

Format : Paperback 304 pages

Genre : Parenting, Nonfiction, Education, Psychology, Self Help, Teaching

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Maura says

Without the strong recommendation from a trusted friend I would have missed out in the insight offered by the Explosive Child. I have a strong-willed child, I have a challenging child, but I would never have categorized my child as "explosive." I'm so grateful I took her advice - this book is a fabulous resource.

On the whole the book is very well written and presents information in multiple modes (a case study type narrative, question and answer sections, summary points). The "explosive child" label is quickly dismissed in the introduction. The book goes on to offer a more compassionate, and helpful lens through which to look at behavioral challenges plus a more effective method for helping your child move beyond unproductive behavioral choices.

Jan says

If you have a child diagnosed with Oppositional Defiant Syndrome, or as Dr. Greene prefers to call them, "inflexible-explosive," you MUST read this book. It completely changed the way I think about daughter. It helped me to see that she's not a tough discipline case, nor am I a parenting failure. She has a processing disorder, and instead of trying to bend her to our will, we have to teach her the skills she needs to reason through her frustration. It isn't easy, and it's very slow going on most days, but thanks to this book, I no longer operate from a place of hopelessness.

Jamie says

Loved it. Super different way if parenting and I have a hard time letting go if some basic 'normal' parenting ideas but as he says 'how is that working for you?'. And it's not. This is about extreme kids and thats what we gave, and I didn't set out a year ago to find a diagnosis but Finally feel like we've found one. Here's hoping

Jonathan Peto says

The book is billed as "a new approach for understanding and parenting easily frustrated, chronically inflexible children". I don't know if it's new - it seemed logical and simple enough, but I think the author's presentation is so clear that you will benefit from the book even if you are already trying to solve problems

with your child collaboratively. A few reviewers seemed to feel that the author was negative, but I completely disagree. I thought he was extraordinarily understanding toward children and parents. His starting premise is that children will do well if they can. Sometimes, it is hard to keep that in mind, or to believe it, when a child "explodes" frequently. It is hard not to feel the child is being manipulative or something like that, but the author works hard to remind you that it is more complicated than that, and that is a good thing, because it makes his approach possible. The method is simple, in a way, but it is systematic and requires work. The author does not split hairs trying to define what an explosive child is, but there are a large number of transcripts that show them in action. You do not need a diagnosis to get started. As a matter of fact, I liked the way he downplayed the importance and value of a diagnosis almost entirely.

After chapters that give a rationale for why collaborative problem solving is the best solution, after a detailed explanation of your three basic options, one of which you probably fall back on unconsciously, even if you try to explain your thinking to your child, the last six or so chapters elaborate on the basic approach. It is not exhaustive, but it gave a very distinct sense that you can not just try the method once or twice, but that you need to practice it so that it will become a habit, so that it evolves in a way that fits your family. Basically, all you are doing is talking to the child proactively. The author demonstrates that your child's explosions are probably predictable. You have to sit down and find the patterns, the situations. You have to sit down with him or her and create a solution. Sounds simple enough, may sound impossible, depending on your child, but the transcripts are very illuminating. As a teacher, I was very interested in the chapter about schools. I will probably pick up his book about schools if it looks like it elaborates on his ideas and gives more examples of dealing with explosive children. A classroom teacher probably could not implement his approach without support though. I also liked how the method could be adapted for solving problems between siblings and/or students and for teaching skills.

Lectus says

Unfortunately, this book doesn't teach you what to do with your negative, explosive child during an episode.

The book provides examples of kids with similar behaviors to my own kid, and it does explain why kids tend to explode, but it doesn't say what you can do during those explosions. The solution provided is extremely unrealistic.

In short, the solution is communication, but how do you communicate with a child who is having an episode?

The way communication goes in this book, the conversations seem taken straight out of a Disney TV show.

What parent, frustrated when your child explodes, is going to sit down and say "hey, I see you are having difficulties doing homework. What's up?" The idea is good, but obviously, the author hasn't really lived through one of those explosive episodes.

The book explains why kids explode. For instance, not being able to transition from one task to another (e.g., from watching TV to have dinner). And that part is good even if vague. But what I want to know is this:

- How could my child transition from one task to another without frustration?
- What can I do with my child's chronic state of irritation?
- How can I help my child to see "the grays"?

None of that in answered.

The book is about how to deal with your explosive child 'before' he explodes, not during. It tells you to identify the triggers but it doesn't tell you what to do about them.

Naomi Kenorak says

This book takes a different perspective to inflexible-explosive children - children who do not respond to behavioral modification programs (like traditional rewards and punishments) because they do not have the flexibility to change their behavior once they degrade or meltdown in the face of unexpected circumstances. These children have great difficulties because they often cannot foresee a problem before it happens - even if it has happened regularly before and their parents think it is plain as day.

Dr. Greene says that these kids don't do it for attention - they actually lack the emotional/mental flexibility development to predict. They also get fixed in their minds that things must happen a certain way and if anything changes, they go into "vapor lock" where they lose the capacity for rational thought. At that point, if the parent also becomes upset and tries to "teach a lesson" or punish, it is pointless because it only further entrenches the child who will likely pass the point of no return and begin doing lots of things both child and parent will later regret. The best method, according to the author, is to analyze each 'vapor lock' situation with an eye towards flexibility - the parent must model flexibility for the child to learn it and all-out battles should be reserved for situations where life and limb are in danger. The parent must also label emotions for the child to help the child learn there are other ways to express emotion other than eruption.

The book contains valuable information and supports a flexible-yet-consistent parenting approach, which is as important to preserve sanity as it is to help certain children.

sarah gilbert says

This book is a revelation for parents frustrated, frightened, confused by their child's unusually challenging behavior. It presents a framework for dealing with their behavior and finding a way to teach children *how* to behave appropriately, and to stop believing they don't *want* to do well ("kids do well if they can"). The book rejects many popular diagnoses -- like oppositional-defiant disorder, ADHD, and the like -- as being beside the point.

This book is not, however, a one-stop solution for parents, and stops short of describing how to "win over" co-parents, teachers and administrators in believing that the child's behavior is not criminal or mean-spirited or a personal attack and is, in fact, a child's inappropriate way of expressing difficulty with a range of social-developmental problems. His book *Lost in School* is the next step, describing how to work with teachers and administrators. I need another one though: *'Lost at Home'* maybe, to help me negotiate the co-parenting minefield.

Sara says

Someone asked why I chose this book over the many others out there on this subject.

1. it deals directly with the brain and its pathways - there is actually some scientific basis for the theories behind this book
2. it treats the children (and parents) with a great deal of compassion and respect. The solutions have to do with understanding our child and coaching them to grow the missing pathways rather than manage, rewarding or punishing (which I know from experience just do not work with my child)
3. at a glance, I recognized that mastering the strategies recommended by this book would help me be more the parent I want to be, whether I have "explosive" children or not

I've just started implementing the ideas from the book and we've already seen a reduction in screaming/tantrums or at least their duration. We'll see if the strategies hold for the long term, but I have high hopes.

Anastasia says

Wouldn't it be nice if when our kids explode they explode with rainbows and sparkles? It would be a mess to clean up but a vast improvement. Lately it seems like our life is smack dab in the middle of a fault line. It's a four year old one. Sweet Pea has always been very sensitive and has had a few meltdowns. But for the past six months, about the time she started preschool it's been an every day thing. Sometimes it's little meltdowns and it's easy to get her out of it. But too often it's a screaming fit that ruins every one's day and makes us want to bang our heads against the wall.

We've tried putting our foot down or disengaging and these just seem to make her more escalated. Dragging her upstairs and shutting the door on her is not something either of us enjoy doing. At all. We've also been giving into her tantrums a lot. Fine you can have more candy just stop already! I should say I give in more than my husband does. Both of us were at a loss, Peanut was never this bad. We had no experience in dealing with her explosions.

Until I saw a book at work called "The Explosive Child." by Ross W. Greene. The first chapter starts with an example of a girl who decides she's going to have a frozen waffle for breakfast, but there isn't any and so she throws a huge fit. This is definitely something that has happened in our house. It goes on to explain that children who explode like this tend to have problems with transitions. She wanted a waffle and it is very difficult for her to make the transition to eat something else. The main thing that struck me is that he kept repeating that "Children do good if they can," His theory is that children like Pea know what's right and they know they're not doing the right thing, but they can't help it. He says to look at it as a learning disability. You have to teach them how to transition and cope. It won't be fixed in a day, but neither is a learning disability. It takes time and a new approach.

He has three options for dealing with the child. Plan A, B and C. Plan A is the one most people use. It's a "No." "You are being ridiculous, stop doing that right now." Which works with some kids, but if your kid is still exploding, it's not working for yours.

C is just giving in. "Fine you can have a piece of candy." Sometimes plan C is a valid option. Would you rather spend an hour with them kicking and screaming or just let them go out without socks on? And the preferable option and the one he recommends is plan B. Where you talk about it with the kid and find a mutually exclusive solution. You start out by asking "What's up?" Then you repeat back to them

what's wrong. "You don't want to wear socks." Then you try and put both concerns on the table. "My concern is that it's cold outside and your shoes will be stinky." Their concern may be that the socks are itchy. "Well how about we find some less itchy socks? Would you like to help me look?"

Obviously it's not always that neat. But I've found that just starting with "What's up?" makes a world of difference. And if you learn their triggers. i.e. hunger, tiredness, math. You can sometimes head them off at the pass.

It's a hard system to keep track of. It's very easy to think you're doing plan B, when you're actually doing plan A. But hopefully after a while you learn to talk to your children and they will learn to talk to you. So less explosions. Except for the rainbow glittery kind. So far so good with Pea. We are working on her saying something besides. "Because I don't want to." But we're getting there.

Amy T. says

I highly recommend this book for anyone parenting a child who struggles with emotional volatility. The author asserts that kids "do as well as they can," and when they respond with outbursts, meltdowns, etc, it is because they lack the skills to do better. He encourages using what he calls "Plan B." Instead of maintaining a "My way or the highway" approach to parenting (which simply does not work with some kids, whether or not we think it should), he proposes using empathy, reflective listening, and collaboration to solve problems before they happen. This is a very practical book, and it has already made a difference in our home.

Wendi says

I ended up really enjoying this book. It was a big eye opener for me on how to deal with my child that is stubborn, smart, perfectionist, always needing to be right, and throws temper tantrums and has a really short fuse. It was interesting idea on that your child just is missing some ways on how to process certain things that happen to them, which end up really frustrate them. How giving them a punishment while they are frustrated is ineffective, and so are many other parenting practices for your child. It made me much more sympathetic towards my child, and want to help him out. He talks about catching your child before they have a meltdown and talking them down and out of frustrations. Modeling a thinking processes, and talking them through what a lot of other kids already do in their heads.

That my child isn't a brat, manipulative, but just needs extra help and different parenting. That you need to reevaluate your expectations for you kids, and not make life so frustrating for them. I highly recommend this book for adults that deal with children that are easily frustrated, and inflexible.

Suzanne says

I want to give this book a bad review because it really goes against everything I hold to be reasonable. But, I have been implementing it for 4 days now and getting some pretty amazing results. Results that I am certain are directly related to following the plan set out by the authors.

I know what you're thinking. "Really? Four whole days? It's a Christmas miracle." If I were there in front of

you, I'd reply, "These are the first 4 days that have even teetered on the brink of replicating normal parent-child interactions that I have experienced in 3 years. Asshole."

Then I'd apologize for my rudeness but I wouldn't mean it.

I will try to update as we make or don't make progress.

UPDATE:

As hopeful as I was that we were making some progress, I'm sorry to report that this method was completely unsustainable. It is possible that a better parent would have hung in there longer. You might be that parent. Don't take my word for the approach. Your mileage may vary.

It is possible that in a smaller family a parent would have this much time to devote to every episode but in a family with 4 children it took about 4 days before I got tired of the script and that was that. In spite of the book's insistence that kids don't manipulate, I was clearly being manipulated away from my other activities at every opportunity to negotiate how I could accommodate the whims of a 5-year old.

The book, of course, does address this by giving you an alternative when you can't negotiate. Give the child what he/she wants no questions asked. At no point did I ever accept this as a real option and because I did not I cannot really say that this method doesn't work overall because I didn't really employ it.

I think it says something that the chapter at the end of the book that says, "What if this doesn't work?", addresses institutionalizing your child. Either the author assumes that his method is the only thing that CAN work or that his method is your end-of-the-road option. Either way, the fact that it is presented this way is something to consider.

Lain says

I was very disappointed in this book. There was never any clear discussion of what symptoms or characteristics one might use to classify their child as "explosive" other than one who throws a lot of violent fits. But there is a big difference between a "difficult" kid and one who is emotionally incapable of controlling him- or herself.

Also, the book devolves quickly into doc-speak, bandying terms like "separation of affect," "working memory" and "shifting cognitive set" which had me seeing stars. It's almost like you need to be a psychologist to even begin to understand what the author is talking about.

From the ratings, it appears that many others have found this book to be helpful. But it left me frustrated and confused.

Beka says

This book was very helpful to me, as I do have a child who is a tad on the explosive/inflexible side.

However, I think this book may have helped me more than him directly. It helped me see that my expectations are too high, and that re-focusing my priorities is helping him deal with life in a much healthier way. It made me think in more in terms of compromise instead of "my way or the highway". He is responding very well to this because he now feels like he has more control over his decisions (even though my goals are still being met), and he's learning how to deal with situations that don't go his way. Very good life skills...I'm glad I picked it up now and not 5 years from now.

April says

probably the most helpful and practical nonfiction book I've ever read. this gels with much of my intuition on parenting an explosive and inflexible child but helps me see where I'm missing the boat and gives great instructions on how to keep working together.

Dr Greene also gives me permission to try to let go of societal expectations and norms about kids behaving as expected and that typical consequences and incentives don't work for these kids. This method doesn't put the kid in charge of the adult but focuses the parenting responsibility on being the child's surrogate frontal lobe and helping them learn the skills they need in life to navigate transitions, emotions, organization, and problem solving. not just hop-to because they're told to do so.

This approach is designed to help "black and white thinkers such in a grey world." I just hope we can apply the theory effectively.
