



Effects of pushing the button



We press the button and hopefully something is switched on or off. The button can set off a reaction which can have good or bad outcomes. Does one have to be trained to be a button pusher? A small baby who cries incessantly for no other reason than that they do not want to lie in the crib is just as good at pushing the button as the elderly person who never is happier than when they are being grouchy and difficult to please.

Toddlers make excellent button pushers. After all, they stand at the threshold of life and they want to make the most of this exciting place they find themselves in. Unfortunately for them, they discover that the people who take great pleasure in preventing them from doing this are their parents. What spoilsports they are! Why should they learn how to brush their teeth, eat their food, go to sleep at bedtime and stop climbing on the furniture! The list of do's and don'ts is endless. Clashes with tiny button pushers often cause negative reactions in the parents when they find themselves being pushed to the extremes of their tolerance. Isn't it interesting how the button pusher knows just which one to push. For example, how does a parent cope with the continual whining and grizzly toddler who wishes to be entertained all the time, thus preventing you from getting on with all the necessary jobs to make life work for every member of the family?

No one can minimise the effect of the defiant teenager who creates the most spectacular display of fiery temper and appalling behaviour causing tension and fear to disturb the equilibrium of family relations. The overbearing manager, or colleague whose constant put-downs and ridicule seem to always hit their mark, can undermine you so much that the job becomes a pressure and you start looking for reasons to not go in to work.

There are two negative impacts of a button pushed for ill intent. We can either explode or implode. We can explode when all our emotions react and we lash out. Sadly, it may not be the one who pushed the button who gets the full force of our frustrations and anger. Most explosions cause collateral damage. Unfortunately, it could be someone whom we dearly love, our spouse, children or closest friend who bears the brunt of the traumatic situation we have found ourselves in. How often do we really take our negative feelings out on the deserving instigator?

The second negative impact comes when we absorb all the put downs, wisecracks, insults, insinuations and let them whittle away at our self-worth, undermining our value and qualities. We convince ourselves that we are useless, stupid, no good to anyone, ugly, not worth knowing - the list can be a very long one. We will become socially inept, a bag of nerves and better off keeping our own company, avoiding our old friends and not trying to make any new ones. In other words, we have not exploded, we have imploded and no one might ever find out what really happened to make us withdraw from social contact as we have done. We keep it to ourselves.

The difficult part is restoring what we have lost. Once we have exploded we can start with an apology. What if that becomes our 'norm'? Will we eventually have enough grace to admit that saying sorry is not enough if we continue to explode when the pressure is on? We need to learn a better, more productive way of handling ourselves.

How can we handle the 'button-pushers'? It is worth reminding ourselves that a two or three-year-old letting forth and getting away with it now does not bear thinking of 10, 20 or 30 years on.



Recognise the source of the provocation. Who is in the wrong? Could it be that what has gone wrong for you - e.g. bad day at work, pushed for time, too much to do or running late, is what is making you crabby? Don't take it out on anyone else. It might be nothing to do with them. Sometimes a parent's willingness to apologise helps children to see that anyone can make a mistake and everyone can put bad attitudes right.

Rebuke kindly but firmly. Give reasonable options. 'When I have finished peeling the vegetables', or 'hung the washing out' we can play or I will read you your story. Above all else point out that the noise must stop otherwise nothing will be discussed or done until it has. This stipulation may take time and patience to register, but it will. Persist because you want to win and have a better relationship with your child.

Remove the source of disruption. If this is impossible, remove everyone else and choose whether to remove yourself. Should we allow ourselves or other family members to witness unpleasant scenes which can produce fear and mistrust later on?

Rebuild a broken relationship as soon as possible. A meaningful apology is so important. Talk about why it is necessary to understand what has been done; why, as will happen on occasion, there has had to be a sanction. When there is a 'sorry', show a readiness to forgive, accept and move on together and, if necessary, involve the whole family so that there is no room for misunderstanding.

We often see ourselves in our children. These tiny people entrusted to our care give us the opportunity to equip them for adulthood. If our childhood didn't do this for us we can learn how to handle ourselves as we do it for our children. We need to show our children the effect of bad behaviour and the benefit of good behaviour. Teach the good manners of saying 'please, may I' or 'thank you', learning how to share, be kind, thoughtful and considerate and the value of not being rude and intrusive by saying 'excuse me' instead of interrupting people who are already talking together. These values will help them to be aware of others and not to be knocked about by those who are rude and abusive. The value we give our children is essential.

It is difficult for cruel put-downs, criticism, judgmental attitudes and constant strife not to affect how we see life. We grow up expecting to be treated in a certain way. We all need to talk, have true friends and people who we can trust. Some children do not have a positive nature. They may be quiet, tend to be unsociable and have no 'get up and go' about them. If the challenges, noise and bustle, handling of different personalities these children meet, and experiences they pass through, are not used as a means of strengthening them during childhood they will struggle and implode when the button pusher comes along. There will always be children and adults who endeavour to play havoc with the child who achieves well, is nice to know or so quiet that they open themselves up to be sport to those of a tougher, cynical or jealous disposition. We will do our children a favour by teaching them how to handle potential button pushers.

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