**Managing sudden inexplicable negative behaviour**

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Children who have experienced trauma and loss can demonstrate sudden mood changes with extreme negative behaviour that is inappropriate to present situation.

**Angela Hobday** calls this “Dropping through a **timehole**”.

**What is a Timehole?**

A behavioural response linked to a past experience, which the child may not be aware of, but which has gathered emotional meaning over time.

1. Child demonstrates an immediate, sudden negative response to an event or circumstances.
2. The behaviour does not fit the present circumstances.
3. The child may demonstrate regression, extreme emotion or a blocking of emotion, including an intense sense of fear, anger or distress.
4. The treatment of the carer is incongruent with the relationship between the child and carer.
5. If there is an associated memory, this can be a relatively trivial memory but it will have collected emotional meaning over time.

**How can I “pull the child out of the timehole”?**

1. Avoid becoming angry and being “pulled into the timehole”.
2. Immediately provide reassurance to the child. This will need to be in a way that the child recognises as belonging to the new carers, including stating clearly who they are and that the child is safe.
3. When the child has begun to return to normal, the carer needs to explain that this is a timehole and discuss it with the child.
4. Help the child understand why he or she is angry, upset or not talking.
5. Acknowledge the child’s right to anger.
6. Help the child to find ways of expressing appropriate anger, eg by talking it through or writing down feelings.

Reassure the child in two ways:

 

1. Even though the carer will do some things the same as the rejecting parent, the carer is a different person.
2. The carer still loves the child and wants to care for him or her.

**Reference:** Hobday A (2001), “Timeholes: A useful metaphor when explaining unusual or bizarre behaviour in children who have moved families”, Clinical Child Psychology and Psychiatry, 6, 1, 41 – 47.

**Reference:** Kim Golding, 2006