

Childhood Rages , By Brenda McCreight, Ph.D

Rages are not uncommon in children who are adopted from domestic foster care or internationally. If you have a child who does this then you know the symptoms – it may be a sudden outburst, or it may be a slow but unstoppable escalation from mild irritation to full blown rage. You may know the triggers in your child, or there may be no apparent triggers at all. Either way, once the child has reached rage level, you, the parent, are stuck with managing a screaming, ranting, belligerent child or teen. Some children and youths hurt themselves or others when they are in a rage, more often than not, it is the mother who is the target.

There are a number of reasons why a child has rages, and I encourage you to look up the web site <http://www.mychild.org/ragefly.html> for a succinct list of causes for rages. These include:

Traumatic Brain Injury. This is very common in children who have been abused. The child may never be diagnosed because some brain injuries simply don't show on the kind of X-rays children in foster care receive. Also, it may be that no one knows that the child was brain injured. The child may or may not recall beatings, but rarely are the reported events followed up by a thorough brain scan.

Mental Illness. This can include children who later develop bi-polar disorder or schizophrenia and diagnoses of this nature are difficult to get and rarely given before the child reaches his or her late teens or early adulthood.

Stimulus. This is everything in the environment that your child touches, absorbs, or responds to. It might be the slight fragrance left by your hair shampoo, or certain foods, or lights or just about anything.

Pain. Your child may have chronic or occasional pain such as headaches, tooth aches, back pain, joint pain etc that can set him off, but if he has had them forever, he may not know that they aren't normal, or that other people don't feel the pain all the time, and so he won't ever mention it to you, even if asked. It is just part of him.

Hypoglycemia. This is another condition for which children are rarely checked. You might want to notice if he is always hungry, or if he behaves much worse a couple of hours after eating.

Unresolved issues of attachment and past abuse and neglect. You will likely have a pretty good idea of your child's history but some children have experienced far worse than we are told or than they remember.

Transition problems. Your child is fine, as long as you don't change the schedule, or take him anywhere, or let anyone new into your house etc.

Learned behavior. Your child may have witnessed adults "losing it" in this manner since early infancy. He may have had this role modeled for him all of his life, and he has not had enough time or help to learn something more effective and less damaging.

Your child may have one of these underlying causes, or it may be a combination of triggers. Most of us never know what really causes the rages, we only know we need them to stop. We want the child to have a better life, we want to develop a loving relationship with the child, and we want to have some quality in our own life.

The good news is that most children who rage can be successfully treated. You will have to experiment to find out which treatment method works with your child. In my practice, I generally use either neurofeedback or EMDR, or a combination of both, as well as training the parents to handle the rages more effectively while we work on alleviating the cause and teaching the child new ways to express pain, frustration, loss, or anger. I know that some of the children I see are going to require medication as well, either homeopathic medicine or regular medication, as prescribed by a licensed physician.

The web site I mentioned (<http://www.mychildsafes.org/ragefly.html>) has some useful suggestions for managing rages while you are waiting for treatment to start or complete. To find a provider of neurofeedback or EMDR in your area, follow the links or check in your local telephone book under counselors. If you are unable to locate a neurofeedback or EMDR practitioner in your area, you may want to consider buying an Audio - Visual Entrainment (AVE) Device called the David Pal. They cost around \$500 but my clients, and my own children, report that they are very successful when used properly. You can check these out at <http://www.mindalive.com> (I am not affiliated with this company and I do not receive any money or rewards for the sale of these devices).