

Behaviourally Challenged and Misunderstood Children with Big Emotions

Many schools label certain boys as ‘badly behaved’, ‘difficult’, or ‘naughty’.

I see *Behaviourally Challenged and Misunderstood Children with Big Emotions*. These Big Emotions often stem from complex and painful circumstances – neglect, abuse, abandonment, or chaotic environments. When boys feel these Big Emotions but don’t understand them – or how to manage them – they often act out. And too often, they’re met with punishment, when what they truly need is understanding, structure, and care.

I’ve spent the last several years working directly with these children through boxing, martial arts, exercise, and games designed to ground and connect. My classes are built around movement, discipline, teamwork, and introspection. A typical session might include a check-in, a grounding game, then physical training like boxing or a conditioning circuit. But often I adapt sessions in real-time, responding to the group’s emotional energy.

In my class, when a boy acts out – by lashing out, being late, or shutting down – I see it as a golden moment. A chance to put previously taught lessons into action. How to *act*, not *react*. These are emotional crossroads, where a child can either repeat destructive patterns or take a small step toward self-mastery. My goal is to help them choose the latter.

Quoting Rabbi Twerski, “At both home and at school, there should be a greater emphasis on *self-mastery*, rather than trying to master and control everything and everyone else in the environment”. I believe this wholeheartedly. Through physical training, emotional awareness, and healthy male role modelling, I work to help these boys move away from harmful coping strategies – drugs, isolation, violence, excessive screen use, etc. – and toward healthy ones – communication, connection to Self, emotional awareness, exercise, etc. The goal is for them to have purpose, meaning, and wholeness.

Someone who has mastery of themselves has the ability to regulate their emotions, make thoughtful decisions under pressure, and respond to challenges with clarity, patience, and purpose; to foster healthier relationships, stay true to their values, and create a life grounded in resilience, awareness, and ease.

Much of my insight comes from my own story. Growing up, I had my own brushes with rebellion and emotional volatility. Years of martial arts and theatre training taught me to connect with myself and others, to express myself, and to feel. I bring these tools into every session I teach. By helping boys connect with their bodies, I help them connect with their *Selves*. This is essential, especially for those who’ve been wounded by trauma who often feel like they don’t belong or even fit in their own skin. Learning to befriend our bodies is often the first step. When we build safety within the body, we make room for emotional healing – and for a sense of *ease* that many of these boys have never known.

Dr. Victor Frankl said that “those who have a *why* can bear almost any *how*.” For some of these boys, I might be the first person who’s ever encouraged them to search for that *why*.

I thank G-d for the opportunities I’ve had to help others, and I look forward to a future filled with even more of this meaningful work.