



# Rifka Schönfeld **STRATEGIES**

THE NEWSLETTER FOR OPTIMUM SUCCESS

TIPS ON SOCIAL SKILLS FOR ADULTS & CHILDREN

## The Frustrating Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde

Dear Readers,

This week's newsletter will discuss the topic of strong-willed children...

Rifka Schönfeld  
**STRATEGIES**

### **QUESTION:**

My daughter has always been strong-willed. Even as an infant, she knew what she wanted and took steps to get it. Now, as a four-year-old, it is a pleasure to watch her grow and blossom. At parent-teacher conferences, I am told how wonderful she is – the perfect child – smart, kind, and social. While I see this side of my daughter quite a bit at home, there are frequent moments when she has tantrums – kicking, screaming, and yelling. Sometimes it seems like she has a split personality. She is Dr. Jekyll in school and Mr. Hyde at home with me. Should I be worried that I am doing something wrong at home to induce these tantrums?

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The second half of the book is a guide for parents, teachers and therapists, with tips for successfully addressing the issues in the first half.

Children will enjoy reading this book with Mom and Dad, because it is a fun way to bring home important life points.

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**Children who are strong-willed** (read: stubborn) are huge blessings and also huge challenges to parents. Children who know what they want and stop at nothing until they get it have the ability to go far and achieve their goals. The flipside of this is that when things go wrong, they often do not know how to handle their failures.

But, how does this connect to the Jekyll-Hyde personality you feel your daughter is exhibiting? Research shows that most children subtly shift their personality when they move from situation to situation. It's a sign that they are developing a social sense. Imagine a child who behaves with astonishing sameness in all social situations – in school, at home, on the street, in the store. That would be a troubling sign and often children with developmental disorders fail to modulate their behavior based on the circumstances they are in.

Okay, you say, but those are subtle shifts. Why is she always so perfect in school and then sometimes so angry at home? The answer might lie in her strong-willed personality. She might be trying so hard to do everything right in school that when she comes home, she falls apart. All of that effort she exerts in order to ensure that she is the model child could wear her out and she no longer can hold it together when she sees you.

Is it possible to end this cycle? You can talk to your daughter and discuss the fact that she it is okay not to be perfect in school – but she might not be able to respond to that. On the other hand, you can know that she wouldn't be throwing tantrums with you if she didn't feel completely safe and secure in your love. No matter how much she acts out with you, she knows that you will love her unconditionally. That is a valuable belief.

Eventually, your daughter will probably grow out of these mood swings, but until she does, here are some tips to help you cope:

- **Look for patterns.** If your daughter always has tantrums after she does an afterschool activity, consider not signing up for the following semester. Maybe the day is just too long. Alternatively, consider picking her up and going for a quiet walk or a drive so that she can have some down time without needing to “perform.”
- **Keep your cool.** As difficult as this can be, maintain your calm so that she knows that her behavior does not get to you. Your anger or desperation will only make her tantrums worse.
- **Discuss other options.** While your daughter is calm, talk to her about running around or riding her bike when she feels her anger rising. Other options for blowing off steam are: talking about her feelings, taking some quiet time for herself, counting to ten, or taking deep breaths.
- **Set consequences and follow through.** Chances are, tantrums will still occur. Depending on the severity and disruption of those tantrums, set appropriate consequences. However, if you set consequences for her tantrums, you must follow through with those consequences. For instance, if she always gets a Shabbat treat on Fridays, do not threaten that she will lose it unless you plan on withholding it. Otherwise, she will believe that her actions are acceptable and your words have no meaning.

**Just remember, your daughter always wants to do what's right – sometimes she loses it because she is trying so hard. Understanding that you are not the cause will make both of your lives a bit easier.**

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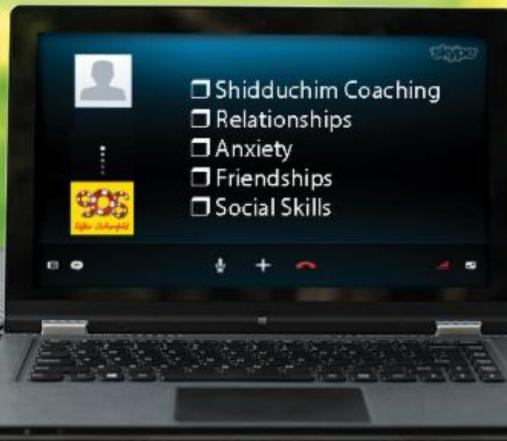


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