

FIRST A FEW THOUGHTS

Parents are often confused about their children's behaviour. It can be puzzling why a child may be lazy, stubborn or have an eating problem. One way of looking at misbehaviour is to look for the purpose or payoff that a child receives by misbehaving. This is particularly pertinent if misbehaviour is continuous or a child persists with certain behaviour. The key is not ask 'Why?' but 'What's the purpose?' of misbehaviour. Children will often whinge because they know someone will give into them eventually. A child is generally only lazy when someone is willing to do things for them. Many eating problems will develop if parents are overly-concerned about the quality and nature of foods that a child eats. Most behaviour involves someone at some point – usually parents either directly or indirectly – so by focusing on your reaction or the reaction of others will give you an insight into the purpose of children's negative behaviour.

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PURPOSEFUL BEHAVIOUR?

Repeated misbehaviour generally has a purpose or a goal. It is not necessarily intentional however the behaviour does have a purpose, a goal or some type of pay-off.

There are five common types of unacceptable behaviour that reflect their goals or intentions

1 "NOTICE ME" BEHAVIOURS

Notice me behaviours are also a type of attention-seeking as they are usually very effective at gaining unwarranted attention. By definition they are very difficult to ignore. Parents often unknowingly encourage children's attention-seeking behaviour by constantly responding to it. They are very common in young children who think that the world revolves around them.

THESE BEHAVIOURS INCLUDE

- ▶ clowning,
- ▶ cuteness,
- ▶ some eating problems,
- ▶ interruptions, shyness,
- ▶ showing-off and whining.

Invariably parents feel annoyed or irritated when confronted with 'Notice me' behaviours.

2 "HELP ME" BEHAVIOURS

'Help me' behaviours include a whole range of behaviours designed to keep adults in their service. Parents usually spend a great deal of their time doing effectively the activities that children can usually do for themselves. Activities such as feeding kids, picking up after kids, finding things for kids and taking forgotten items to school. The list is endless.

THESE BEHAVIOURS INCLUDE

- ▶ feigned incompetence,
- ▶ laziness,
- ▶ forgetfulness
- ▶ untidiness which are all great ways to keep parents in children's service.

When parents respond to "help me" behaviours by reminding, tidying and doing things for them kids soon become helpless! Invariably parents feel annoyed or irritated when confronted with 'Notice me' behaviours. Both 'notice me' and 'help me' behaviours achieve the goal of **attention.**

3 "MAKE ME" BEHAVIOURS

Ever been in a power struggle with a child where you just want to "make your child" cooperate with you? We all have. Power struggles between parents and children are common in many homes. Often "I want to make you" becomes more important than the issue we may be fighting or arguing over.

THESE BEHAVIOURS INCLUDE

- ▶ defiance and arguing
- ▶ dawdling
- ▶ temper tantrums
- ▶ stubbornness. These behaviours let parents that they can't make their child do anything they don't want to do.

The goal of "make me" behaviours is **power and **control**. Parents feel angry or frustrated when confronted with "make me" behaviours.**

4 "I'LL HURT YOU" BEHAVIOURS

As awful as it sounds some behaviours are designed to hurt parents. Children will often say and do things to hurt others, including their parents. Sometimes this is a retaliation for a perceived hurt that you may not even have been aware that you did. Some children who feel hurt or that they have been slighted by family members will behave in ways that hurt others around them. To hurt someone a child may hit, embarrass others, steal, argue or just plain refuse to cooperate.

THESE BEHAVIOURS INCLUDE

- ▶ hitting
- ▶ stealing
- ▶ refusal to cooperate
- ▶ saying hurtful things.

The behaviours vary but the goal is the same – to retaliate or hurt others around them. Parents generally feel hurt, disappointed or even threatened when they experience "I'll hurt you" behaviours

5 "GIVE UP ON ME" BEHAVIOURS

Children who are extremely discouraged or who possess low self-esteem often try to lower others' expectations of them. They show behaviour that lowers other people's expectations of them in order to avoid humiliation or hurt. Children who display these behaviour want others to give up on them so they avoid feelings of failure. In effect, they impress others with their hopelessness.

THESE BEHAVIOURS INCLUDE

- ▶ laziness
- ▶ feigned stupidity
- ▶ babyish ways
- ▶ refusal to mix and fantasy activities.

The behaviours vary but the goal is to lower the expectations of those around them and make them give up on them. Their sole purpose to avoid hurt, humiliation or disappointment and this is achieved by impressing others with their inertness. Parents generally feel helpless and feel like giving up on their child when they experience "give up on me" behaviours.

WHY DOES GOAL-RELATED BEHAVIOUR WORK?

Goal-related behaviour works because parents tend to be as predictable as a washing machine cycle. As difficult as it may seem you can change your children's behaviours when you stop responding impulsively to their misbehaviour. Ignore 'notice me' behaviours (and place your attention elsewhere), stop being a mule to help me kids, refuse to fight with power-seekers (and implement a consequence) and avoid overtly showing your hurt when confronted with retaliatory behaviours.



HOW DO I RECOGNISE THE GOAL?

There are two simple ways of recognising the goal of children's misbehaviour.

1 NOTE HOW YOU FEEL ABOUT THE MISBEHAVIOUR

The easiest way to work out the goal of a child's misbehaviour is to notice your emotional reaction. If you feel annoyed then that is an indication that you have an attention-seeker on your hands. You know you have a power-seeker on your hands if you feel angry or personally-challenged. You actually want to make your child do something. It's not pretty! If you respond by telling them what to do you often get an argument, more defiance or lack of cooperation. These kids don't mind a good scrap!

When confronted with retaliatory behaviours you feel hurt or even threatened. "How could she say such awful things to me?" is a typical reaction. You also feel that you want to get even with your children for wanting to hurt you. It can get nasty!! When confronted with the goal of withdrawal you feel frustrated, helpless and often despair. You often want to give up on your child.

2 OBSERVE HOW YOUR CHILD RESPONDS TO CORRECTION

Another way of working out the goal of children's misbehaviour is to correct the behaviour when it happens. Your child's response to your correction will give a guide to the goal.

To work out if a child is seeking attention through misbehaviour all you need to do is to give the attention they want and the behaviour will often stop but five minutes later you may find more attention-seeking behaviour. Attention-seeking stops temporarily but then starts again in another guise. Whining may stop but he or she may fight with a sibling or continually interrupt you soon after getting attention.

The child who is on a power trip will continue the behaviour even though they have received a reprimand. Either that or they make a half-hearted

effort to conform. For instance, a child who doesn't put away his toys makes you angry. So you keep reminding him and he dawdles and puts them away in his time. His goal is to let you know that he is in control. Infuriating stuff for most parents! This seems the most problematic goal for most parents as we become personally challenged by their behaviour.

The wish to retaliate is usually met with more of the same behaviour, only it is usually intensified. If you punish a child for saying hurtful things to his brother and he adds some physical treatment upon rebuke then you know revenge or retaliation is the goal.

The goal of withdrawal is usually met with a resigned shrug. The child doesn't really care if you give him a rebuke or not.



YOU HAVE WORKED OUT THE GOAL, WHAT THEN?

1 CHANGE YOUR OWN BEHAVIOUR

First, step is to focus on yourself rather than keep focusing on your child. To change your children's behaviour, you must change your own behaviour first. That means you need to avoid your first impulse when they are less than perfect.

This is tough but if you buy in to the notion of purposeful behaviour then you need to avoid your impulsive reaction to children's poor behaviour as often your impulsive reaction can just encourage more of the same. It sounds perverse but if you give into children's whining then you will just encourage more of the same.

If you give into tantrums then you will more than

likely get more of the same. If you continue to argue with argumentative kids then they will just keep arguing with you. This notion is really tough as most parents want to change their kids. They think it is their child who should change rather than them. Maybe so, but this is not the smartest reaction. As all behaviour whether consciously or unconsciously has a purpose then by changing your usual response you remove the pay-off.

A word of warning: If you change your usual reactions to misbehaviour then the chances are that your child's poor behaviour will intensify before it stops. He or she will see if you really mean it!

2 INITIATE NEW BEHAVIOURAL RESPONSES AND HEALTHY GOALS

Changing your initial customary response when children misbehave may influence the immediate behaviour but you need to put some further strategies in place to ensure that children learn more appropriate behaviours. You also make sure your child feels good about themselves so plenty of encouragement and opportunities to feel valued through contribution are part of the key.

Your focus as a parent should be a forward one – on learning better behaviours. Focus on improving kids' behaviour not punishing them for behaving poorly. Use consequences to bring about changes, recognition and rewards to shape and reinforce positive behaviours and methods such as practice, positive explanations and feedback to help children develop more positive behaviours. In the next section you will learn plenty of new tools that you can use to help your children to improve their behaviour and also feel good about themselves.



BEHAVIOURS	GOAL	PARENTS FEEL	WHAT CHILD IS SAYING	TYPICAL PARENTAL REACTION	HOW TO RESPOND
"Notice" me behaviours	ATTENTION	ANNOYED	"I only belong when I am noticed by others."	Give unwarranted attention, remind	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ignore • Answer or do unexpected • Give attention for positive behaviours
"Help me" behaviours	ATTENTION	ANNOYED	"I only belong when I put others in my service."	Do for children what they can do	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ignore • Develop skills of independence • Give attention for positive, helpful behaviours
"Make me" behaviours	POWER Defeat others	ANGRY	"You can't make me do anything I don't want to do."	Argue, fight, power struggles	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Remove self • Act, not talk. Use consequences • Be friendly • Redirect child's efforts into constructive channels
"I'll hurt you" behaviours	RETALIATION Hurt others	HURT	"I haven't got my own way or I feel hurt so I will hurt you as I have been hurt."	Retaliate, say and do hurtful things to children	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Remove self • Maintain order with minimum of restraint • Avoid retaliation • Take time and effort to help child
"Give up on me" behaviours	WITHDRAWAL Lower expectations	FRUSTRATED DESPAIR	"I can't do anything right, so I won't try. I am no good."	Give up on them, expect little, express disappointment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encouragement (may take a long time) • Have faith in child's ability



ACTIVITY: IDENTIFY THE GOAL OF MISBEHAVIOUR

WHAT ARE THE GOALS OF THESE BEHAVIOURS?

1 Jai throws a temper tantrum in a supermarket when he doesn't get what he wants.

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2 When you have visitors your child interrupts with smart comments.

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3 'I'm no good. There is no point trying.'

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4 'It's better at dad's place. He let's me do what I like.'

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5 Despite your constant reminders you still have to pack your child's lunch in his bag.

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6 'I wish you could stop contradicting everything I say.'

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7 Mia deliberately breaks her younger sister's toy.

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8 Your child continually drops her head and refuses to speak when introduced to other people.

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POSSIBLE GOALS

1) Power 2) Attention 3) Withdrawal 4) Retaliation 5) Attention 6) Power 7) Retaliation 8) Attention