**Understanding Behavior – The Basic Needs**

**Understanding Behavior: Purpose Not Cause**

In order to understand another person’s behavior, it is important to understand that humans are beings with free will who choose how to behave based on their experience, values, and goals for the future. So instead of asking your child, “Why did you do that?” ask yourself, “What is their goal?” “What is the ‘payoff’ their behavior is aimed at getting?”

**Children have four goals, and teenagers through adults have an additional fifth goal. The five goals are: contact/belong, power, protection, withdrawal, and the additional teenage/adult goal of challenge.**

**Contact/Belonging**

The basic need of every human being is to belong, which is critical for survival. Out of this desire to belong, each of us develops the goal of making contact – physical or emotional –with other human beings. Contact with parents or primary caregivers helps the growing child develop a sense of belonging in the family. As teenagers start to look toward the future, they feel a stronger need to create connection with friends and other groups outside of the family.

**Power**

Each of us wants to influence our environment and gain at least a measure of control over it. As parents, our challenge is to guide and protect children, while at the same time increasing the amount of power and control they have over their lives. It is a gradual transition from dependence to independence.

**Protection**

**All people have a desire to protect themselves, both physically and emotionally. Your child’s need to protect their personal identity becomes a driving force as a teenager, which explains why they become angry when they are restricted. Some teenagers will do whatever they need to do to have their goals met. This includes lying to you. Be careful to not become the victim and view their lying as being disrespectful *to you*. Rather, it is a means to get what they want.**

**Withdrawal**

The development of one’s own identity leads most children to withdraw into their own space. They need time and privacy to sort out all the changes and understand their new world and their place in it. There are two exceptions to giving them their privacy: 1) if you suspect drug or alcohol use, and 2) if your child is depressed.

**Challenge**

The desire to test her/his skill and courage against an obstacle is one way teenagers measure how well they are doing on their journey from dependence to independence. It is a natural part of growing up. Many create their own challenges by challenging *you.*

**Each goal can be met with behavior judged as either negative or positive. Here are the five goals, the negative and positive actions to achieve each goal, and reactive emotions in you that help you determine your child’s goal.**

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Child’s Goal** | Positive Approach | Negative Approach | Your Feelings About the Child/Teen |
| contact/belonging | contributingcooperating | undue attentionseeking | annoyed |
| power | independence | rebellion | angry |
| protection | assertivenessforgiveness | revenge | hurt |
| withdrawal | appropriateavoidance | undueavoidance | helpless |
| challenge  | safe adventures | thrill seeking | afraid |

**When you discover their goal, then you can offer opportunities for your children to meet their goals positively rather than you feeling helpless and confused.**

<http://bridges2understanding.com/why-children-do-what-they-do-it-isnt-about-you/>

**BASIC NEEDS OF A CHILD – (Based on Alderian Psychology Principles)**

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| [[1]](#footnote-1)Basic needs of child’s actions | Child’s approach to goal and feeling experienced | Child’s Belief | Adult Response | Child Response |
| Challenge | Goal: stress relief, relaxation, healthy/safe risk taking, learn by testing limits | I can have fun by challenging the limits appropriately. I will learn how to get along with others. | Understanding | Cooperation, friendships built, responsibility, low stress |
| Goal: thrill seek, risk take, force independence | I will do what I want, when I want. Others feelings and thoughts do not matter to me. | Powerless, thus exert more control, limit set | Increase risk taking, increase stress/anxiety, increase thrill seek |
| Contact/love | Goal: RecognitionFeeling: Confidence | My contributions are recognized. I belong by cooperating. I enjoy human contact. | Closeness | Cooperation and contribution |
| Goal: Undue attentionFeeling: Neglected | I belong only when I’m noticed or served. The world must revolve around me. | Irritation | Stops, but begins again very soon and behavior may increase. |
| Power | Goal: IndependenceFeeling: Responsible | I am able to influence what happens to me. I am responsible for my life. | Admiration | Responsible, self-motivated behavior, learning |
| Goal: RebellionFeeling: Powerless | I belong only when I’m the boss or when I’m showing you that you can’t boss me. | Anger | Escalates behavior or gives in only to fight again another day |
| Protection/ freedom | Goal: AssertivenessFeeling: Empathy/ remorse | I can stand up for myself and those I love when attacked or treated unfairly. I am able to forgive and even contribute to those who have wronged me. | Love, Recognition, Support | Positive contact. Makes positive choices, considers consequences, independent thinking |
| Goal: RevengeFeeling: Hurt (but will mask with anger) | I’ve been hurt and will get even by hurting back. Then maybe they’ll learn they can’t get away with hurting me! | Hurt, disappointment | To continue to hurt, or escalate misbehavior, blames others, attempts to control |
| Withdrawal/ survival | Goal: CenteringFeeling: Sadness | There are times when I need to be alone. And there are situations to be left alone. | Respect, understanding | Resumes contact when ready, discusses thoughts and feelings |
| Goal: AvoidanceFeeling: Worthless | I’m a failure at everything. Leave me alone. Expect nothing from me. | Helplessness, abandoned | Becomes passive; refuses to try; gives up, makes excuses |

1. Active Parenting Handbook P. 29

***Active Parenting Handbook***. By Michael H. Popkin, Ph.D. 1983.Active Parenting Inc. Atlanta GA. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)