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# BEYOND THE BEHAVIOUR



Children and young people have an amazing knack of knowing how to push our buttons. When we are closely attuned to our children, our ability to continue being the calm, responsible adult can sometimes feel stretched to the limit.



Children need us most when their behaviour is at its worst.



Anger and tantrums are usually 'smoke-screen' defences for big feelings such as fear, frustration, embarrassment or insecurity. As parents, if we only react to the angry behaviours, our children feel isolated and misunderstood. Without our loving insight, children feel they need to escalate their 'help seeking' difficult behaviours to try to reach us.



Lack of confidence and low self-esteem are very often the real feelings behind a child's obstructive, hurtful or controlling behaviours.



All behaviour is communication.

As children grow, they are developing their ability to cope with their feelings. When emotionally distressed, children often 'misbehave'. This is a child's way of saying...

'I can't cope with this, please help me, I need you'

When children feel overwhelmed, they often find it easier to blame others. It is very difficult for fragile, developing personalities to accept vulnerability or failure.

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Distressed children often feel less isolated if they have gathered others into their emotional chaos e.g. by triggering parents or siblings into arguments.



For further reading consider Dr Dan Hughes, Dr Dan Siegel, Sarah Naish & others

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## So what can help?

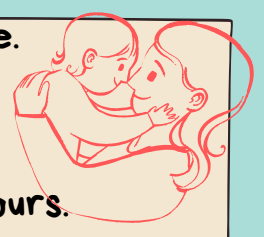
Try not to take your child's difficult behaviours personally. If you do, it can be emotionally exhausting and will often negatively influence how you respond. Your child is trying to share how they are feeling, NOT how they feel about you. They need your understanding and emotional balance.



Try to really see 'beyond the behaviour' to the child you love.

Aim to mentally separate this child in need from the words and actions they are using to try to cope.

Try to acknowledge emotions rather than challenge behaviours.



\*\*\* Try 'time-in' instead of 'time-out' It is difficult for distressed children to benefit from being left alone to cope with overwhelming feelings.



\*\*\* Try to avoid forcing apologies. This usually increases a child's sense of shame, and can extend the challenging behaviours.

\*\*\* Encourage physical activities to help your child to overcome the powerful 'fight or flight' urges created when they are trying to cope with big emotions.



\*\*\* Gently acknowledging your child's feelings, and finding solutions together, is co-regulation. Your child cannot do this without you.

\*\*\* Try to really notice your own triggers. Where are your 'buttons'? What raises tough memories or feelings for you? What could help? Who could support you to overcome these?



\*\*\* Try to look after yourself. If you are tired, hungry, feeling pressured from all angles, your 'buttons' will be more vulnerable. Self care = Capacity to cope

REMEMBER...Your response to your child's behaviour will always be more important than anything your child has done.

Children are super sensitive to how we cope with the tough feelings they can't handle on their own.



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