

Are You Listening?

Are you listening to your child's behavior? Many professionals working with children and families have observed that "Behavior is the Unspoken Language of Children". Developmentally, children are unable to put their thoughts and feelings into words, so they express themselves in the only way available to them...through their behaviors.

Negative behaviors or misbehaviors frequently have anger (or a related emotion such as frustration, irritation, disappointment, etc.) as the emotion being expressed by the behavior.

Did you know that there are only 2 primary causes for anger? We get angry if something does not go the way we want it to go or think it ought to go and we get angry if someone doesn't do what we want them to do or think they ought to do.

Since children tend to be pretty self-centered, it should come as no surprise that the emotion of anger is often one of the emotions that is expressed by misbehaviors.

Very commonly, misbehaviors by children are quickly met with some type of punitive response by the parent or caregiver. Although this reaction is commonly seen, it often results in an escalation of emotion in the child. Now there are 2 problems, not just 1: there is the misbehavior plus the emotionally out-of-control child.

So when your child misbehaves, is uncooperative, noncompliant or shows an unexpected response, look for the emotions that are giving rise to the behaviors. The discerning parent will often have a sense of what the child is thinking and feeling.

Here are some helpful suggestions:

1. First of all, ensure the safety of all concerned.
2. Stay as calm as possible. The calmer the adult is in such situations, the more confident the child will be in that adult being able to handle it. Children do not like being out of control emotionally. They are often frightened and fearful. A calm adult can produce a sense of security in a child who is out of control emotionally.
3. Since it is not possible to reason with a child who is emotionally out of control, trying to talk to such a child usually results in the child becoming more emotional.
4. Taking a child out of the situation is often one of the best ways to deescalate it.
5. Try to determine if the misbehavior was a reaction in the heat of the moment or if it was planned to manipulate or cause harm.
6. Remember that a consequence for a misbehavior does not always have to be immediately implemented. It is often better for everyone to calm down so that a reasonable consequence can be determined and implemented.

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