

What Your Child's Behavior is Telling You



WHY YOUR CHILD'S BEHAVIOR MAKES SENSE AND WHAT
TO DO WHEN NOTHING IS WORKING

PRESENTED BY: MORGAN COBURN, M.ED.

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60 MINUTES



Agenda



1. Introduction (5mins)
2. Why Your Child's Behavior Makes Sense (15 minutes)
3. How to Respond (15 minutes)
4. What to Do When Nothing is Working (5 minutes)
5. Q&A (15 minutes)

What feels hardest right now?

Tantrums/meltdowns
Defiance or not listening
Aggression
Big emotions
Anxiety or withdrawal
Nothing seems to work anymore



You Are Not Alone

Parenting is hard.

Children don't come with instruction manuals.

We've all had moments that left us feeling confused, frustrated, overwhelmed, or stuck.

Today is a judgment-free space.

We are here to learn, grow, and better understand our children together.

THE BIG IDEA

Behavior is Communication

When we understand what behavior is communicating, we can respond in ways that support connection, regulation, and growth.



What Behavior is Communicating

- Tantrums
- Meltdowns
- Defiance or not listening
- Aggression
- Big emotions
- Anxiety or withdrawal



- I'm tired
- I need help
- I don't know how
- That's too hard
- I'm overwhelmed
- I need connection
- I'm scared
- I don't have the skills yet



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Daniel's Story

DANIEL IS 3

HE IS WATCHING BLUEY ON HIS
TABLET ON THE COUCH

MOM, THERESA, INFORMS
DANIEL TABLET TIME IS OVER
AND DINNER IS READY

DANIEL MELTS DOWN



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What Mom Sees

- Screaming
- Hitting
- Kicking
- Refusing

What Daniel May Be Saying

- I'm overwhelmed
- I wasn't ready
- This transition is hard
- I need help regulating
- I don't know how to calm down

What's Happening Inside of Daniel's Body?

His nervous system is dysregulated

Regulated

This looks like:

- Listening
- Learning
- Problem solving
- Following directions
- Using words to communicate
- Managing emotions
- Connecting with others

"I feel safe enough to learn, connect, and engage."

Fight/Flight

This can look like:

- Hitting
- Kicking
- Biting
- Yelling
- Arguing
- Running away
- Defiance
- Aggression
- Impulsivity

"Something feels wrong, and I need to protect myself."

Freeze/Shutdown

This can look like:

- Withdrawing
- Hiding
- Avoiding
- Ignoring
- Going quiet
- Refusing to respond

"This is too much. I'm going to shut down."

So, What do you do?

Behavior is communication ✓

What is the child communicating ✓

Now what?

The child's (emotional) safety has been compromised.

They have been disconnected to his caregiver

Their nervous system is dysregulated

We need to create an environment of safety to get the child regulated so they can begin to understand why they must change what they're doing, and so that the parent can reconnect with the child

Why Punishment often doesn't solve the problem

Punishment may stop behavior temporarily. It does not teach regulation.

When a child is dysregulated, punishment often:

- Increases stress
- Increases fear
- Increases shame
- Misses the underlying need
- Fails to build missing skills

Behavior may stop. The problem often remains.

A Dysregulated Child can't access Logic

THIS IS WHY EXPLAINING "WHY" DOESN'T WORK.

- The logical mind goes offline when dysregulated and the body and emotional mind are activated.
- Explaining why can seem like you're dismissing their needs.
- Appeal to their emotional side, make them feel safe, and help them return to a regulated state before explanations.

BUT HOW?



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Co-Regulation

Children learn regulation through relationships.

Before children can regulate themselves, they borrow regulation from us.

Co-regulation looks like:

- Staying calm
- Using a gentle voice
- Being present
- Helping your child feel safe
- Holding boundaries with compassion

Your calm helps create the conditions for your child's calm.



Disconnection/ Conflict Repair

WHEN A PROBLEM OCCURS, USE THIS
LIST AS A REMINDER

1. Notice how you are feeling
2. Regulate yourself
3. Stay present
4. Get curious (Why are they acting like this?)
5. Attune (See things from their POV)
6. Respond
7. Repair and Teach

Understanding vs Excusing

Behavior makes sense.

AND

Behavior is not always acceptable.

We can be compassionate and hold boundaries at the same time.

✓ “I understand you’re angry **AND** I won’t let you hit.”

✓ “I know you’re upset **AND** I won’t leave you.

✓ “You’re angry **AND** I’m going keep everyone safe”

✓ “I know you want more screen time **AND** it’s dinnertime.”

✗ “Okay, just one more episode.”

✗ “Fine, do whatever you want.”

✗ “I don’t want to upset him.”

✗ “Maybe if I ignore it, it’ll stop.”

✗ “He’s having a hard time, so I can’t hold the boundary.”

✗ “I know you’re upset, so you don’t have to come to dinner.”

Return to Daniel's Story

SO WHAT COULD THERESA DO
NOW IF DANIEL GETS UPSET
AFTER SCREENTIME?



What if nothing is working?

Sometimes children need more support.

Sometimes parents need more support.

And sometimes families need more support.

When behavior continues despite your best efforts, it may be a sign that:

- Additional skills need to be built
- The child needs more support
- The environment needs to change
- Professional support may be helpful

NEEDING SUPPORT IS NOT FAILURE.

Key Takeaways

1. Behavior is Communication

2. Regulation comes before reasoning

3. Children borrow calm from adults

4. Understanding behavior doesn't mean excusing behavior

5. Connection and Boundaries can exist together

6. You don't have to do this alone



Q&A

Thank You!

By Morgan Coburn, M.Ed.

425-610-8257

havenfamilyconsulting.com