

UNDERSTANDING BEHAVIOUR - SEEING BEYOND BEHAVIOUR

FOR PARENTS/CARERS



ALL behaviour is a way of communication.

Children, and adults, communicate what they are thinking and feeling through their actions.

This may not always be in the most helpful way, but if we want to help our children to communicate better, we first need to understand what they are trying to tell us. They may not always be aware of the reason themselves; as adults we will need to make a best guess at what we think this could be. We can 'wonder aloud' our guesses to check them out;

It's okay if we get this wrong!

You can always explore this again, or it gives children an opening to tell us what they think is the reason- "I think I got it wrong earlier. Would you help me to understand what's going on for you?"

"I wonder if maybe the reason you threw your toys is because Mummy couldn't play with you straight away and that made you sad?"

"I wonder if the reason you hit your brother is because you felt sad when he didn't want to play with you anymore."

You can always explore this again, or it gives children an opening to tell us what they think is the reason- "I think I got it wrong earlier. Would you help me to understand what's going on for you?"

Remember that children may not be fully aware of the reasons themselves and may not be able to respond. Wondering aloud with them, without expecting a response, will help them to make the association between feelings and actions in the future.

To help us get a better understanding of children's behaviour, we can use the 'iceberg model'. Like icebergs, we can only see what is above the surface, e.g., the behaviours. But, we cannot see underneath the surface, which is often much bigger and can explain why children (and adults!) behave in certain ways.

"I don't want to go back to school"
Anger, throwing objects, shouting

What is happening
above the surface?
What is the behaviour?
What can we see?

**Tired/didn't sleep well
the night before**

**"What if I don't understand
the work?"**

What is happening
below the
surface?
What can't we see that might
explain the behaviour?
What might my child be
thinking?
What is our best guess?

**"I don't have many
friends in school"**

**"My teachers don't
understand me"**

**"I am worried
about seeing too
many people"**

**"School is scary and
home is my safe
space"**

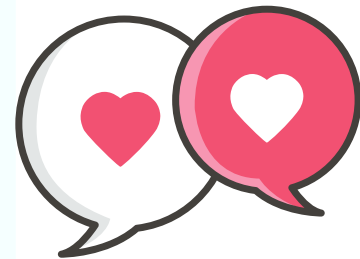
**"I will miss my mum when
I go back to school"**

THERAPEUTIC PARENTING

Therapeutic parenting places the focus on relationship and encourages us to see all behaviour as communication. By taking this perspective, we can address what children are trying to tell us, not just the behaviour itself.

KEY POINTS FOR THERAPEUTIC PARENTING

- Focus on the relationship, rather than the behaviour. This will strengthen emotional connection, helping your child to develop trust and security with you.
- Be curious about the underlying needs that the behaviour is communicating and address these rather than the behaviour itself.
- Communicate boundaries alongside clear consequences (and stick to them!) to help your child know that they have choice, but their actions have an impact on the world.
- Connect consequences to the behaviour. Natural and/or logical consequences show your child, with no shame/blame/guilt, that the behaviour is unhelpful (See 'Consequences' resource for further information).
- Try to empathise with your child whilst they experience the consequence to help maintain the relationship through emotional connection.



PACE (Playfulness, Acceptance, Curiosity and Empathy) can help us to uncover and respond to what is under the iceberg (See PACE resource).

This document is available in Welsh / Mae'r ddogfen hon ar gael yn Gymraeg