

Ain't behavin'

What's behind your child's acting up, out



A feeling of belonging is important to everyone, and children are no exception.

In order to achieve this feeling of belonging, children learn to use certain behaviours. When they receive positive feedback from parents, they are likely to continue with the same positive behaviours.

However, when children are feeling discouraged, they try to find another way to belong. This is where misbehaviour comes into play.

Misbehaviour comes in many different forms, but can usually be classified under four different goals.

Children might misbehave to:

- Get attention
- Have power
- Get revenge
- Display inadequacy

It is important to remember that an infant's behaviour is his or her way of communicating. Infants are not misbehaving when they cry, for example. A crying baby has needs that must be met.

Even older children who seem to be misbehaving might actually be tired, hungry or not feeling well.

A good way to recognize one of the four goals of misbehaviour is looking at your own response.

If your child is demanding attention, you will likely feel annoyed. You may nag, coax or bribe. The child may stop the misbehaviour for the time being, as the need for attention has been met. However, they are very likely to repeat the same behaviour at another time to get the same result.

When a child's goal is to gain power, you are likely to be very angry. You may want to fight back or punish the

Shawna Munro PARENTING POINTS

Shawna Munro works at the Elspeth Reid Family Resource Centre, a facility of Child and Family Services of Western Manitoba that offers parenting information and support.
» 255 Ninth St., Brandon
» 726-6280

child, which will lead to a power struggle that can go on and on. Sometimes you may just give in. At this point, the child has achieved the need for power.

A child who is seeking revenge may cause you to feel hurt. No parent ever wants to hear his or her child shout, "You don't love me!" You may become defensive and try to get back at your child. By getting this reaction, the child has met their need for revenge.

When a child displays inadequacy, you may agree that he or she is helpless and give up as well. You do things that the child should be able to do independently, just to save the hassle. In this scenario, the child does not learn and improve, so the behaviour is sure to repeat itself.

These actions and reactions by both parent and child are not plots to inflict misery on each other. They are natural ways of defending one's sense of belonging. Only when we watch for the goals of misbehaviour and change the way we respond, can we help our children find more positive ways to interact.

• **Children will always want and need attention from parents.** Make a point of giving positive attention when your child is not expecting it. Wherever possible, ignore unwanted behaviour and make an effort not to let it bother you.

• **Nobody ever really wins a power struggle, so refuse to fight or give in to your child.** Wherever possible, instead of trying to change your child's misbehaviour, let him or her experience the natural consequences of their actions. For example, a child who refuses to eat will be hungry until the next meal.

• **The misbehaviour goal of revenge is similar to the power goal; it takes two to keep it going.** Refuse to fight back. Work to build trust and mutual respect with your child. Acknowledge his or her feelings to show that you understand and want to help.

• **When your child displays inadequacy, don't give up.** Encourage your child's efforts and avoid criticism. He or she will gain the confidence needed to learn and improve new skills.

When parents learn to recognize the meaning behind a child's unwanted behaviour, they can take steps to help meet their child's needs, or prevent a repeat of one of the goals of misbehaviour.

To learn more about understanding and responding to your child's behaviours, please feel free to enquire at the Elspeth Reid Family Resource Centre about our many available programs.

Source:
"Parenting Young Children"
by Dinkmeyer and McKay