

# PARENTING OUTSIDE THE LINES

## Week One/Lesson One: Decoding Behavior

In this lesson, we're going to talk all about how to understand what your child is trying to communicate through their behavior. As a reminder, behavior is just a form of communication. Kids don't have the verbal skills to communicate what it is they're feeling inside. They don't have the verbal skills to say, "Hey I'm really stressed right now," or "I'm feeling anxious." Behavior is just their way of letting you know what is wrong or what they are thinking.

I've had multiple people approach me and say, "My kid just comes up and screams at my face says horrible things to me", or "My kid randomly shouts hurtful things". Once I am able to put it into context for these moms and let them know that's their child's way of expressing their feelings, it starts to make more sense for them. They're trying to express what it is that they're feeling on the inside. They don't have words to say that everything in them is anxious and hurting and upset and afraid and scared. Instead, the way that they express those feelings is by just getting it out there, and a lot of times it comes out as very inappropriate behavior.

Ross Green would call this "learning the skill of communicating your feelings". Kids don't have that skill. They've never been taught it. Our goal here is to teach them the skill of communicating behavior in a much more productive and effective way so they can start helping us get to the root of their behavior.

### GETTING TO THE ROOT

Let's talk a little bit about getting to the root of behavior. Behavior is a result of what's happening inside. By looking at just the behavior; the hitting, the whining, the screaming, etc, we're missing why the behavior happens, what triggered it, and what is causing it. Once we figure out the cause, or the root, we can address what's really going on.

### GET READY TO PEEL BACK THE LAYERS

Our child's behavior is what we think about most often as parents. It can include things like: hitting, whining, acting defiantly, and playing too rough or too aggressively. They might tell us "no". When they are super picky, or too sensitive, or withdrawing. Whatever they are doing, that is behavior. Parents always ask me, "Why is this happening? Why is my child not changing their behavior?"

We tend to address behavior typically by being the adult. We send them to time out, take away privileges, and bribe or even plead with them to change. While those things will sometimes work, they



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won't ever work consistently. Nothing's going to work consistently until we get to the root of what is causing it.

We tend to feel like bad parents because the behavior keeps happening no matter what we're doing. However, if you were trying to learn any other new skill, and what you were doing wasn't working, likely you would change your technique.

If you were learning how to swim, you wouldn't keep doing the same thing if it wasn't working. Maybe the water is too cold, or the pool is too deep and you don't feel comfortable. Instead of forcing yourself to make it work, you would find a new pool and put yourself in a different situation. The same principle applies to behavior. It's not that your child is inherently bad, or your child is inherently flawed, it's because the approach to dealing with this behavior has not been one that is effective.

### WHAT IS THE TRIGGER?

The triggers are what sets your child off or what causes the behavior.

For instance; if someone takes your kid's toy away, they may retaliate by hitting the child that took his toy away. Of course, that's not an okay reaction, but why was your child triggered by that? What is the skill that your child is lacking that made him so frustrated that he wanted to hit? That's where we get down deeper.

Most behaviorists say that by focusing on the trigger, you can figure out why your child is misbehaving. I see the logic behind that, however, it's not a complete picture of what's causing your child to do these things. Yes, the trigger happens, and the trigger then prompts the behavior, but why is your child triggered by these things? Why are unexpected events causing your child to freak out? What is it about being told "no" that your child can't handle? What are these triggers causing your child to act the way that they do? That's what we're going to get into here.

### GETTING TO THE ROOT

The way we do that is by looking at the root of the behavior. According to Ross Green, Cynthia Tobias and Dr. Shefali, there are four roots of behavior:

- Sensory, which includes the sensory system
- Lacking skills



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- Predictability
- Power

Over the next few weeks, we're going to break these behaviors up and talk about each one more in depth. Trying to talk about all of them at once would be too overwhelming.

In week two, we're going to talk about how to address power and predictability. We all need power in life. Most kids don't have power over many things, so they tend to want to fight for the power, and the more that they have to fight for the power, the more of a game it becomes. If we can find ways to give them power in appropriate ways, the less they should fight us for it. If they don't have to fight for it anymore, the behavior triggered by the lack of power is no longer necessary and the behavior actually disappears.

Week two will teach you how to:

1. How to give your child power on a daily basis without taking away your power and without making you feel like you are just being stepped on and walked all over.
2. How to create your expectations and boundaries, and how to give your child power within that.
3. How to create predictability, so that we eliminate the need for a lot of these tantrums and meltdowns.

In Week 3, you will learn how to teach the skills that your child is lacking, and in week 4 we're going to go really deep into sensory; what that looks like, why it's related to behavior, and how to address it.

### YOUR REACTION IS DETERMINED BY YOUR PERSPECTIVE

I love this statement because it really encompasses parenting.

Our reaction is everything. How many times have you logged onto Facebook and seen things like, "Stop yelling at your kids in 7 days with these tricks." Or, "Stop fighting with your kid in 2 days with these tricks." While these ideas are solid, we can't control our reactions until we shift our perspective. Our perspective is what causes us to be stressed out and to react. Rather than trying to control our reactions, we're going to shift our perspective, so that we are no longer as reactive. If I can adjust the way that you are viewing behavior, and if I can show you exactly why that behavior is happening, then

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the way you address behavior will automatically change as well. You're not going to have to fight to stay consistent or struggle to be bigger and louder than your child. I want this to become a natural thing



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for you. This class isn't about adding things to your already busy day, it's about making things more simple.

How do we put it into practice? For now, I want you to continue with your daily connection time with your child. Head over to the Facebook group and let me know how things are going. Is anything changing? Let me know what you think of this lesson of how behavior happens and the different levels of why it's happening. In our next lesson, we're going to talk about how to debunk the most popular parenting myths. Why they're damaging to you, and why you need to just let them go.