

Fostering FAMILIES TODAY

November/December 2014

A Foster Care and Adoption
Resource for America

ANSWERING THE CALL

*People Join the Ranks
of Foster Parents
for a Variety of Reasons*

NATIONAL ADOPTION DAY

**Helping Thousands
of Children Join Families
During One Special Day**

PROMOTING PERMANENCE

**10 Innovative Ways
to Change the System**

U.S. \$5.95 • CANADA \$6.95



www.fosteringfamiliestoday.com

Books

1. *Help for Billy: A Beyond Consequences Approach to Helping Challenging Children in the Classroom.*
2. *Dare to Love: The Art of Merging Science and Love Into Parenting Children with Difficult Behaviors.*
3. *Beyond Consequences, Logic, and Control: A Love-Based Approach to Helping Children with Severe Behaviors, Volume 1.*
4. *Beyond Consequences, Logic, and Control: A Love-Based Approach to Helping Children with Severe Behaviors, Volume 2.*
5. *100 Daily Parenting Reflections*

Your Child is Misbehaving, *Are You Listening?*

When reviewing records of many of the children with whom I work, I am forever perplexed at one particular notation I continually see written by therapists and counselors. Under the list of negative traits of the child, it is often written, "Child exhibits attention-seeking behaviors."

I strongly believe that children seek attention because they NEED attention. Nature has designed children to be completely dependent on their parents at the moment they are born. A baby crying is the signaling to the parent the baby has a need, a need that the baby cannot satisfy on his or her own. The baby is indeed exhibiting attention-seeking behaviors.

The natural flow of the developmental journey of a child is to gradually release this need for attention, moving from a state of dependence to a state of balanced independence. The time period for this is about 18 years. We are the only animals in the animal kingdom that have our children under our care for this length of time. Expecting our children to not need our attention or to view it as a negative behavioral issue during these 18 years goes against our biology.

When children do not know how to verbally express their needs, which is predominately the case during early childhood, they "speak" through their behaviors. In other words, behavior is a form of communication. When a parent can stop, pause and "listen" to the behavior of a child, it can become quite obvious what the child is saying. Looking at the behavior from an objective perspective also unveils the logic behind the child's behavior. Here is a list of 10 behaviors along with an interpretation of each behavior to demonstrate this:

1. SLAMMING DOORS. When a child begins slamming doors, it is an indication that he or she does not feel like he or she is being heard.

By slamming a door, the child is making loud noises, hence forcing the parent to “hear.” The child is essentially saying, “I need to have a voice and I need you to listen to me now!”

2. CURSING. Most children know that they should not curse. They use profanity to jar the parent’s nervous system into listening. It is a way to get a parent to respond to the child, even if the response is negative. The child’s fear of not being good enough for the parent to pay attention to him, is also playing out in such a scenario.

3. SHUTTING DOWN. A child who shuts down, refuses eye contact, walks away or gives the parent the silent treatment is a child who is overwhelmed. We have traditionally labeled a child like this as defiant. This is a child who is saying, “Life is too big to handle. I’m shutting down my world in order to survive.”

4. HITTING A SIBLING. Sibling rivalry is more about the relationship between the child and parent than it is between two siblings. If a child is not feeling secure in his or her relationship with the parents, the child will perceive the sibling as a threat to this relationship with the parent(s). Reacting against the sibling is the basic game of “King of the Hill” in order to win the attention of the parents. The child may receive negative attention from the parent (“Billy, stop picking on your brother!”) but to a child, especially a child with a trauma history, any form of attention, whether positive or negative, is love.

5. CHALLENGING AUTHORITY. A child who challenges authority is a child who has lost trust in authority figures. Look back into the child’s history and you will likely see a child who was abused, neglected or abandoned by someone who was supposed to care for and nurture the child. A child who fights having someone else in charge, is a child saying, “I can’t trust anyone. It is too much of a risk.”

6. SAYING, “I HATE YOU!” Such hurtful words directed toward a parent from a child

are simply a window into the child’s heart. The child is projecting self-hatred and self-rejection back onto the parent. What the child is communicating is, “I hate myself!” It is easier to hurt someone else than it is to feel the internal hurt within one’s own heart.

7. ARGUING ABOUT EVERYTHING. A child who argues about everything and anything is keeping the parent looped in a conversation in order to keep the parent attuned. The child feels that if the parent were to stop talking with him or her, the child would cease to exist. Arguing is the child’s way of staying connected. It is a negative form of attachment.

8. LAZINESS. Describing a child as being “lazy” is like calling a child crying in a crib a “cry baby.” It is a gross misinterpretation of the child. Laziness is typically a sign of a child who experienced helplessness early in childhood; it is a learned behavior. Neglect happens when a child tries to elicit attention from the caregiver and the result is nothing. No attention. No help. Zilch. The child learns that his or her energy does not produce results and as the child grows older and gets challenged by life, he or she will simply shut down and do nothing. The child is saying, “My efforts don’t produce results so therefore I won’t even try.”

9. PUSHING EVERY BOUNDARY. Many children have such intense behaviors that the adults around them in the past demonstrated a lack of ability to handle them or an unwillingness to stick with them. When parents find the child pushing every boundary, every rule, and every limit, the child is asking, “Can you really handle me?” and “You say you’re my parent, but I need to know you’re not going to give up on me so I will test you to make sure you really are committed before I put any trust into you!”

10. BECOMING UNGLUED DURING TRANSITIONS. Trauma happens by surprise and when it happens, there is typically a major change in the child’s life. It is transitional trauma. The aftermath of such traumatic experiences is that the child becomes

fearful of EVERY transition, whether large or small. A child’s belief around transitions becomes, “Something bad is going to happen. Guaranteed.” Past traumatic experiences create the black and white thinking that “all change equals pain.” When a parent sees a child’s negative behaviors intensifying during a transitional time, the parent needs to remember that the child is saying, “I’m so scared that my entire world is going to fall apart in a flash just like it did in the past!”

When parenting a child with challenging behaviors on a day-to-day basis, it is easy to lose sight of the idea that behavior is the language of a child. Negative behaviors are tiring! Keep taking care of yourself and keep your cup filled so that you have enough space inside of you to keep looking beyond the behaviors and listening to the behaviors instead of reacting to the behaviors.

The parent/child relationship is a dyad — a two-part system. Remember that your behavioral response also signals a communication to your child. Thus, it is imperative for you to stay mindful and attuned. Give enough attention to yourself as to stay in a place of love so you are always speaking the language of truth, love and acceptance to your child in return.

To learn more about Beyond Consequences, visit www.beyondconsequences.com. 🌟

ABOUT THE AUTHOR: Heather T. Forbes, LCSW, is the owner of the Beyond Consequences Institute. She is an internationally published author on the topics of raising children with difficult and severe behaviors, understanding the parent’s reactivity when challenged in the home, and self-development. Forbes lectures, consults, and coaches parents throughout the U.S. and internationally with families in crisis working to create peaceful, loving families. She is passionate about supporting families and professionals by bridging the gap between academic research and “when the rubber hits the road” parenting.