

# Better Parenting: Understanding Our Kids and the Four Reasons for Misbehavior

By Sonia Spackman, MA, MFT

It wasn't easy to learn to read or ride a bike. Each skill took working at it. It took time and practice. Being a parent is a skill we can learn and improve, and get better with time. Let's start with understanding our kids and then get strategies.

## WHAT IS IMPORTANT?

Before we begin we need to decide what we can reasonably expect from our kids. Each child is a special mix of traits and behaviors that will not change. Some kids are more sensitive and some are more stubborn. Boys and girls tend to think and react differently. Some traits may lesson or grow, but most likely will not go away. Other traits that affect the way kids grow and behave are mentioned below.

## WHAT HAS TEMPERAMENT GOT TO DO WITH IT?

Temperament is about a kids own style. Temperament has nothing to do with being smart or talents they are born with. It is what your child is born with. Some kids love to be active, surrounded by people and some are calm and like to be alone. Do you have a child that needs more sleep, prefers to go to the library rather than the ball field?

When we pay attention and accept our kid's temperaments we gain understanding. This will help us to enjoy our kids and understand how to guide them in ways that help them.

## WHAT HAS HEREDITY AND ENVIRONMENT GOT TO DO WITH IT?

*Heredity* means traits that "run in the family." Our kids get these traits from us, such as eye color, and body build. Some people believe that behavior is inherited and some believe that behavior comes from the people, places and experiences in a child's life.

We can't change heredity but the environment our kids live in is the most easy to change.

## WHAT ABOUT ROLES FOR BOYS AND GIRLS?

Over the years the world has changed what the expectations for girls and boys behavior should be. As parents

we need to understand that both boys and girls can feel teary or aggressive. We need to expect that boys and girls can help equally with the family chores.

## WHEN ARE KIDS OLD ENOUGH TO KNOW BETTER?

Children go through big developmental changes at different ages where we can expect certain skills and behaviors from them. However, each child develops at his or her own rate. A child who is eight can still believe in the tooth fairy where another child the same age doesn't. Teen hormonal changes can affect behavior and maturity levels.

## WHEN CAN I EXPECT MY KIDS TO COOPERATE?

All the information above can affect kids' behavior, but that is not the whole story. Kids act in many different ways. Some parents see a behavior and blame it on something else; while other parents think misbehavior is normal for kids. Expectations are powerful. Our kids can sense our expectations, and when they do, they try to live up to them or down to them, what ever we expect. This means that if we expect negative behavior we may be *inviting it!* Wouldn't it be better to expect cooperation? We may or may not get it, but we can have it as the standard to help them become more responsible with time.

## WHAT ARE THE FOUR GOALS OF MISBEHAVIOR?

When kids misbehave, they have a goal. They may feel the way to belong is by:

### Attention

All kids need attention. But some kids seem to want it all the time. If they can't get it in appropriate ways they will seek it by misbehaving. Usually doing something that is very irritating to you, and when you are dealing with the behavior to correct your child - your child is getting attention, and it won't be long before your child will want more attention.

Your child may get attention in a passive way by doing nothing so you will wait on him or her.

### Power

Some kids feel like being the "boss". The goal is power. If your kid

seeks power he or she is telling you "I'm in control", "You can't make me." Or "Do what I want." Your child may yell at you or refuse to budge. When your child seeks power, you feel angry. If you argue with your kid he or she will argue right back. If you give in, your kid has won the power struggle. Your child may do what you want slowly or sloppily. The message is passive power. Your kid is telling you without words: "OK, I'll do it. But I will do it my way. You can't make me do it your way".

### Revenge

When your child wants to be the boss and can't win in a power struggle with you they will decide to get even. This goal is revenge. Your child will say or do something to hurt you, or stare at you. The result is you feel angry and hurt. And this could become a growing war where both of you are angry and hurt.

### Acting Helpless

Some kids just give up. They want you to leave them alone. They are trying to tell you, "I can't do it." When

your child gives up you do too. When this happens your child's goal has been met. Now this helplessness usually only happens in a certain area of your child's life, like schoolwork, sports or some other activity where your child feels unable to succeed.

Your kids don't always know that their behavior has a goal. Your kids may use the same tactics for different goals. However, we can control how things turn out or reinforce it by our own behavior. The charts below quickly outline behaviors, reasons and some ways to solve them.

## HOW DO I GET THE 4 REASONS FOR MISBEHAVIOR CHARTS?

You may pick up copies of the charts from STEP on the table at City Hall or on the counter at the Vernonia Library.

There are three charts, for toddlers and preschoolers, for grade school age and one for teens.

Resources, *STEP, Systematic Training for Effective Parents, AGS*

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