



Making Sense of Your Child's Behavior

A child's behavior can often seem impulsive or illogical. What does it mean when a three-year-old suddenly pushes his little sister off the couch? Why does a preschooler refuse to eat lunch even though she hasn't eaten since breakfast? We often try to rationalize children's behaviors based on our adult view of the world, but a child's reasoning is often much different than an adult's.

What You Can Do

Take a deep breath. Resist a quick emotional response. You will understand your child's behavior better after you:

- Watch:* What are you seeing?
- Wait:* Watch long enough to get a full picture of the situation.
- Wonder:* What might your child be feeling? What other factors might be contributing to the behavior?

Think Like Your Child

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| <i>What I Did:</i> | I pushed my sister off the couch. |
| <i>Possible Reasons:</i> | I was angry because she took my special spot. I had to stand up for myself. |
| <i>What S/He Needs from You:</i> | Teach me how to ask her to pick another seat. |
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| <i>What I Did:</i> | I wouldn't eat the lunch you served me. |
| <i>Possible Reasons:</i> | I need to control something in my life. I need to feel like I belong. |
| <i>What S/He Needs from You:</i> | Give me choices between two foods. Serve family style and help me to take a serving. Eat with me and talk to me. |

Ways to Encourage Positive Behaviors in Your Child

- Give clear rules and review them often
- Support and praise good behaviors
- Provide opportunities for choices (make them ones you can live with)
- Be consistent and predictable
- Help your child feel safe; "It is okay to make a mistake, I still love you."

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