

One of the most important principles I have learned about parenting comes from my colleague, Karen Alonge:

“All behavior is communication.”

Over the years, I have come to realize that the purpose of most human behavior is to manage our emotions and connect with other humans. This is especially true for a young child whose brain is so underdeveloped and thus reliant on such primitive ways to manage and connect (e.g., crying, screaming, hitting, biting).

So when your child is “misbehaving” ask yourself: What is my child trying to communicate she is feeling or needing?

Is he/she anxious?

Is he/she feeling lonely?

Is he/she overstimulated?

Is he/she warm, cold or tired?

Is he/she thirsty or hungry?

Did he/she have a tough day at school?

Did he/she have a hard time with a friend or peer?

Asking ourselves questions helps us find solutions to the root cause rather than the surface problem. It engages the thinking part of the brain, the prefrontal cortex, critical to problem solving and self-calming.

And it introduces a pause, a chance to slow down and be reflective rather than reactive. When we allow ourselves a moment to be reflective and curious, we are generally more open, available, creative and responsive. And in doing so, we train our child to do the same.

Even more, we begin to see challenging moments as problem solving opportunities during which we can work to find sustainable solutions. We become a team with our child. We develop tools to use in the future.

As we get more practiced in inquiry, we become a team with our child. Together, we notice feelings and needs, and find solutions

collaboratively. And ultimately, the child becomes his/her own problem solver and active emotional regulator. Of course this takes lots of practice! And we will not be reflective and responsive every time.

However, at any moment we can try again! The beauty of parenting is that we get lots of opportunities to practice.