

Dear Parent!

Welcome to the Calm Parent Challenge - Homework 3

Patrick

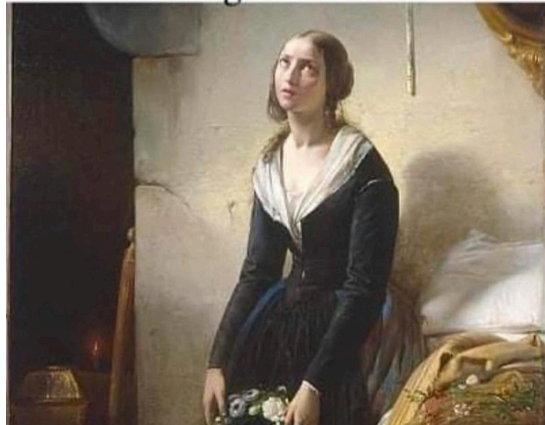
Ps. if you have any questions at all either go to our product page <https://allaboutparenting.com/product-the-5-week-calm-parent-challenge-may/> or contact our amazing head of Customer Care, Stefania Rusu here: hello@AllAboutParenting.com or [+1 \(240\) 534-1084](tel:+12405341084)

A short summary of your homeworks (to complete before the meeting)

Homework 1: Fill In Your Child's Iceberg using information about the 3 psychological needs	
Homework 2: Fill In Your Child's Iceberg using information about the 3 psychological needs	
Homework 3: Find out where YOU exhibit your child's negative behavior.	

The Why Of Your Children's Behaviour - Introduction

When it's morning and people
are using words and expecting
things from me.



Behaviour has causes. Sometimes it's just the time of day!

In this meeting, and for your homework, we'll be thinking about and discussing the idea of understanding the WHY behind your child's behavior.

Thanks to the last meeting, you should now have a better awareness of the trigger points that make you angry and should have taken steps to reduce their impact. Your stress score is lower - well done! This means that when your child refuses to do something, talks back, or is rude, you'll have a pause before your instant reaction.

In that pause, you have the chance to do something really important - ask yourself: WHY is my child doing this?

Over the past six years, working with thousands of parents, I've come to see this as one of the most powerful questions we can ask. If we don't, we tend to rush to judgment. The judging parent - and we've all been there - might think, "This kid is just being difficult" or "I have a problem with this child." And when that's the thought pattern, the immediate response becomes: "How do I stop this difficult child from being difficult?" That creates a cascade of negativity from us, which in turn triggers more negativity from them.

The negativity becomes our reality.

Of course, there are moments when children are simply just testing limits or pushing boundaries. That's natural. But when we take the time to understand why a child is behaving a certain way, something profound shifts. Instead of seeing their behavior as a problem to be solved, we start putting together the bigger picture.

We move from frustration to understanding, from uncertainty to clarity.

Instead of wondering, “Is something wrong with my child?” or “Am I doing something wrong?” we begin to see what’s really going on - and most importantly, what we can do next.

The parents from our previous challenges have told us that this module was a game changer.

Diana - I have learned to shout less because I now understand the "why" behind my children's behavior. This helps me control my emotions and respond more appropriately. - I spend more quality time with my children because I understand that their need for relatedness must be satisfied to prevent unnecessary outbursts

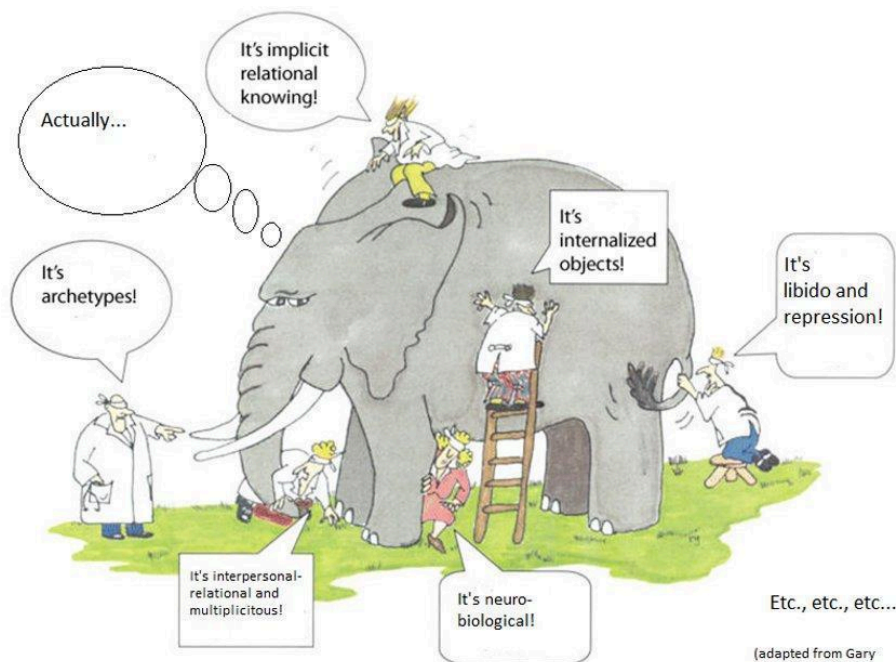
Cristina - Since I started the challenge, I have hardly raised my voice at my daughter. Understanding that there is always a need behind the "why" of my child's behavior - one that I can often satisfy easily - has given me more patience and calm.

Marlene - I have learned to be curious about my son's need for Relatedness rather than feeling defeated if he doesn't see things my way in the moment. - I have learned to give him space for choices and feelings and then guide him toward a plan that works for both of us.

This shift is one of the most powerful transformations we can make as parents. It replaces worry with focus, doubt with a plan. So if that sounds like a journey you want to take, that’s exactly what we’ll be working on in this session.

It can be complicated, but it doesn’t have to be...

Over the years, I've discovered that the reasons behind a child's behavior are vast. There are over 400 psychological theories used to help people with their challenges, and each one could offer another piece of the puzzle. But none of us have the time to explore them all, so in this meeting we're trying to focus on the most important causes. This will give you the clearest possible insights in the shortest amount of time and you'll build a new understanding of your child.



Theories can be helpful frameworks, but the only person who ever truly sees your child in their entirety is... you! PN

What's in this Reading Homework?

First, we'll look at the **Three Basic Psychological Needs of children**.

Second, we'll explore how **sensory systems** can have a huge impact on behavior. As a dad, this has been incredibly helpful in understanding my own daughters.

Finally, we'll ask whether our child's behavior is actually normal for their age and whether our intense reaction **says more about us than it does about them - because, quite often, we struggle with the same behaviors ourselves.**

If you can go through this material and put together your child's "iceberg," you'll start experiencing that shift from uncertainty to confidence. And that is one of the greatest gifts you can give yourself as a parent.

Patrick

Your Child's Iceberg

Your child's iceberg is the concept through which you'll proceed in this meeting and homework. Below, you can see Sarah, a girl whose family I worked with several years ago, and her iceberg.

This principle has really helped me as a dad because, for obvious reasons, we can only see the tip of the iceberg, while much more lies beneath the surface. It's a brilliant metaphor for what's going on in our children's lives.

There's the behavior we can see, and then there are the causes behind it.



The behavior itself is obvious. We know when our child is spitting, like Sarah was, having extreme meltdowns, or physically attacking their mum or dad. But we don't always know why. In this situation, Sarah's parents were concerned that she might be neurodivergent. Maybe they had made mistakes? Maybe there was something wrong with her?

Working with Sarah's family we created a detailed profile of what her life looked like at that point. The world's best experts on any child are their parents, guardians, or caregivers. And so it was with Sarah. There were factors in her life that had significantly impacted her ability to manage relationships. Her dad had been absent for large parts of her life, and without going into too much personal detail, the first three years of her life had been chaotic, difficult, and disrupted. Then, during the COVID years, things got even worse.

I think we all understand that a child who has had a messy relationship with their father, a mum who is overwhelmed with work and looking after multiple children, and significant sensory needs is far more likely to be at a stress level of 7, 8, or 9 out of 10 than a child who has had a continuous presence of loved ones, adjusted well to the stress of COVID, and has no physical challenges.

Together with Sarah's parents, we put together this iceberg because it helped us understand what we needed to work on. Her parents told me at the time that they found it tremendously helpful because, before that, they had been judging her for her behavior. They were using labels like "difficult," "problem child," and "aggressive," and those labels were becoming Sarah's reality.

As a parent, I know how difficult it can be to see the wood for the trees, especially when it comes to our own children. I've struggled with this myself, particularly with my eldest daughter. It can be hard to see beyond the immediate behavior and recognize the underlying reasons.

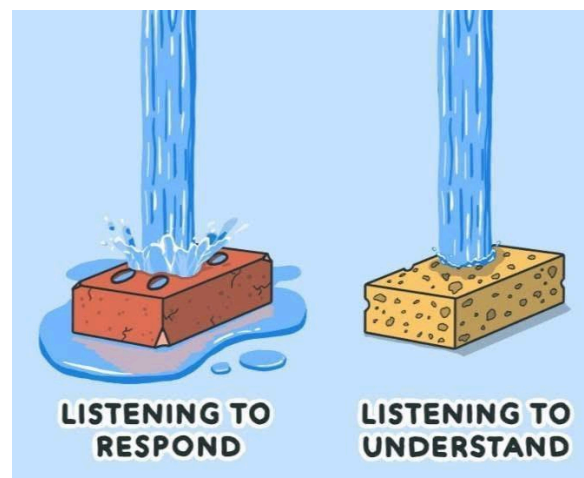
That's what this module is all about.

Your Main Goal From This Homework

Your main homework in this module is to create your own iceberg for your child so that you identify not only the behaviors that are challenging for you but also the possible reasons behind them. When you finish, you'll start to see the "why." And when that happens, you'll likely have the same experience that Sarah's family did - that moment of clarity when they said, *Oh my gosh, now I see this child as they truly are. Now I know what to focus my parenting energy on.*

In Sarah's iceberg, for example, one major factor was routine. Her family life was chaotic - there were no rules, no boundaries, and things changed from day to day. Once her parents put in simple rules and boundaries, especially regarding screen time, things improved almost immediately.

That kind of transformation is coming for you, too. To do so, please print off the Behavior Iceberg we've provided on the Program page (and which I've added at the end of this document) or you can make your own on a piece of paper. Keep this iceberg in mind as you move forward through the material.



The more sponge-like you are as a parent, the more your listening skills improve, the more you understand the why, the less reactive you are. That is why we fill in the Iceberg! PN .

Why? The 3 Basic Psychological Needs

If you've been a member of the All About Parenting Programme or taken part in some or many of our webinars, this definitely WON'T be new material for you! If there is one framework we have used more than any other since 2019, it's the 3 Basic Psychological Needs. It's a simple

but powerful way to understand the 'WHY' of your child's behaviour.

The 3 Psychological Needs are part of Self-determination Theory, created by Dr. Richard Ryan and Dr. Edward Deci.

These 3 needs brilliantly explain why kids throw tantrums, resist our instructions, or act out at the most inconvenient times. The answer lies in understanding children's psychological needs: **Relatedness, Competence, and Autonomy**. These needs are deeply ingrained in every human being, from infancy to adulthood, and they shape how children interact with the world.

When these needs are met, children thrive, displaying positive behaviors such as cooperation, curiosity, and resilience.

When they are unmet, children may resort to challenging behaviors as an attempt to fulfill them.

Understanding these needs will help you recognize the underlying cause of your child's actions and respond in ways that foster internal motivation rather than temporary compliance through rewards or punishment (which is standard parenting we often do).

The Need for Relatedness: "Do you see me?"

The need for Relatedness is a child's need to feel loved, valued, and connected. From the moment they are born, children seek closeness and attachment. A newborn cries to be held, a toddler clings to a parent's leg, and an older child eagerly shares their latest drawing - all are expressions of the need to belong.

How children express this need

- **Positive behaviors:**

- A child brings you a picture they drew and says, "Look, Mommy, I made this for you!"
- They offer to help set the table or complete small chores.
- They initiate play with other children and form friendships.

- **Challenging behaviors:**

- Interrupting conversations: "Mom! Mom! Look at me!"
- Using inappropriate words to get attention: A child suddenly yells a curse word, knowing they will immediately get a reaction.
- Acting out in class to gain acknowledgment from peers or teachers.

When a child is ignored or feels disconnected, they will often resort to any means necessary to gain attention - even if it's negative attention. This is why yelling or scolding can inadvertently reinforce unwanted behaviors. Instead, making time for regular, meaningful connection with your child - such as listening to them without distractions or engaging in activities they enjoy - can satisfy their need for relatedness in a positive way.

We will discuss within the meeting a lot about Relatedness and I will share stories of parents who've made significant improvements in behaviour happen through working on this need.

The Need for Competence: “Let me do it!”

The need for competence drives children to explore, learn, and master new skills. From learning to walk to asking endless “why” questions, children constantly seek to expand their abilities. When this need is met, they develop confidence, curiosity and perseverance.

How children express this need

- **Positive behaviors:**
 - Asking numerous questions: “Why is the sky blue?”
 - Insisting on doing tasks independently: “I want to tie my own shoes!”
 - Persisting in learning a new skill, like riding a bike or solving a puzzle.
- **Challenging behaviors:**
 - Giving up too easily: “I can’t do it! You do it for me!”
 - Procrastinating on homework or tasks they fear they’ll fail.
 - Comparing themselves to others and feeling inadequate: “My friend can do it, but I’m not good enough.”

Children naturally want to prove to themselves that they are capable. However, if they frequently experience failure without encouragement or are overly criticized, they may begin to doubt their abilities. A key question to ask ourselves when it comes to competence, is “does my child KNOW how to do this skill or behaviour?” If no-one has taught or modelled the behaviour, then the answer is most likely ‘no.’

That’s why if we see that our child needs skills development, we’d put Competence in their Iceberg.

The Need for Autonomy: “I want to do it/choose/be in charge!”

The need for Autonomy is a child’s desire to have control or choice over their actions and decisions. It is the drive to say, “I want to do it my way.” A child who feels they have no say in their daily life may resist, argue, or shut down.

How children express this need

- **Positive behaviors:**
 - Choosing their own clothes or deciding what to eat.
 - Taking initiative: “I want to pack my own lunch.”
 - Demonstrating independence in problem-solving.
- **Challenging behaviors:**
 - Refusing to cooperate: “No! I don’t want to!”
 - Power struggles: “I don’t have to listen to you!”

- Deliberately doing the opposite of what is asked.

Children today have fewer opportunities for unstructured play and independent decision-making than past generations. Constant adult supervision and scheduled activities leave little room for autonomy. To support this need, allow children to make choices where appropriate. Even simple decisions like “Do you want to brush your teeth before or after putting on pajamas?” can give them a sense of control.

If you consider your child to have a very high need for autonomy (control or choice) or use descriptions like “strong-willed, demanding, controlling, stubborn” about your child, put the word “Autonomy” in their iceberg.

How does this knowledge help us?

The ultimate goal is to help your child balance these three needs. When a child feels connected, competent, and autonomous, they experience well-being and internal motivation. Instead of behaving out of fear of punishment or desire for rewards, they develop a natural drive to learn, cooperate, and engage positively. Co-operation from a child to a parent becomes a natural outcome of such a relationship.

Here’s 3 ideas as to how you can support each need daily:

- **Relatedness:** Set aside daily one-on-one time with your child, listen actively, and express appreciation for who they are. This is what I call “Being Time”
- **Competence:** Provide age-appropriate challenges, celebrate effort rather than just success, and encourage curiosity.
- **Autonomy:** Offer choices, respect their opinions, and allow natural consequences to guide learning.

When your child exhibits challenging behavior, instead of asking, “How can I stop this behavior?” try asking this “Why Question” which is: “Which of the 3 needs is my child trying to fulfill?”

How the Needs Look In Our Adult Life - Relatedness

We also have the 3 Psychological Needs and our needs can often not be met and have a big impact on us (without us really understanding what’s happening at the time).

To illustrate how our need for Relatedness can not be met in adult life, let’s imagine a little story...

You finally manage to schedule a walk in the park with a close friend. It's been a while, and you've really missed her company. The sun is shining, you bring her favorite coffee, and as you stroll together, you begin to open up about something that's been on your mind. She listens, nods, and smiles.

But then her smartwatch buzzes. She glances at it, reads a message, and says, “Just a second,” as she starts replying. You walk in silence for a few moments. She apologizes, slips her phone away, and resumes the conversation. Still, something in the vibe between you is list.

A few minutes later, she suddenly remembers she needs to return a call about her son’s school. She steps aside to talk, leaving you waiting by the bench. Again, she returns, apologizes, and you keep going. You laugh together, share stories, and reconnect. But before the walk ends, she checks another notification, this time from work, and tells you she needs to send a quick voice message.

You understand. She’s busy. She cares. You’re not angry. But there’s a feeling of frustration. It feels like you’re not really with each other. Not the way you were hoping to be. You find yourself wondering if she respects you, really.

This can often be our interactions with our children *without us consciously understanding.*

How the Needs Look In Our Adult Life - Competence and Autonomy

Here’s another story you might recognise.

You show up to work early, coffee in hand, ready to contribute to the new project your team is starting. You’ve been thinking about it all weekend and even came up with a few creative solutions you’re excited to share. As the meeting begins, your manager walks in, sits down, and immediately launches into a detailed list of what needs to be done, how it should be done, and who should do what.

You try to offer a suggestion. “Actually, I was wondering if” But you’re cut off. “We don’t have time for that right now. Just stick to the plan, like I tell you to”

You nod, say nothing, and jot down your assigned tasks. You do your job. You meet the deadlines. But inside, your energy dips. Your ideas feel irrelevant. You stop thinking about how to improve things and just focus on getting through the day.

The worst part is it’s not that your boss is cruel or unfair. It’s that you don’t feel heard. You don’t feel trusted. You feel like a cog in someone else’s machine.

When we are stuck in a job with a manager or boss who doesn’t care about our opinion or control us, it sucks. So imagine what it’s like when we’re like this to our children?

Homework 1

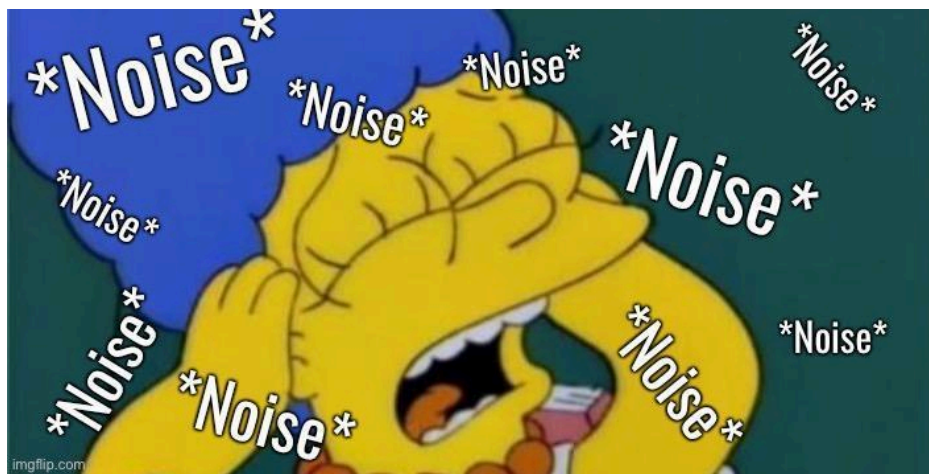
It’s time to fill in your child’s Iceberg with information about the 3 Needs.

Do you consider that all 3 of your child’s needs are being met? Do you think there’s one to work on? If Yes, add it to the “Why” section of your child’s iceberg. You might put “high need for Autonomy” or “high need for Relatedness” there.

If you're not sure, here's a question I sometimes ask parents which I think helps. How far do you think on a scale of 1-10 your child's needs are being met, with 10 being very high and 1 being very low? If it's 6 or lower, then there's a good chance that's a part of your child's iceberg.

Understanding the Why: Our Children's Sensory Systems

As we learnt in the previous Homework and meeting, our nervous system operates along three primary pathways: the Green Zone (ventral vagal state), the Red Zone (sympathetic state), and the Blue Zone (dorsal vagal state).



The Polyvagal Theory helps us understand that behaviour is deeply rooted in our biology. When a child's nervous system detects a threat (which can be the things we say and do as parents) it triggers the Red Zone (fight or flight), leading to increased heart rate and heightened arousal. If the threat persists, they may shift to the blue zone (shutdown), where they become withdrawn or unresponsive.

The idea that our children's behaviour is rooted in their bodies and not just their minds is something that a lot of traditional psychology STILL, even in 2025, has yet to grasp. My handbook on Child and Adolescent Psychology for British psychologists has almost no mentions in over a 1000 pages of the body-brain connection.

Fundamental to the WHY of our children's behaviours are the **8 sensory systems** inside the body. We are all familiar with the five "traditional" senses: sight, hearing, taste, touch, and smell.

But there are 3 additional senses that are crucial for understanding the WHY of our children's behaviour:

1. Proprioception: This sense helps us perceive the position and movement of our body parts. It's vital for coordination and motor control.

2. Vestibular: This sense, located in the inner ear, helps us maintain balance and spatial orientation. It's essential for movement and equilibrium.

3. Interoception: This internal sense helps us perceive internal bodily sensations like hunger, thirst, and the need to use the bathroom. It also plays a role in emotional regulation.

Now, what have these systems got to do with our children's behaviour?

Well, to put it simply, we all exist on a spectrum of sensory need. Some of us AVOID (hyper-reactive) certain sensory input and some of us SEEK it (hypo-reactive).

This happens to us on a daily basis without us really understanding it.

For instance, if a child is experiencing sensory overload - perhaps their proprioceptive or vestibular systems are overwhelmed-they may exhibit behaviours that seem irrational or disruptive. Similarly, if their interoceptive sense is signalling discomfort, it can lead to emotional outbursts or meltdowns.

When a child's sensory needs are not met - whether they are under-stimulated or overstimulated - their nervous system can become overwhelmed, pushing them into the Red Zone and causing us all distress.

Example - Johnny

Let's look at an example. Johnny is one of those 'bashy, crashy smashy' children I love to play with. He has a strong need to jump, kick, push and roughhouse and typically does it with friends in play and his dad when he's at home. Unfortunately, Johnny's dad has been away for a few days, and Johnny's had to sit all day at school in a hard chair and has been told off for moving.

His body is practically shaking with the need to move, the need to get proprioceptive and vestibular stimulation. When he gets home, feeling frustrated but not really understanding why, his rough play turns to his younger brother, he goes too far, it quickly gets out of control and leads to a huge family argument. Johnny's been 'aggressive' again. Or has he just had an unmet sensory need?

Yes, Johnny went into the Red Zone when the play got too much. But the real cause of WHY he started hitting almost certainly lies in his deep desire for sensory input that wasn't met because of the unique circumstances of that day at home and at school.

By understanding that these behaviours are not 'intentional' (as we would understand them) but rather a response to their body's sensory needs, we can start to see the WHY behind the behaviour. For example, providing a calm environment or using sensory integration techniques can help regulate their nervous system and bring them back to the Green Zone.

In Johnny's case for example, I would have definitely recommended that his family give him as much opportunity for bashy, crashy, smashy play as possible. It will immediately calm him. It would be a major part of his Iceberg work.

Example - Christy

For example, I once worked with a parent of an 11-year-old girl, Christy, who became physically aggressive when she got into the 'Red Zone.' After doing a sensory assessment, we discovered she had a strong need for proprioceptive activity, but it wasn't being met at home because her mum had a bad back. The solution? She enrolled in a boxing class, and her mum got her a home punching bag. The new family rule became: *When you're angry, it's okay to hit - but you hit the boxing bag, not Mum.* (At All About Parenting we call this technique "Redirect the Rage").

The result? A 70% reduction in hitting at home. Why? Because Mum understood the *Why*. She had filled in her Iceberg.

Example - Emily

Emily's parents began to notice something unusual when she was around two years old. She constantly rubbed soft fabrics against her cheeks- blankets, shirts, even the curtains. She would press her face into them and hum quietly, as if it brought her peace.

At first, they thought it was just a cute habit. But over time, they saw how much she relied on this comfort. She avoided rough textures and cried when tags or seams touched her skin. Getting dressed in the morning became a struggle.

In busy places like shopping malls or birthday parties, Emily would often shut down or ask to leave. She wasn't being difficult. She was overwhelmed. Her sensory system seemed to crave softness and quiet, and her parents began to adjust their routine.

They worked with an occupational therapist who explained Emily had a tactile sensory preference. With some small changes, like tagless clothes, a quiet corner at home, and time to self-soothe, Emily became calmer and more confident. Her world didn't change. But how she moved through it did.

Homework 2 - Your Child's Sensory Needs

Take a moment to think about your child. As we've already discussed, you know them better than anyone else. Consider any extreme reactions they have to their environment. Do they have a strong dislike for certain textures, fabrics, or the feeling of things on their skin? That could indicate tactile hypersensitivity. Or do they show an intense need for specific activities, like playing with water every single day or engaging in rough, high-energy play like Johnny's example?

To help you, you might want to fill in this table listing each of the sensory needs and write if they are seeking or avoiding each of these needs.

Sensory Need	Description	Seeking?	Avoiding?
Touch	May seek lots of touch or avoid		
Taste	May have strong aversion or preference for tastes		
Smell (Olfactory)	May seek certain smells or avoid them		
Hearing	May react to noise or seek it		
Seeing (Visual)	May cover eyes (avoid) or seek visual stimulation		
Proprioception	Movement of our body (see above description)		
Vestibular	Balance (see above description)		
Interoception	Our internal feelings (see above description)		

If your child's sensory needs aren't understood this is likely a key part of the iceberg puzzle we're putting together.

Whatever You Judge You Have In Yourself

If you've ever found yourself deeply irritated by something your child does- whether it's their defiance, their outbursts of rage, or their apparent lack of responsibility - you're not alone. But have you ever stopped to wonder *why* certain behaviors bother you so much more than others? According to both Carl Jung, the things that most irritate us in others - especially our children - are often reflections of qualities we struggle to acknowledge in ourselves.

Jung famously said, *"Everything that irritates us about others can lead us to an understanding of ourselves."* This is a principle that I find painfully apparent to me when I am getting annoyed by my daughter's annoyance!

In other words, when you judge your child for being too aggressive, too demanding, or too messy, it's worth asking: *Where in my own life am I aggressive, demanding, or messy?* If we resist seeing a part of ourselves - perhaps because we were taught as children that it was unacceptable - we become highly reactive when we see it in someone else. This is especially true with our kids, who mirror both our strengths and our struggles.

Imagine this scenario: Your child is throwing a tantrum, shouting and stomping their feet. You feel your frustration bubbling up. *Why can't they just calm down?* You might even snap, telling them to *stop being so dramatic* or *control themselves*. Now, pause. Instead of simply reacting, ask yourself: *Have I ever acted out in frustration or anger? Do I struggle with controlling my own emotions at times?* Did I grow up being told that expressing anger was wrong or shameful? If any of those questions resonate with you, then your child's behavior is likely triggering an unresolved issue within yourself. Perhaps you've been conditioned to suppress your anger, and seeing your child express theirs freely makes you uncomfortable.

Homework 3

To help you explore this further, think of a recent time when your child's behavior really got under your skin. Maybe it was their refusal to listen, their temper tantrum, or their unwillingness to share. Ask yourself: *Where do I display this same behavior in my own life, in that form or another?* It might not look exactly the same. If you're irritated by your child's anger, do you also experience frustration but express it differently (perhaps through passive-aggression, avoidance, or self-criticism)? If their messiness annoys you, is there an area of your life where you lack organization or control? If their stubbornness drives you crazy, can you recall times when you were determined to do things *your way*?

Every quality has both positive and negative aspects. Anger can signal boundaries being crossed. Stubbornness can mean persistence. Messiness can be linked to creativity. What is your child's behavior teaching you about the strengths behind the traits you judge? Instead of just seeing it as a problem, recognize it as an opportunity to address and accept a hidden part of yourself.

When we judge our children, we unintentionally create resistance. But when we use their behavior as a mirror, we gain insight into our own inner world. This shift in perspective allows us to respond with more empathy and wisdom rather than reacting out of frustration. The next time your child does something that irritates you, take a deep breath and remember: they are not just misbehaving; they are giving you a chance to better understand yourself. By embracing this, you'll not only improve your relationship with your child but also deepen your own personal growth.

Conclusion

So you should have a good understanding of the following "WHYs" of your child's behaviour.

If not - write in our Whatsapp group or save your question for our upcoming meeting!

Well done for all the work you've done so far!

Patrick

Inspiring Quotes

Carl Jung - "Every individual life is at the same time the eternal life of the human species"

Mark Twain - "It's not that we know so much it's that we know so much that isn't so"

Folk saying "Holding a grudge is like drinking poison and hoping someone else will die"

Einstein "To punish me for my contempt for authority, fate made me an authority myself."

Robert Schuller "Life is a peak-to-peak experience."