

Dear Parent!

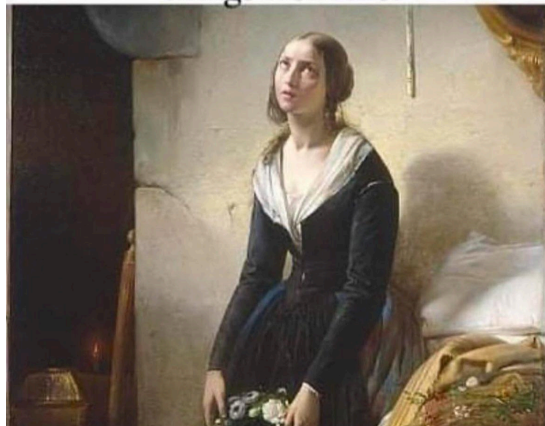
Welcome to this module which focuses on the WHY behind your child's behaviour(s).

This is one of the most powerful things you will learn in this course!

Paddy

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 previous meetings, 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! You're more in the Green zone! 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, 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.

Sara I've shifted from control to influence, Instead of telling my son what to do (which caused conflict) I create calm boundaries and lead with empathy. e.g i would shout his name to come and get his meals now i suggest would you like me to help you cook your steak dinner , so he feels competent.Easing Tension in the home.

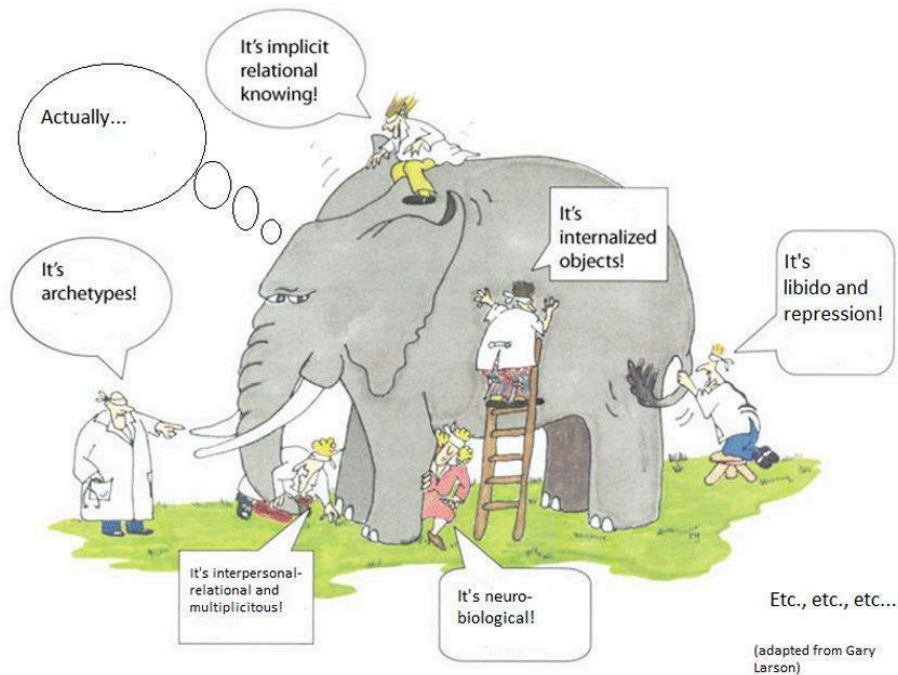
Jeremy I've have made an important realisation regarding the 3 needs of children - particularly relatedness. I'm seeing what my kids see of me - always working, not spending much together time, busy, hurried, edgy. While, I'm honestly at my wits end with balancing work, finance and household schedules, I realise, I just need to keep trying to engage with my daughters and that's what I have been doing.

Grace Since I started paying attention to my kids core needs, I feel like their behavior have started changing for the better, we still have a lot of down times but overall, I'm seeing a lot of positive responses from them.

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 using a world-leading theory of motivation.



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?

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

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

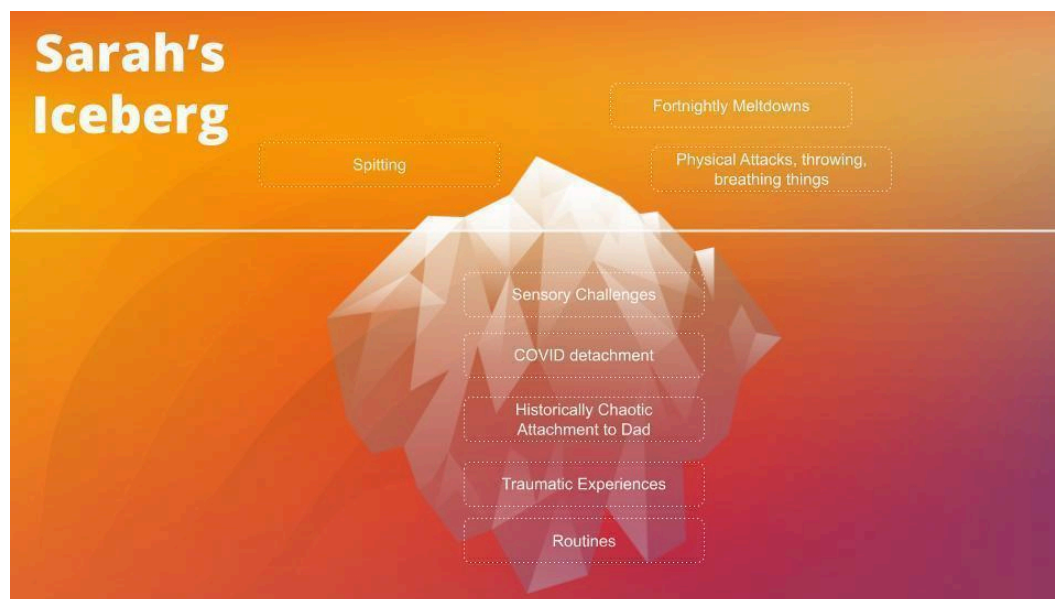
Your Child's Iceberg

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.

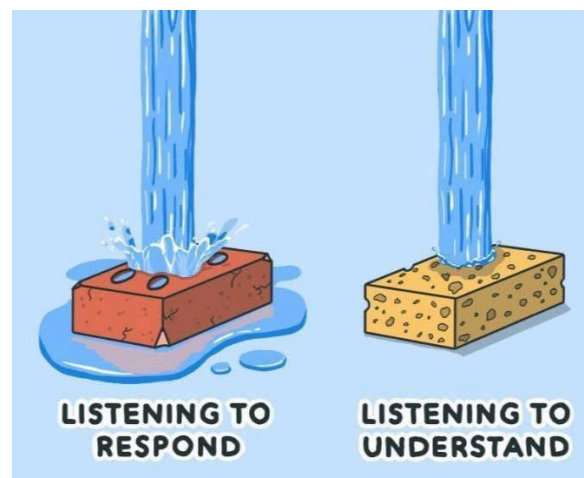
As a parent, I know how difficult it can be to see the wood for the trees, especially when it comes to our own children. I've struggled with this myself, particularly with my eldest daughter. It can be hard to see beyond the immediate behavior and recognize the underlying reasons. That's what this module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

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.

As you think about these three needs, try to listen to yourself as you engage with others and see yourself from their perspective.

You might catch yourself saying things like

"I don't care what you think, I'm your parent" (autonomy-harming)

Or

"I haven't got time for you right now (relatedness harming).

If you catch yourself saying or doing something you regret, that's OK. Try to use it as a learning opportunity, write it down and share it at the next meeting, where we'll be going DEEP on the 3 needs.

Homework 2

If your child is old enough, you might consider having an age-appropriate conversation with them about the Need that you've identified that you might need to work on.

"Hey Danny, you know, I think I realised I don't spend enough time with you because I get so distracted by my phone. I'm gonna try to do stop doing that when I finish work. What would you like to do if we get 20 minutes extra every day together?" Relatedness

"Hey shall we do a cool experiment? This week, you can get dressed on your own without me doing it for you. What do you think?" Competence.

"You know what I realised, Jenny? I realised I've been really controlling lately and telling you what to do. I'm sorry, I've just been in the Red Zone a lot recently with your father being away. Is that how it feels for you? How can I give you more choice in your life?" Autonomy

Conclusion

So you should have a good understanding of the following “WHYs” of your child’s behaviour.

You should be catching yourself and reflecting on the 3 Psychological needs before the meeting and seeing real change in your child’s behaviour as a result.

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.”