

JACK'S CORNER

QUESTION: Sometimes my child's behavior just baffles me. Is there a method to their madness?

ANSWER: Although behavior many times SEEMS random and purposeless, it never is. All learned behaviors (and most unlearned behaviors too) have a definite purpose. Behaviors can be understood **theologically** as well as psychologically by understanding the following three categories:

1. **LOVE.** Every child longs to be loved and to love. However, every child learns that love is dangerous; love runs the risk of wounding a person's heart. Therefore every child experiences ambivalent feelings about love. (e.g. "I deeply want love, but I also deeply fear the possible effects of love.")
2. **SECURITY.** Every child craves security and safety in relationships and life experiences. However, every child learns that total security is not possible. Especially around age 4, children learn that the world is not always safe. Furthermore, it is not always safe for *them*.
3. **PURPOSE.** Every child desires purpose, meaning, and accomplishment in life. However, every child learns that these things can't always be found. (e.g. "I sometimes fail, and it hurts. Sometimes I feel worthless.")

All behavior is directed to answering the following three questions: **"What must I do to be loved? What must I do to find security? What must I do to have purpose?"** When a child's behavior is examined in the light of these three questions, the behavior is clearly understood.* (e.g. Think about how a shy child answers these questions.....the over-achiever.....the under-achiever.....the intellectual....the athlete.....the social butterfly.....the abused child.....etc.) As each and every child experiences life, he/she learns to find the safest and most successful ways to answer these three questions.

Sadly, as sinful human beings, we often answer these questions in sinful ways. Instead of turning to God to find true love, security and purpose, we turn to ourselves, others, or things. Our job as parents is threefold: **(1) Affirm** the value of our children's longings for love, security and purpose. **(2) Expose** the ways our children try to find love, security and purpose apart from God. And, **(3) Offer** our children true love, security and purpose by drawing them to God. As parents, we primarily draw them to God through OUR example, OUR faith and OUR character.

* Needless to say, all adult behavior can be understood in light of these three questions too. What to read more? Check out Kevin Huggins' book: [Parenting Adolescents](#)

Jack Lipski, MA
SOTHCS Counselor
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