

## Mrs Dowdell's Parenting Pointer

### The tip of the iceberg

Do you sometimes struggle to understand your child's behaviour? Why do our children have the incredible ability to push all of our buttons? How can we cope better when they lose the plot? We know that ALL BEHAVIOUR IS COMMUNICATION, so we just have to try and figure out what our children are trying to tell



us. The challenge is that the behaviour is just the tip of the iceberg, the bit that we actually see above the water line and there's an awful lot going on underneath.

All human beings have needs which have to be met in order for us to thrive and reach our potential. Some of these needs are very basic, like having enough to eat and drink and getting enough sleep. We need to feel safe and loved and that we have a place where we belong. Then we

move on to needing to achieve, build our self-esteem and gain respect from others. When it feels like these needs are not being met, this can result in uncomfortable feelings and emotions which can then affect our behaviour and the way we react with other people. As adults, we're usually better at modifying our behaviour appropriately, even when we feel horrible underneath the surface, but our children are still learning this skill. Having said that, how many of us have shouted at our child when they've wandered off and we couldn't see them? On the surface, our reaction appears to be anger but if we look under the surface, we can see that our reaction is because we were scared that something could have happened to them.

Let's imagine our child has had a disagreement with a friend at school. This may make them feel that they no longer belong to their friendship group. This perceived lack of belonging may make them feel sad, lonely, or angry, depending on the child. We're completely unaware that this has happened until we get home from school and ask them to put their shoes away, only to be met with tears or tantrums which actually have nothing to do with our perfectly reasonable request. All we see is the behaviour and it's really easy for us to react and then make the problem even bigger because now we're all cross with each other.

Instead, we need to try and stay calm when we see the tip of the iceberg. What feelings are they trying to express? What basic need feels like it is being threatened? Parents need to learn to be Feelings Detectives; what is my child trying to communicate? Sometimes we can meet that need immediately, for example if they're hungry. At other times we may not be able to fix the problem. In the previous example, we may not be able to help them make up with their friend but we can listen to them and acknowledge their feelings or help them to come up with possible solutions. So, the next time things kick off, pause for a moment and remember that our children's behaviour is just the tip of the iceberg.

For support with managing behaviour at home, you can e-mail me at [parenting@foundrylanepimary.co.uk](mailto:parenting@foundrylanepimary.co.uk)

