



Bids for Connection

Rethinking How We View Behavior

ENGAGEMENT & CONNECTION

The first plan child is inherently driven to make connections and engage with their environments. This engagement and connection is not limited to the physical environment but also applies to our psychological and social environment. It is through this connection and engagement that the young child builds their framework of understanding their world, themselves and others.



EMOTIONAL CONNECTIONS

The first plan child is in the process of developing their emotional awareness, their emotional literacy and understanding of relationships. Connections help them build a framework of how to navigate relationships. They seek emotional connection but don't necessarily have a complete set of tools by which to navigate the complexities of this new world.



ALL BEHAVIOR IS COMMUNICATON

All behavior is a form of communication. As first-plane children develop language, will, awareness, and understanding, their behaviors often serve as their primary way of expressing themselves. This communication may be unrefined, inconsistent, or even messy at times. However, it is essential to recognize that every behavior reflects a child's attempt to convey a need, emotion, or experience. The child is attempting to make a connection not act in a malicious way.



RETHINKING WHY?

When a child exhibits a behavior, adults often seek to understand why it happened, sometimes even asking the child to explain their actions. However, young children lack the necessary tools—such as language, self-awareness, understanding, lived experiences, and the ability to consider others' perspectives—to provide a clear explanation. In many cases, they simply don't know why they acted a certain way. Our strong desire to find an answer can sometimes interfere with the connection and engagement the child is truly seeking.



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EMOTIONAL BIDS

Emotional Bids are defined any attempt from one partner to another for attention, affirmation, affection or any other positive connection. Emotional bids provide a different lens through which to view behavior. (*Emotional Bids is a term coined by Dr. John Gottman of the Gottman Institute.)



THREE RESPONSES

Throughout the day, we encounter small but meaningful moments where a young child seeks connection. In these moments, we have a choice in how we respond to their emotional bids:



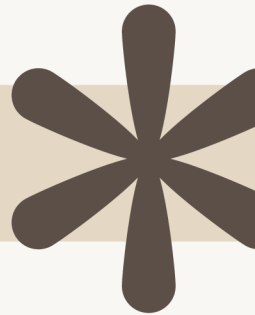
a. Turn Toward – Engage with and acknowledge their need.

b. Turn Away – Dismiss or ignore their attempt at connection.

c. No Response – Remain unresponsive, whether intentionally or unintentionally.

When we view behavior as a means of building connection and strengthening relationships, our goal should be to intentionally turn toward the child as often as possible, fostering trust and engagement.

Ways to Intentionally Turning Toward



- **Be on the look out** for a child's bid towards you.
- **Respond with empathy**, no matter what the comment is.
- If you don't get the response you want when you reach out, **step back and provide space** before you step back in and respond starting with empathy again (e.g. *I can see that you are frustrated right now. I get frustrated too when things don't go my way.*)
- If you make an overture and you are greeted with something hurtful, **try not to respond with anger**. Remember the child is trying to learn and we gain more when we help a child understand a situation. Instead respond with a statement that shows empathy and also how the words impacted you (e.g. *I can see you are mad. Your words really hurt me. We don't use our words to hurt others. We are going to take a minute and try again.*)
- Be sure that you have an **abundance of intentional, positive interactions on a daily basis**. These small interactions help grow and deepen connection.