

# The Child Behind the Symptoms

When children exhibit challenging behaviors, it is easy to focus on the symptoms themselves. They may be disruptive in class, defiant at home, or withdrawn and isolated from their peers. While it is important to address these behaviors, it is equally crucial to understand the emotional needs that may be driving them.

## Understanding the Underlying Causes

Challenging behaviors are often a child's way of communicating their unmet emotional needs. These needs may vary widely depending on the individual child, but they commonly include the following:



### An Autism Casebook for Parents and Practitioners: The Child Behind the Symptoms by Shoshana Levin Fox

★★★★☆ 4.8 out of 5

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Enhanced typesetting : Enabled  
Word Wise : Enabled  
Print length : 234 pages  
Screen Reader : Supported



- **Attention and connection:** Children need to feel seen, heard, and valued. When they do not receive enough attention or positive reinforcement from adults, they may act out to gain attention, even if it is negative.

- **Safety and security:** Children need to feel safe and secure in their environment. They may exhibit challenging behaviors if they feel threatened, anxious, or overwhelmed.
- **Regulation and control:** Children need to learn how to manage their emotions and behaviors. If they do not have the skills to cope with strong emotions or deal with difficult situations, they may act out in ways that seem inappropriate.
- **Autonomy and independence:** Children need to feel a sense of control over their lives. They may exhibit challenging behaviors if they feel their autonomy is being threatened or they are not allowed to make choices.
- **Self-esteem and competence:** Children need to feel good about themselves and their abilities. They may exhibit challenging behaviors if they feel low self-esteem or lack confidence in their abilities.

## **Practical Strategies for Supporting Children**

Once we understand the emotional needs that may be driving a child's challenging behaviors, we can begin to develop strategies to support them. Here are some practical tips:

- **Build a strong relationship:** Spend time with the child, getting to know their interests and needs. Establish open communication and let them know that you are there for them.
- **Provide attention and positive reinforcement:** Catch the child being good and praise them for positive behaviors. Avoid focusing solely on negative behaviors, as this can reinforce them.

- **Create a safe and supportive environment:** Make sure the child feels safe and secure at home and at school. Provide a consistent routine and structure, and be available to listen to their concerns.
- **Teach regulation and control skills:** Help the child develop coping mechanisms for managing their emotions and behaviors. This can include teaching them deep breathing exercises, problem-solving skills, and anger management techniques.
- **Foster autonomy and independence:** Give the child choices and allow them to make decisions whenever possible. Help them develop self-care skills and encourage them to take responsibility for their actions.
- **Boost self-esteem and competence:** Help the child identify their strengths and build on them. Encourage them to participate in activities that they enjoy and that make them feel good about themselves.
- **Seek professional help if needed:** If you are struggling to support a child with challenging behaviors on your own, don't hesitate to seek professional help. A therapist can help identify the underlying causes of the behaviors and develop a treatment plan that is tailored to the child's individual needs.

Challenging behaviors in children are often a sign of unmet emotional needs. By understanding the underlying causes and implementing practical strategies to support children, we can help them develop the skills they need to manage their emotions, behaviors, and relationships. When we focus on the child behind the symptoms, we empower them to reach their full potential and live happy, healthy lives.



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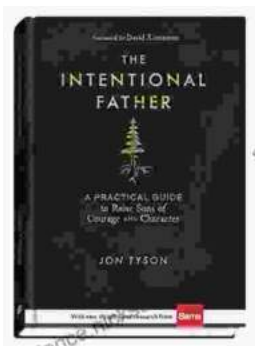
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