



The Child's Need To Belong: Part 4 Meeting The Goal Of Protection

In previous sessions we talked about the child's need to belong, and how a child's behavior is directed towards getting this emotional connection of belonging.

We've talked about how a child's behavior is driven by four unconscious goals: contact, power, protection and withdrawal.

Meeting our children's goal of protection begins with **accepting and respecting feelings**.

When the child's goal of protection is met, we see a child who is both assertive and forgiving.

But the child who lacks a sense of protection is fearful and distressed.

The child who lacks a sense of protection may act out by taking revenge and trying to hurt others.

Most of all, the child who feels unprotected feels unloved.

When our kids feel loved and have this emotional connection of protection, we see children who are...

- Happy,
- Cooperative,
- Self-motivated,
- Assertive and
- Self-aware.

One important way we can help our children feel like they are protected is to accept and respect their feelings.

It can be easy to dismiss children's feelings.

Children can be overly dramatic or use vague or incorrect words to describe emotions.

We can be caught off guard by their emotional outbursts and respond with phrases such as:



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- You're not hungry. You just ate.
- You're not hot. The air conditioner is running.
- Don't say you hate your sister. That's an awful thing to say.

Hearing feelings dismissed, though, can undermine our children's goal of protection in two ways:

- It can lead children to not trust their feelings.
- Our dismissal of their feelings can keep them from learning to express emotions appropriately.

In short, when we dismiss our children's feelings, they may sense that they are not respected, not accepted, and therefore, not protected.

How can we accept and respect feelings?

Here's a four-part tip.

1. Listen quietly and attentively.

Turn off the television, radio, cell phone and computer, and give your child your full attention. Listen and refrain from giving advice, judging, asking questions, pitying, psychoanalyzing or taking sides. Simply listen.

2. Acknowledge the child's feelings with just a word.

Using only a word or two, for example, oh, mmmm, or I see, help our children feel that we are hearing and connecting with what they are saying and feeling. I've also found nodding with steady eye contact acts as an understanding word.

3. Give the feeling a name.

For example:

- That sounds frustrating.
- You must be upset.
- You must feel happy about that.

Also, we can work on giving our children an emotional vocabulary.

4. Give the child's wishes in fantasy when the request is not practical.

For example, I wish you could wear your pajamas to school. I wish we all could wear our pajamas to school!



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Here's a story about three-year-old Andrea.

Andrea was upset and in tears about having to take turns on the tree swing at our house.

I listened to her cry and exclaim that it wasn't fair. (Step 1: Listen.)

I looked Andrea in the eye and said, "I think you'd like to swing all day." (Step 2: Acknowledge feelings.)

Andrea nodded through her hiccups.

"It's frustrating to take turns with your brothers." (Step 3: Give the feeling a name.)

Andrea nodded again.

"I wish I could build another swing, Andrea, just for you, so you could swing and swing and swing. I'd write your name on it with pink and silver letters." (Step 4: Give a wish.)

Andrea wiped her face and gave me a quick smile. She jumped up and ran to get a ball.

Feelings acknowledged. Crisis over.

Using these four steps we show our children that we accept and respect their feelings.

Actions intended to harm are what we should not accept or condone.

A child might be angry and express hatred or a desire to do harm. We can respond with, "I see you're upset with your brother. Use your words to tell him what you want. Remember, we use our words to solve problems."

There are many ways to help our children meet their goal of protection.

But remember this: meeting our children's goal of protection begins with accepting and respecting feelings.

Time to put this into action!

Think of a recent high emotion incident with your child.



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How was it related to your child not meeting the goal of protection and thus belonging?

Write out the 4 steps you could have used to accept and respect your child's feeling in that moment.

Resources:

Adler, Alfred. *The Individual Psychology of Alfred Adler*. Harper Torch Books (1964)

Dreikurs, Rudolf. *Children: The Challenge*. Plume Publications (1964)

Popkin, Michael. *Active Parenting Handbook*. Active Parenting, Inc. (1983)