



The Child's Need To Belong: Part 5 Meeting The Goal Of Withdrawal

In the previous four articles in this series, we've considered a child's need to belong, and how a child's behavior is directed towards getting this emotional connection of belonging.

To feel like they belong, children's behavior is driven by four unconscious goals: contact, power, protection and withdrawal.

Now, let's consider how we can help our children in *meeting the goal of withdrawal*.

The goal of withdrawal may be better understood as the need to be alone. I see the goal of withdrawal as the need for solitude and in this article I will refer to the goal of withdrawal in terms of solitude.

You might see solitude as a counterbalance to the goal of contact.

We all need to time to be alone. To think. To re-center ourselves. To consolidate learning. To recharge. And more.

To support the child's need for solitude, there are two major helps we can offer:

- First, we respect the child's wishes to be alone.
- Second, when the child is ready to make contact again, we listen to try to understand behavior, needs and emotions.

For the child whose need for solitude is positively met, we see a child going off to be alone to calm himself or think through a situation. This child realizes that it's okay to want to be alone. The child also respects the need of others to be alone.

When a child's goal of solitude is not met, we see an avoidance of interaction. The avoiding child...

- Feels he is a failure
- Gives up trying to make contact
- Doesn't develop personal power
- Stops trying to feel safe and protected
- Is passive, and
- Refuses to try.

As adults, with the avoiding child, we can feel helpless and have no idea how to change the situation.

When the goal of withdrawal is met, a child re-establishes contact when he is ready. As adults, we respect this child's self-awareness of needing to be alone.

Remember. We should respect the child's desire to be alone.

Our next help is this: When the withdrawing child makes contact with us again, we use listening techniques to try to understand behavior, needs and emotions.

In communicating, too often adults do all the talking, and miss seeing from the child's point of view.

OR

we fall into *the traps of listening* by...

- Offering advice
- Giving our opinion
- Telling a story of how we went through a situation that was even worse
- Blaming
- Insulting
- Criticizing
- Punishing
- Judging
- Diagnosing, or
- Interjecting our own needs, emotions and values into the scenario.

When we neglect to listen in order to understand behavior, need and emotions, we block an opportunity to support the child's self-awareness gained by with solitude. For the avoiding child seeking to re-engage with us, not listening dismisses the child's efforts to make contact.

A key technique to help us avoid these traps of listening is straightforward: *Only ask questions.*

As a listener:

- We need to be calm enough to hear and to process what we are being told.
- We need to realize we don't own the problem (at least not at the time of our listening).
- We need to refrain from advising or defending our point of view.
- We should provide a safe environment for our children to speak.
- We should to seek to understand, and
- We should ask questions to clarify our perceptions.

Only ask questions is an easy way to help us avoid the traps of listening.

Asking question after question with only the goal to understand behavior, needs and emotions also helps us do something else.

As we sit kindly and patiently waiting for each answer, guess what happens?

We create a safe environment for our children, thus meeting all their unconscious goals for belonging: Contact. Power. Protection. Withdrawal.

An ask only questions session might go something like this:

Why did you hit your brother? *I was bored.*

Why did you choose to be bored? *I dunno.*

Do you realize you have a choice about how you treat other people? *Yes.*

Would you tell me why you would choose to hit your brother instead of doing something else? *I guess I just wanted to have him do something with me. I was bored.*

Can you think of how you might have gotten your brother to do something with you? *All I really needed to do was ask him. I guess I just hit him so he wouldn't be able to say no. If I hit him he'd hit me back and then we'd be doing something together.*

What do you think you can do in the future to get your brother's attention? *I can just ask him to do something with me. And if he says no, I can ask him why.*

Do you have anything you'd like to ask me?

Remember. Only asking questions helps us understand our children as they work to meet their unconscious goals of contact, power, protection and withdrawal.

Time to put this into action!

Today at dinner or bedtime with your children, when there is no issue at hand, practice this only ask questions technique.

Thinking of yourself as an impartial television interviewer may help you from falling into the listening traps.

Practice this *only ask question* technique everyday with your children, spouse or friends.

That way when you really, really need it, this tool will be ready for you to put into action.

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)