

Reframing Challenging Behaviors: Looking at the Needs and Feelings Beneath the Behavior



Language of Distress

I need to

- feel safe and secure
- feel safe and stimulated in my exploration
- feel a sense of predictability
- feel a sense of control
- feel worthy and loved
- feel noticed and receive attention
- feel acknowledged and understood
- have mutually enjoyable relationships and feel a sense of belonging
- understand and be able to manage my feelings of distress
- feel competent



Sad or Withdrawn



Mad or Acting Out

Reframing Challenging Behaviors

When your child needs something from you, they often will not be able to tell you in words what they want and need. At these times, your child may use ways to get their needs met which can be challenging for both of you. Your child may let you know they are upset by looking sad, choosing to be alone, clinging to you, crying, hitting, shouting, or throwing things. These are your child's cues, their "language of distress", that they need you to help them feel less distressed.

At these times, it is important to think beyond the behavior and instead concentrate on what your child is feeling and needing. Once you figure this out, you can step in with ways to help your child feel better. By showing your child that you understand how they are feeling and by changing things to meet their needs, you build a trusting relationship with your child and encourage your child's cooperation and feelings of competence.

