

DECODING BEHAVIORS EXERCISE



Pathways to
Permanence 2

Parenting
Children
Who Have
Experienced
Trauma
AND LOSS

Session 3
Childhood
Development

Exercises

Purpose: To assist caregivers in developing skills for understanding the unmet needs underlying their child’s behavior, as well as to expand their parenting responses to include developmental re-parenting approaches to problematic behaviors.

Time: 30 minutes total

1. Instruct participants to take out the Decoding Behaviors Exercise Worksheet, and also a blank sheet of paper. *Facilitator, provide a blank sheet of paper to those participants who may need one.* Instruct participants to use the blank sheet of paper to cover all columns except the Behavior column on the Worksheet.
2. Have participants choose one of the behaviors that appears on the Worksheet to use as an example for the exercise. Ask participants to brainstorm suggestions for “traditional parenting” responses to the behavior that was selected. For example, if the group chose the “Hides under the bed” behavior, a traditional parenting response might be to demand that the child come out a once, or perhaps to leave the child alone until he/she eventually decides to come out.
3. Next, have participants reveal the information in the Decoding column on their Worksheets and read the decoding information for the behavior that was selected. Discuss with the group the possible unmet needs for a child exhibiting that behavior, focusing on the following:
 - Which of the *Seven Core Issues* might this child be dealing with?
 - What developmental stage does this child appear to be in?
 - Which developmental buckets may need to be filled for this child?

Ask the group to consider whether “traditional parenting” approaches such as those mentioned above will be effective in addressing the behavior of a child with these unmet needs.

4. Ask participants to next reveal the information in the Empathic Response column for the selected behavior. Read the suggested empathic caregiver responses and elicit feedback from the group about these responses, focusing on how these Empathic Responses help to address the Core Issues for the child, and fill the child’s buckets.

Note: Responding to a child’s negative behavior in an empathic manner may be a new idea that is met with resistance by some in the group. Allow this discussion to take place, then assist participants in understanding that when the parent/caregiver is able to respond with empathy to the unmet need of the child, it helps to reduce the child’s distress/resistance. This prepares the child for learning new behaviors.

5. Next, have participants reveal the information in the Corrective Actions column for the selected behavior. Discuss the corrective actions with the group, focusing on two key points:
 - Corrective actions do not necessarily have to take place at the time the behavior in question occurs;
 - These corrective actions place an emphasis on the child learning new skills that will help to eventually correct the negative behavior.

6. If time allows, have the group select one other behavior from the Worksheet and repeat the above steps before proceeding to Step 7.

Note: It is most important for participants to have an opportunity to go through this exercise using



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their own children's behaviors, so make sure to allow time for Step 7.

7. For the last two boxes in the Behavior column, have each participant write down one or two of their own child's problematic behaviors. Ask a volunteer to share one of their child's behaviors, and brainstorm with the group some ideas for the Decoding, Empathic Response and Corrective Actions for the suggested behavior, to help participants practice these skills without answers being provided.
8. Emphasize the importance of each participant practicing these steps with their own children's behaviors. If their child's behavior was not selected as an in-class example, suggest that they take the time later to fill in their worksheets for one or two of their own child's behaviors, perhaps with the assistance from others in the class. It can become a "cheat sheet" for them to refer to later, when they are needing to respond to their children's behavior. Remind them to keep the following in mind while they are completing the exercise worksheet:
 - What Core Issue might your child be dealing with?
 - Does your child's behavior reflect an earlier stage of development than his/her age?
 - Which buckets need to be filled for your child as you address their behavior?
9. Conclude the exercise with this question: What do you now understand about your child's *needs* that helps you to understand his/her *behavior*?