



Dynamic Solutions for change

Using Acceptance and Empathy on the road to change.

So now we have worked out what feelings and thoughts are behind some of your child's behaviours. The obvious goal now is to just stop the behaviour, but it's not as simple as that. Just stopping the behaviour without changing the thoughts and feelings means that your child will just need to find another behaviour to show you how they are feeling, and it's impossible to guess whether that behaviour will be better or worse than the one that you have right now.

Instead, what we need to do is to help your child to learn the connection between their feelings and the behaviours and to learn what thoughts trigger those feelings. The way we do this is through EMPATHY and ACCEPTANCE.

Acceptance

Firstly, you need to accept that this is how your child feels about themselves and the world, even though this may not actually be true. This is really hard, because as a good parent or carer you want your child to know how much you care, so when a child says that they are not good at something, or that their picture is rubbish or no one likes them, the natural thing to do is to tell them that they are wrong and that the picture is great, they are loved and that they are worthy.

But, this is like trying to convince someone to change a firmly held belief, almost impossible.

Just think for a moment, is there anything that you have strong beliefs about, maybe politics or religion, or how to drive properly. Having someone, even someone close to you, tell you to change your mind rarely works. Now think about a belief that you have that is very personal, it may be about how you look, whether you are too tall, short, thin, overweight. It may be about whether you are good at singing or cooking, it can be anything, how hard is it to listen to someone telling you you are wrong now?



Dynamic Solutions for change

So, if from birth your child has believed that they are unlovable, worthless, can't make adults happy and that adults can't meet their emotional needs. So, telling them with words that they are wrong is not likely to have an change what they think.

So the first step, is going to sound a bit strange: we don't tell them they are wrong, that way it is likely that your child will listen to the rest of the conversation. This is called acceptance, and it means accepting that your child views their picture as bad.

Instead, you might try saying things like

- 'that's so sad that you think it's a bad picture'
- 'wow you really think you're a bad person'

This is the next stage in helping your child to make the link between their behaviour and what is driving it.

We have accepted that they feel bad about themselves, so now we are going to use empathy to make a guess at the feeling that they have. Empathy is not sympathy, it's not telling your child how bad it is for you, or sharing your stories with your child, or telling them to look on the bright side.

Empathy is trying to imagine how your child is feeling right now and explaining it to them, because they are too young to make the feeling/behaviour link. This is also the same thing that you will notice your therapist is doing with your child, helping them to understand the feelings behind their behaviour so that they become more aware of what is driving their behaviour. This will happen more often when your child starts Dyadic Developmental Psychotherapy.

So now we've got Acceptance with Empathy

- 'that's so sad that you think this is a bad picture (acceptance), I guess that you think you're a bad person (thoughts), you must feel so sad right now (feeling/empathy)



Dynamic Solutions for change

Its really hard to do this at the start because its feels so strange and doesn't feel like the way you talk to children or adults.. but give it a try, maybe with a friend or partner till you get the hang of it. Have some fun with it! Then try with your child. This isn't magic wand, it takes lots of times of doing this for your child to make the link themselves and start to understand why they act like they do and want to make a change.

So be patient.