

Managing your child's tricky behaviours

Welcome to the RelationKit mindfulness series. In this practice you will reflect on a difficult situation or your child's tricky behaviour that you want to deal with or find a better way of tackling.

Before we begin to reflect on our children's behaviours, it's important to recognize what's going on for us when we find our child's behaviour difficult.

One thing I have learnt from being a parent is to pick my battles. For sure we cannot let our child behave in ways that are harmful to themselves or others, but there are things that come up, that we can let go of, so we're not always on their back.

When we take time to become aware of what's going on for us, we can see more clearly if it's actually our own needs that aren't being met when we are faced with a problem rather than our child's; to separate our needs from theirs.

For example, when your child's room is a mess, you might feel angry, because it makes you feel out of control or your need for help isn't being met. But your child might not have those same needs and going in all guns blazing is not going to make them realise why it's important to you that they help tidy it up.

In this example, it's really about our own needs and not theirs. It's important to realise this, as this can change the way we speak to our children; and it's especially important in a difficult or charged situation, so that the discussion can stay non-judging and fair.

So, let's begin our practice now. Begin to calm yourself with some slow easy breaths, letting your breath bring you home to yourself, and into more presence.

Remind yourself that your breath is always here for you to come back to when you feel a little busy in your mind or upset. It will help you to stay calm and present.

When you are ready, open your awareness to life with your child or children at present, and gently allow any difficult situations that you might be having with them to arise in your awareness. Maybe it's a young child showing anger or having meltdowns, when they're really pushing your buttons; maybe an older child is leaving a mess or not doing what you are asking them to do. Whatever the problem is allow that to enter your mind now.

Now leave that there in your mind, without being dragged into the story or drama of it and turn your attention to your body, so that you become aware of any feelings that are alive for you when you think about this situation or behaviour. You might want to imagine that you can turn the volume of this feeling up with dial inside yourself, turning it up to a 9 or a 10. Where is it and how is it playing out in your body?

Begin to breathe with any feelings there, accepting that they are there, that they exist, which is the first step in handling them. You're letting them be as they are. Now give your-

self silent empathy, befriend these feelings - "it's okay to feel this now". As you breathe with the feelings, notice how they feel in change in texture, shape, or strength.

Remembering very often it's how we can change our response to or our relationship with our feelings - how we change ourselves - to get the better result we want in our life...

As you turn towards this feeling inside, notice if it's really about a need that isn't being met for you. As you sit with it, maybe you can ask the feeling itself what it needs. Is it love, support, connection? And can you offer that to yourself now?

And as you breathe and sit with this feeling some more, begin to consider if your child's need for something isn't being met in this problem situation? Remember, your child is suffering here, as we all do, when we have these strong negative emotions.

Does your child want to behave in this way or cause these problems? The answer is probably 'no', they didn't choose it, even if you feel they are behaving in this way deliberately in that moment they didn't wake up that morning with the idea to cause problems.

Something has maybe triggered them, and they don't know how to deal with their emotions in the right way yet. They cannot manage themselves fully. But if we can gently open to those feelings that they are having we can change the conversation.

At this point let go of any of your own agendas for meeting your own needs here and focus on what is most important to your child - their needs.

Imagine you are with them now seeing their difficulty and suffering and you're talking to them now. You tell them what you see happening without judgment, so just a clear description of what you see - the facts, no blame. Then from your heart, tell them that you are worried and that you want to help them feel better; you want to listen to what's happening for them and be a support for them.

Telling them that you have no idea what it's really like for them right now, but that it's okay to feel this way - whether it's anger, frustration, sadness - whatever it is, it's okay for that to be there right now. It's a normal human feeling that we all have.

You imagine telling them that you want to see things from their side, understand better. You are willing to listen without interrupting or without making any judgements.

Then imagine that you sit and mindfully listen to what your child has to say fully and completely - without getting distracted by your own need to fix, to solve or make your own points of view about what they are feeling. You are listening mindfully.

Picture this now: that when they have finished speaking, you are giving them the support and the care that they need, whatever that is: telling them that you are confident that they can get through this, or that it's okay to accept the help they need, giving them a hug or some other kind touch, maybe offering words of encouragement, compassion or courage. If they are older, reminding them that you might not have all the answers as you're not the expert adult, but you are a human being with the same sort of feelings and emotions, so you get it.

And after some time, and if they are old enough and they are calm enough to hear you, you can imagine now explaining why the situation or behaviour that has been going on makes you feel the way you do; why it perhaps makes you shout or nag or get stressed,

so you can explain what needs aren't being met for you when it happens, and maybe that you can now work together to try and meet each other's needs for the better. Imagine that you are saying that to them now, listening for the response.

Now sit with the after-effects of this scenario you have played out with your child in mind for a few moments. Notice how it plays out in your body and also in your mind: so what thoughts, feelings, emotions come up when you reflect on this new way of doing things.

Maybe it's doubt or fear of trying this new way. And if so, meet that with a loving kindness - that's normal with learning any new skill. Just consider how this way of approaching problems could have a positive influence on your relationship.

And now coming back to your breath and feeling the body against the seat or the ground beneath you, and now gently blink your eyes open if they've been closed.

Good luck and take care 'til next time.