

## LOOKING BENEATH BEHAVIOR

### What is this developmental skill?

Looking beneath behavior means recognizing that behavior is often an expression of an underlying emotion, need, belief, or expectation rather than simply a choice to behave well or poorly.

### How does this normally develop?

Children gradually learn that emotions influence behavior through conversations with caring adults. Likewise, caregivers become increasingly skilled at identifying what children may be communicating through their actions.

### How can neglect interfere?

Neglect often teaches children to communicate through behavior because their emotional needs were not consistently recognized or responded to. Instead of saying, "I'm scared," a child may become aggressive. Instead of saying, "I need reassurance," they may become controlling or argumentative.

### What might this look like?

A child may:

- Become angry when feeling embarrassed.
- Refuse help when feeling insecure.
- Act silly when feeling anxious.
- Become oppositional during transitions.
- Seek attention through disruptive behavior.

### Parenting Implications

Rather than asking, "How do I stop this behavior?" first ask, "What might this behavior be communicating?" Once the need is understood, discipline becomes more effective because it addresses the root cause instead of only the symptom.

### From Understanding to Attunement

Children often communicate their deepest needs through their behavior long before they have words. Looking beneath behavior helps you respond to what your child truly needs.