

## UNDERSTANDING MY CHILD'S MIND

### What is this developmental skill?

Children benefit when caregivers recognize that behavior is driven by thoughts, feelings, needs, and intentions that may not be immediately visible. This caregiver skill is also an important part of reflective functioning.

### How does this normally develop?

Parents naturally become more skilled at interpreting their child's signals over time. Through observation, curiosity, and experience, they learn to distinguish between behaviors caused by fear, frustration, excitement, sadness, or fatigue.

### How can neglect interfere?

Neglected children often display behaviors that seem confusing or contradictory. Because their coping strategies developed in unsafe environments, caregivers may mistakenly interpret protective behaviors as manipulation, disrespect, or defiance.

### What might this look like?

A child may:

- Reject comfort while desperately needing connection.
- Become controlling when feeling unsafe.
- Laugh during stressful situations.
- Push caregivers away after positive experiences.
- Appear indifferent when actually feeling anxious.

### Parenting Implications

Before responding to behavior, pause and ask yourself, "What might my child be thinking or feeling right now?" Looking beneath behavior often leads to responses that strengthen the relationship rather than escalating conflict.

### From Understanding to Attunement

Behavior tells only part of the story. When you become curious about your child's inner experience, you create opportunities for connection instead of confrontation.