

What is Behavior?

A behavior is the way a person acts in response to a particular situation.

Why is Behavior Important?

- For children who have experienced trauma, keeping themselves safe becomes the primary motivator of behavior. Children may appear manipulative or controlling, when in reality they may be attempting to just keep themselves safe. Safety trumps all else.
- Behavior is like an iceberg...we only see the small portion above the surface. Below the surface are the feelings and emotions driving the behavior. The misbehavior we see is often a child's attempt to solve another problem of which we are unaware.
- Even minor stressors can act as triggers that fill children with emotion and can result in misbehavior. Misbehavior puts children at risk for maltreatment.
- When caregivers don't understand why a child is acting out, they are more likely to focus on "managing" the behavior rather than meeting the child's need. This is an ineffective response to misbehavior, like a doctor treating the symptoms of a disease without considering the cure.
- In order to understand misbehavior, it is important to understand the body's stress response.



What is the Body's Stress Response?

- Our bodies have a built-in alarm system that signals danger. Children who have experienced repeated trauma often have overactive alarms. They are keenly watchful for danger, and may label non-threatening things as dangerous. False alarms can happen when children hear, see, smell or feel something that reminds them of frightening things from the past. These reminders are called triggers.





A Child is like
an Iceberg

The behaviors we see above the
surface

Are a result of the needs below:

I feel angry.
I feel frustrated.
I feel scared.
I feel happy.
I feel loved.
I feel proud.
I feel lonely.
I feel worried.
I feel embarrassed.
I feel sad.
I am sick.
I am tired.
I am hungry.
Am I safe ?
Can I do things by myself ?
Do I belong ?
Am I respected ?
Am I understood ?
Am I accepted ?
Do I matter ?
Am I loved ?