

Your Toddler's Behavior Decoded

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ONE connected FAMILY



Toddlerhood is challenging. The thought of the 'terrible 2s' gives many mothers jitters. I get it! I've been through it myself.

Most of the time, we see our toddler's behavior as wilful defiance – You might hear yourself thinking, "This girl is becoming very stubborn. She just doesn't listen to me. She's purposely taking me for granted."

If you've been thinking like this about your child – I understand it's natural to have these thoughts.

That's why, here's what I want you to know right at the outset,

---

The way we perceive our kids, determines the way we approach them.

So, if we perceive our toddlers as terrible trouble-makers, we tend to deal with them with an attitude of anger & frustration. I want you to know, your toddler is not trying to make your life miserable on purpose. They can never do that to you, because you are the centre of their universe! They love you to the moon & back. Literally!!

The truth is: They are having a hard time being a toddler, dealing with all the emotions they're feeling. Their behavior is simply their naïve & only way of communicating their struggle with you, and seeking your help & guidance.

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Now, that's a fresh perspective, right? When we perceive our toddler as a little child who's seeking warmth, connection & guidance especially when they're at their worst behavior – we become capable of dealing with them with an attitude of love & care, which is all they need.

In this quick guide, I want to help you see your toddler's behavior for what it really is, which will help you manage those behaviors better with peace & confidence.

By the end of this guide, you will learn that:

1. Behavior is Communication. You will understand what your toddler is trying to communicate through his difficult-to-handle behavior.
2. Unmet needs lead to undesirable behavior. You will learn about the six core toddler needs, that must be met so that your toddler can be the cheerful & playful self that s/he is!
3. You will equip yourself with a handy checklist of difficult behaviors & the hidden needs that will help you understand your toddler better, and therefore manage their behavior with more love & confidence.

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Behavior is Communication

I'm sure you are dealing with a lot of undesirable behavior with your toddler. Right from crankiness, tantrums, aggression, defiance - the list goes on.

Firstly, let me assure you – there's nothing wrong with you or your toddler if you're seeing such behavior. All of these behaviors are age-appropriate & common in the ages of 1-4 years.

The more important thing to know is that - your toddler's behavior is just the tip of the iceberg. Trying to FIX the behavior is much like trying to chip away the unwanted parts of the massive iceberg tip, hoping to sculpt it the way you like. Can you imagine what a tedious and futile task that is!?

That's why I want to show you what's beneath that tip of the iceberg, and I want to give you a new way of looking at your toddler's behavior. So that. every time you see an unwanted behavior – you will look beyond & beneath the behavior. You will learn how to address the ROOT cause of the behavior, and not just the symptom (i.e. the behavior).

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To shift your lens to this new style of thinking – here's the most important thing you need to know:

Beneath every ***behavior*** there is an ***emotion***.
And beneath every emotion there is ***need***.
And when we meet that need
rather than focus on the behavior,
we begin to deal with the cause,
not the symptom.



This means that when you see your toddler behaving in a manner that deviates from their default state of playfulness & joy – you need to put your thinking cap on to look beyond the surface.

Thanks to the next fact, that you're about to learn.

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Unmet needs lead to undesirable behavior in toddlers.

Well, this true of all humans. For a moment, imagine a situation when you feel very grumpy & irritated with everyone around you. Your behavior is your body's way of communicating that something is amiss "inside" you. You're probably tired, hungry, sleep-deprived or lonely. Which means your behavior is communicating your hidden need for rest, food or company.

The same holds true for every behavior you see with your toddler. What adds to the challenge with toddlers is their inability to communicate as well as adults can.

So, the onus is on us - parents to decipher & decode our toddler's HIDDEN needs and provide accordingly. When their needs are met, you will see how your toddler goes back to being the cheerful self s/he is.

Now, you might wonder - decoding our toddler's needs that's causing unwanted behavior sounds like a tough task! I understand.

To make it a little easier for you, I've put together the top 6 most important needs of a toddler in this quick guide that you can use as a checklist, each time your toddler isn't at their best!

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Top 6 Basic Toddler Needs

Health, Attention, Power, Predictability,

Inclusion and Evolution,

Infused with a good dose of PLAY.

Fulfilling these needs daily, make and keep your toddler ***HAPPIE****.*

RAISING A

HAPPIE© TODDLER

Meeting said & unsaid needs

H HEALTH / PHYSICAL WELL BEING

A ATTENTION / CONNECTION

@oneconnectedfamily

P POWER + PLAY

P PREDICTABILITY

I INCLUSION / PARTICIPATION

E EVOLUTION / PROGRESS

Adapted from Universal Human Needs explained by Marshall Rosenberg

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Sharon Mary @ OneConnectedFamily

What follows is a helpful checklist of questions to ask yourself & decode the hidden needs, when you find your toddler acting wild or weird, and you feel clueless about what's wrong!

Read till the end to find **a printable checklist** that you can hang on your fridge or wall for quick reference as you deal with your toddler's behaviors everyday!

Let's delve deeper together!



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#1. Health / Physical Well-Being

The most basic and fundamental human need is: Health / Physical well-being. So, next time you find your toddler acting 'out of order' or being too aggressive, or melting down, FIRST rule-out anything that's missing in the area of physical well-being.

Here's a quick checklist for you to assess the missing need & provide for it, to help your toddler feel better (almost instantly).

- ✓ Is she well-fed?
- ✓ Is she well-rested with enough sleep during the day & night?
- ✓ Is she experiencing any kind of physical uneasiness due to teething, indigestion, colic, fatigue, or injury?
- ✓ Is she experiencing enough warmth & comfort from a parent/caregiver?
- ✓ Is she getting enough opportunities to move around & play indoor & outdoor?
- ✓ Is her Sugar intake excessive? Excess sugar is also known to cause aggressive behavior, lack of sleep because of the effect it can have on the brain.

I've realized this is the MOST, MOST common cause of disruptive behavior in kids, and one that is often overlooked by parents. They look for answers for their child's misbehaviour by judging their child's intention – feeling that the child is being naughty or throwing tantrum 'on purpose' to get what they want, to manipulate the parent into doing

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or not doing something. But that is NEVER the case. They are just expressing their needs in the way they CAN, in the way their 'not-so-developed' higher brain allows them to.

To share my personal experience - My daughter is usually very playful & cheerful (like most kids are & can be). And each time, I see the start of crankiness or irrational demands for a cookie at 9pm, or tang soon after lunch – It's always because she's either hungry, or sleepy or tired. Once I meet that need, she's naturally back to being the cheerful bub that she is.

So, I urge you to remember how each time your little infant cried, you tried to figure is it for milk or because she's sleepy – put that same instinct to work even with your toddler. She's still a little child!

Here's how the need of Health / Physical Well-Being manifests in your toddler's behavior.

Behavior (What you see)	**Hidden Need** (What your toddler is trying to communicate)
Demanding a snack at odd hours	I'm hungry
Rubbing eyes, quietly slowing down, fussing, whining, acting out	I'm tired / sleepy

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Lying around, zoning out, being fussy, not eating	I'm getting sick
Biting odd things, chewing fingers, crankiness, clinginess	I'm teething
Excessively jumpy & active just before bedtime	I'm over-tired / over-stimulated
Super-clingy, cranky, eating less / more than usual, sleeping less / more than usual	I'm going through a growth spurt!
Meltdowns or tantrums for completely irrational reasons, Asks for the green cup - then cries or denies when you give it	I'm not feeling right, May be I'm hungry, sleepy, tired, or what I don't know. I need you to help me. I need care & connection.

Simple ways to meet the need for Health / Physical Well-Being

1. As soon as you realize the missing need is related to food / rest, stop everything else & prioritize giving them their meal or snack or the nap that they're needing.
2. Be pro-active. Have a consistent routine for food & sleep so that your toddler doesn't end turning h-angry, or over-tired which causes the undesirable behaviors.

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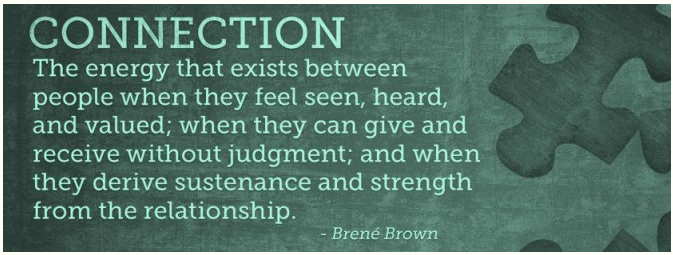
#2. Attention / Connection

All of us crave for attention from our loved ones. For kids, attention means your 'undivided' positive time & presence. So, if you are near your child expecting her to play with her toys, while you are glued to your laptop or doing other chores – that does not count as attention for them.

When kids feel a lack of positive attention from you, that's when they knowingly or unknowingly resort to negative behaviour that is sure to get your attention!

Your checklist:

- ✓ Is she getting enough hugs, cuddles and play with me/other parent during the day?
- ✓ Am I intently listening to her, and making enough eye contact when she speaks?
- ✓ Am I sure that she feels seen, heard and understood by me/other parent?
- ✓ Do I pay 'real' attention to what she's doing and appreciate her efforts & tiny successes?



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Here's how the need of Attention / Connection manifests in your toddler's behavior.

Behavior (What you see)	**Hidden Need** (What your toddler is trying to communicate)
Can you play with me?	I need to feel connected with you
Holding on to you, being your shadow, snuggling, being silly with you, trying to help you, hugging, sitting on your lap	I love you, I need to feel connected with you
Repeatedly doing something that you've restricted like throwing food, drawing on the walls, jumping on the sofa	I need your attention
Making loud noises, screaming, trying to grab your phone / laptop, trying to stall your work	I need your attention
Interrupting your conversations	I need your attention

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Constant Tantrums, Defiance, & Resistance for every single thing, Ignores your instructions on purpose, (seems “stubborn” to you)	I’m feeling disconnected, I can’t behave well when I don’t feel right.
Dumping out toys, fighting over toys, breaking toys, playing aggressively with toys	I want to go out, I need a break from toys, I want some adult attention & connection.
Showing off her creations – artwork, block tower, etc	I need your attention (eye-contact & genuine appreciation)
When you say NO / deny what they want, they erupt into tantrums & meltdowns	I need your help in coping with my frustration.
Asking endless questions, talking endlessly	I’m excited. I want to share WITH you. I want to be WITH you.
Shyness, hiding behind your back, cries when around unfamiliar people, stranger anxiety, separation anxiety	I’m scared. I need to feel SAFE, please stay with me.

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With siblings – hitting, pushing, fights for toys	I need your attention, You're always with baby. I need to feel connected with you.

Simple ways to meet your toddlers' need for Attention / Connection

1. Give them what they're seeking. Take a few minutes out of your current task, make eye contact, give them a hug & cuddle, say something nice.
2. Do not worry that by giving attention to your child, you'll worsen the negative behavior. Think of it like this - If a plant is wilting, you'll never say – "It looks like you need some water, but I won't give it to you." You'll meet the plant's need, and it will go back to it's natural bloom. The same is true for your toddler. Needs must be met, and when they're met – your toddler's brain & body can function at it's best.
3. Be proactive and fill your toddler's cup of connection through simple acts of love & care throughout the day. Whenever you can – take some time out to indulge your toddler one-to-one personally, give her special time with hugs, cuddles, story time and play. When her cup of attention is full, you will notice her drift away slowly, and she will leave you alone to tend to your own work. To help you get started, I've listed 8 easy ways to connect with your toddler in 0-20 minutes in this ebook here.

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#3. Power & Play

When you're a kid whose life is mostly controlled by an adult, you will at some point feel POWERLESS. As a fact, nobody likes to feel powerless!

As parents, we must learn to respect our child's need for power. Most of us have been raised by authoritarian parents, and so subconsciously we believe that elders know better, and kids are not really capable of doing things themselves or making good choices.

We feel that if a kid is given too much power or control, they will get spoilt or take us for a ride. Well, 'too much' power is bad – but age-appropriate power is necessary for your child.

It is when a child feels powerless, that he tries to snatch the power from you by rolling on the floor wailing at top decibel, forcing you to buy him the lollipop that he demanded!

Your checklist:

- ✓ Is she being restricted with too many 'No' during the day?
- ✓ Is she given enough age-appropriate choices to make?
- ✓ Does she feel 'independent' in doing age-appropriate tasks like helping you dry clothes, or remove her own pants?

Interestingly, one of the ways to end power struggles even before they begin is by infusing PLAY in your routines. Yes! It's frustrating at times to come up with fun & creative ways to do a diaper change, or to get your

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toddler to brush! But, you'll get better at it with time & practice (I speak from experience!)

Don't worry that you're spoiling your child by doing this, if nothing else - it'll lighten you up and your child, avoiding imminent power struggles, helping you protect your sanity, and also connecting with your child throughout the day, even with routine tasks.

Here's how the need of Power manifests in your toddler's behavior.

Behavior (What you see)	**Hidden Need** (What your toddler is trying to communicate)
I want it NOW! I don't want to, No!	I need a 'little' Power & Control
Refusing to come out of the bath, brushing & other routine chores	I need a 'little' Power & Control
Constant Tantrums, Defiance, resistance for every single thing that might look like stubbornness	I'm feeling restricted with too many commands & demands, I can't behave well when I don't feel right. I need a 'little' Power & Control.

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Doesn't share	What is mine is mine, I don't understand sharing. I just want to play. Owning something helps me feel 'powerful'

Simple ways to meet your toddlers' need for Power

1. When you sense a power struggle, offer choices. Letting your toddler decide, gives them much-needed power that they're seeking. Here's few important points to note:
    a. You must offer age-appropriate choices. Eg. Looks like it's hard for you to wear this dress right now? You choose – do you want the green one or the red one? So, you decide the big stuff – that the dress needs to be worn. Your toddler gets to decide which dress?
    b. Offer only 2 simple choices – both of which you're ok with. Too many choices can overwhelm your toddler which can lead to more struggle. Giving 2 simple age-appropriate choices is a good way to help your toddler experience power that she can manage.
2. Creating spaces within the house where your child can explore unrestricted (without you constantly saying, "No, don't do that!") also gives your child a sense of positive power.

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Here's how the need of Play manifests in your toddler's behavior.

Behavior (What you see)	**Hidden Need** (What your toddler is trying to communicate)
Running in circles, being super silly, hanging from things, wrestling, jumping on the sofa	I need to run, jump, and play outside. I've got a lot of energy within me, I need to release it through play, preferably WITH you.
Tugging you to play, Snuggling, jumping on you	I need to play WITH you
Running away laughing & giggling when you call them for a bath / brush / routine chores	I need some play, routines are boring for me.
With new baby – touching baby, poking, holding hands, legs (usually not so gently)	I want to play, but I don't know how.
Grabs toys from others	I'm excited to know what having 'that' (other toy) feels like.

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Simple ways to meet your toddlers' need for Play

You can incorporate play in your daily parenting in simple ways like:

1. Make daily chores fun,
2. Find ways to get them to laugh & giggle for no reason,
3. Play WITH them the way they like, whenever you can.

This article has some more playful parenting tips you can start with.



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#4. Predictability

Knowing what will happen in our lives gives us a sense of power, doesn't it?

The same is true with toddlers. Predictability in their daily schedules, in your responses and reactions gives them a much-needed sense of power, stability, familiarity and calm. That's why, establishing routines, responding to similar requests or behaviour in a consistent manner helps!

When every next moment is unpredictable, anxiousness is bound to arise – which can easily trigger tantrums and aggressive behavior.

Your checklist:

- ✓ Do we have an established daily routine for day-to-day activities like brushing, bathing, food time, nap time?
- ✓ Is there a consistency & predictability in how I respond to my toddler's demands / requests? (Like more screentime or a snack at odd hours)
- ✓ How can I handle transitions in a more fun way?

Here's how the need of Predictability manifests in your toddler's behavior.

Behavior (What you see)	Hidden Need (What your toddler is trying to communicate)

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Repeatedly asking for something you've said No to (Eg. Snacks, screentime) Repeatedly doing what you've restricted.	I'm testing the limits to see your response. I love doing that!
Making a fuss for daily routines	I'm having trouble with "boring" daily chores. I need you to be consistent with the routines, make it predictable, make it fun. Give me some power & give me some time to accept & adapt to these routines.
Difficulty transitioning from one task to the next	I need you to make the next task predictable, prep me a few minutes in advance about the upcoming task, and help me through the transition.
Fear of new experiences (Eg. New school, doctor's appointment)	I need you to help me visualize the new experience, make it predictable for me - prep me in

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	advance so that I can feel prepared & safe.

Simple ways to meet your toddlers' need for Predictability

1. Maintain a consistent flow of routine chores. Eg. Wake up, Brush, Breakfast, Playtime, Lunch, Nap, Snacks, Outdoor Play, Bath & Sleep.
2. Give them prior notice of upcoming tasks to ease transitions– Eg. When we finish this game, we'll have a bath. Before the end of baththime, explain to your toddler what will come next, and how much FUNNNN that is going to be!
3. A sudden change in routine like a new daycare/playschool, change of residence, change in caregiver will need to be handled with care, by gently preparing the toddler mentally much in advance of the change. Also, try to bring in the change gradually, if possible – For example, instead of starting the 1st day of day care with 4 hours straight, start with just 1 hour.
4. Help them visualize what to expect in a new place or new experience – like visiting a relative, doctor's appointment, new playschool, etc. Knowledge is power, when they know what to expect, they'll feel less anxious, safer & therefore, calmer.

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#5. Inclusion

How do we feel when people we adore & admire, refuse to include us in their plans? Well, for toddlers, they admire & adore us – they want to be like us. And so, they want to participate in all that we do, they want to ***'feel included'***.

That's why, when we constantly keep telling them, "You can't do this", or "You can do this when you grow up.", it reiterates their feeling of smallness/powerlessness. It can be frustrating, which if bottled up can erupt as tantrums.

Your checklist:

- ✓ How can I include my toddler in daily household activities?
- ✓ Is my child receiving enough appreciation that makes him feel like she's contributing positively to the family / tasks at hand?

Here's how the need of Inclusion manifests in your toddler's behavior.

Behavior (What you see)	**Hidden Need** (What your toddler is trying to communicate)
Being your shadow, trying to play with things you're using, grabbing	I want to help you, I want to contribute

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things from you, trying to open a package	
Trying to contribute to family conversations	I need to feel included
Expresses her ideas or opinions (which may sound silly to you)	I need to contribute & feel included, I want to be appreciated, I want to feel like a grown up.
When you say, "It's time for a bath" – s/he will suggest a different plan	I need to feel included in my daily plan & routines

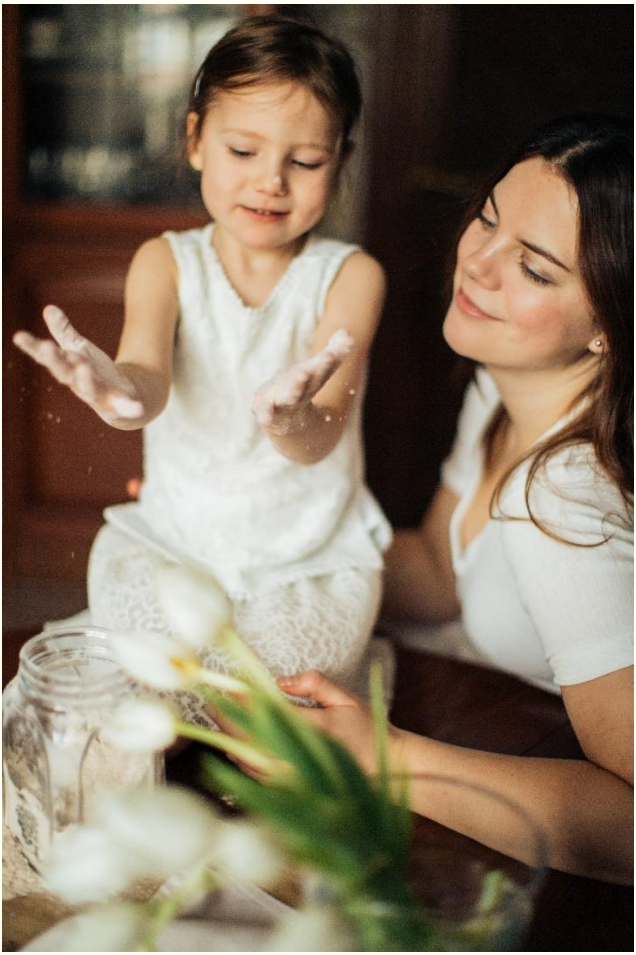
Simple ways to meet your toddlers' need for Inclusion

1. Do your best to include your toddler in your routine activities, they love to 'help'. As long as the activity is safe, find smaller versions of the huge task that they can manage. For eg. Let them mix ingredients while cooking, small clean-up tasks, handing you clothes for hanging, et.c
2. Appreciate their 'efforts', however avoid praises like 'You're such a good boy!". Such praises tell the child nothing about themselves. Rather a more helpful praise is, "I am happy you helped me dry these clothes. Thank you." Your toddler will swell

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with pride, and that's good for building her self-esteem and confidence.

3. Think of your toddler as your 'partner', they love it! Your work might slow down a bit, but it sure is worthwhile, helping them gain life skills and also connect with you deeply.



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#6. Evolution

Progress is essential for humankind, and hence it is hardwired within us. There is a dire need within all of us to keep learning, gain mastery, discover new things, explore and evolve.

Likewise, toddlers constantly want to learn, explore and gain mastery. By helping your toddler fulfil this need for constant growth, progress and evolution – you will not only help them hone necessary life-skills, but also build their inner spirit with self-confidence & self-esteem.

Your checklist:

- ✓ Is my child constantly learning new things?
- ✓ Does he have enough opportunity to gain mastery at age-appropriate tasks?
- ✓ Is he being encouraged to try when he fails?
- ✓ Is he being unnecessarily pushed even when he does not want to try anymore?

Here's how the need of Evolution manifests in your toddler's behavior.

Behavior (What you see)	Hidden Need (What your toddler is trying to communicate)

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Wants to do everything him/herself	I need to feel independent
Tries hard to put on his clothes, shoes, socks him/herself	I need to master these tasks
Lifting the heavy box	I need to feel like a 'grown up' & do what they do
Tries to build a taller tower with blocks, pushes & stretches to do hard tasks or new tasks	I need to progress, learn new things, gain mastery.

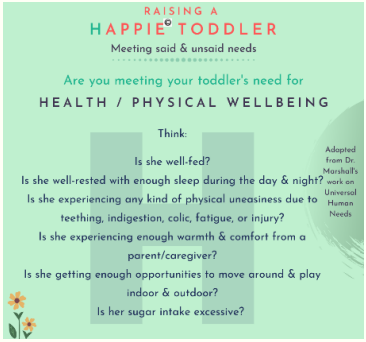
Simple ways to meet your toddlers' need for Evolution

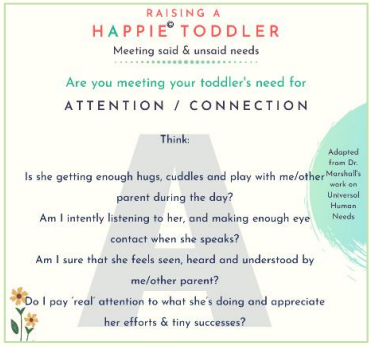
1. Give your toddler age-appropriate tasks that are challenging yet achievable.
2. Let her explore toys & safe things around the house by herself.
3. Help her when she needs or asks for help,
4. Encourage her to try when she fails,
5. Accept her stance when she does not want to try anymore by saying, "It's ok to take a break, you can try again when you're ready."

So, the next time, you have an aggressive or unhappy toddler – think what's making him/her unHAPPIE!!

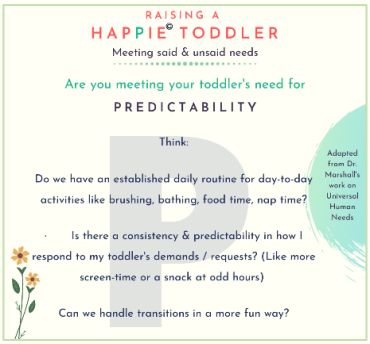
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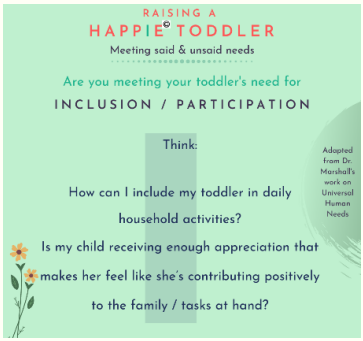
Here's your 'Why is my toddler unHAPPIE' Refrigerator Sheet

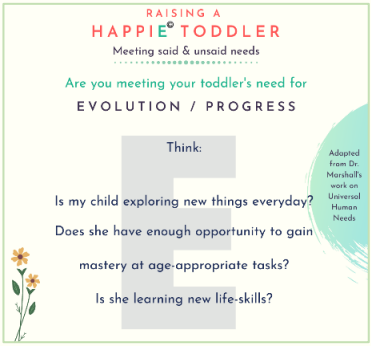












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About Sharon



Hi there! I'm Sharon, a Gentle Parenting Educator and a work-from-home mom to a wonderful daughter.

I've turned my passions for learning, parenting, and teaching into my work at 'One Connected Family.' My mission is to help parents build stronger bonds with their children and find peace, confidence, and happiness in their parenting journey.

I provide practical and lasting strategies rooted in Gentle & Respectful Parenting principles that help achieve discipline without resorting to harsh traditional parenting methods..

I invite you to join One Connected Family - a community of Moms united by the common goal of raising our kids in the most loving way and creating a family that's forever connected with beautiful memories.

If this speaks to you, let's #StayConnected!

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