

AM I BOTHERED?

- Q. What does your child do that really winds you up? (Pause . . . and think)**
- Q. Why do you hate that behaviour so much? (Pause . . . and be honest)**
- Q. What would be the worse thing your child could do? (Pause . . . and consider . . . Now think again . . . is that really the worst thing they could do?)**
- Q. Why does it matter?**

A. It matters because that dreadful behaviour or action violates something really important to you, something that you hold dear and is integral to who you are at a deep level. It challenges your values.

The last two articles (in *Adoption Today* June and August 2007) focused on how children might experience traumatic events, how their implicit and explicit memory function and how events can be reframed to give different and more useful perspectives.

The common thread was the question, "What triggered that behaviour"?

This article is focused more on us as parents, what's important to us (our values) and how we respond to our children's challenging behaviour, i.e. what triggers our reaction.

Why values matter

When our values are not met we often feel dissatisfied, aggrieved or violated. This is not **good self care**. That's why understanding values is particularly important for adopters.

By understanding our values and therefore our motivations, we can learn to align ourselves and be congruent (i.e. matched or in agreement). The more congruent we are, the more we can be true to ourselves and comfortable with who we are; an essential element of good self care.

Good self care incorporates having the maximum number of resources available to us at any time. Internal resources develop through understanding yourself. Understanding why you are happy or sad or angry or joyful or depressed is enormously useful. It somehow gives you permission to acknowledge the feelings, be with them and let them progress through you.

Like many adopters, I have experienced enormous challenges with my children. It was only after getting my head around values did I start to realise why I was angry or sad or depressed. One of my high values is truth and honesty so living with children who lie and steal regularly crashed into that!

I found that I could learn to live with deceit by connecting to my values of 'family' and 'contribution' and remembering that the stealing was not personal.

The beliefs my children formed in their early life were the trigger for the behaviour. However, when an adult deceives me I'm infuriated. Truth is still a very high value for me – but in the context of my children I've learned to restructure it. For me that's useful. It helps me keep my sanity, so it's good self care.

Values are motivators

Values are interlinked with beliefs. Together they are the drivers for our behaviour. However one belief or cluster of beliefs could result in very different actions.

Let's take a belief; "The world is a dangerous place". This might manifest in safety and security being a high value. The resultant behaviour could be the need for a steady safe job with a pension, or stealing, or staying indoors, or not risking intimacy, or hitting first or clinging to any perceived rescuer, accepting domestic violence or . . . countless outcomes.

Our values and beliefs answer the question "why" and help us to make meaning from experiences. (See the 'Logical levels' article for a detailed model expanding this concept).

Values relate to what we want and desire. We value something for its worth to us. We might value old photos because they remind us of happy times. We might value money because it gives us security or allows us to buy a car which impresses others.

"Because values are associated with worth, meaning and desire, values are a primary source of motivation in people's lives. When people's values are met or matched, they feel a sense of satisfaction, harmony or rapport. When their values are not met, people often feel dissatisfied, incongruent or violated." Robert Dilts (*Sleight of Mouth*, 1999).

In essence, our motivation to do something (our behaviour) comes from our values. It's what gets us out of bed in the morning!

Different values

There are lots of values. None are 'right' or 'wrong'. Everyone has a different hierarchy of values which are unique. They might include such things as security, reciprocity, success, recognition, family, love, sensuality, connection, creativity, praise, achievement, humour, challenge, fun, independence, vitality, financial success, adulation, responsibility, contribution, respect, stability, change, flexibility, intellect, simplicity, health, wealth, friendship, safety, team building, originality, pleasure... to name but a few.

Values remind me of jelly – not often thought about, rather hard to get hold of, coming in assorted flavours, consistencies, colours with varying shapes and sizes.

Even though values matter, like jelly, we seldom think about them. It often comes as quite a revelation, during an intake session with a new coaching client that their values are such an integral part of themselves yet were unnoticed. People don't normally consider, list or prioritise their values. However having identified them, people find it hugely valuable, because it helps them understand what really matters to them, what they really want in their lives and why certain things wind them up.

One client (John) realised that 'fairness' was a high value for him, so queue jumping bugged him, yet he realised that because he displayed this value at work, his staff liked working for him and trusted him to treat them fairly.

Another client (Mary) realised that 'recognition' was a high value for her; hence when she found a solution to a major work problem, and her boss publicly took the credit and did not mention her contribution, Mary was furious.

Her 'recognition' value was seriously violated.

Mary realised she needed a boss with personal values similar to John, in an organisation which encouraged creative thinking and brain storming.

Different departments in an organisation will have different values. The Accounts, Sales, Programming and Human Resources departments would each rate security, challenge, fun, achievement, creativity, flexibility, praise, spiritual connection, curiosity, love, family, reciprocity, health, responsibility and honesty differently. Within each department, individuals would have their own unique list.

In what order would you put this random list? (There is no right or wrong order – it's just interesting to think about).

Why does this matter to adopters? Because sometimes unpacking our response to an event can throw light onto what really matters to us at a deep level and what value has been stomped on.

If 'connecting to others' is important to you, yet your child's behaviour disconnects you from other parents in the playground, that bumps an important value and might make you feel isolated or sad or solitary or angry or mistreated.

How to identify your values

Think of something that happened recently that made you sad or angry or joyful. Ask yourself:

"Why did that matter?"

Because . . .

"And why is that important?"

Because . . .

"And why is that important?"

Because . . .

Keep asking the questions until you find you're looping back to the same thing.

This process, which only takes a few minutes, when done regularly can be enlightening

The only constant in life is change

Values like beliefs can be enhanced, modified and changed. They are not fixed in stone, they can sometimes be modified in different contexts. Health is often a value which will shoot to the top of the pile if a serious disease is diagnosed. Previously it may have sat below say family, contribution, pleasure, responsibility and challenge. I know it took a number of potential and actual 'dis-eases' and pain before I really put and kept health at the top of my values list.

So it may be worthwhile for you to gently examine your values and check whether they still apply or whether an update is needed. Are they still useful, which are you paying lip service to and which are you truly living?

Whose values are you holding?

There is a joke allegedly told in AA meetings:

Q. Why does your mother know how to press all your buttons?

A. Because she installed them.

What if some of your beliefs and values actually belonged to someone else? What if you were operating with some beliefs

and values that served you well at age six or 12 but hadn't been updated? You update software on your computer frequently, run virus checks daily or weekly. Do you run virus checks on the software running your mind? When did you last upgrade your mental software?

We all talk to ourselves inside our heads (self talk). I sometimes ask a client "When you listen to your internal dialogue – whose voice is it?"

The results vary; sometimes it's "mine", sometimes it's "don't know", sometimes it's "my Dad" and sometimes it's "Oh my Gawd . . . it's my mother!"

All of the above are fine . . . if they are useful.

However if that voice is not comforting or useful – take a few minutes to play with the voice, change it, temporarily or permanently.

- Speed it up or down.
- Change the volume.
- Move it further away or closer.
- Change the location – move to front, behind, side.
- Muffle or sharpen it.
- Make it very high or low.
- Ask it what it wants for you (the positive intention).

These simple, quick strategies can be refreshing and liberating. For some quietening their mother's voice or moving it to a different location is comforting. For others, pressing mute works better. Experiment – your mind and body knows what's best for you.

So in future, listen to your inner voice, notice when your values get bumped or honoured. Then decide which software you want to update. Observe that 'thought virus', that gremlin who undermines you. Take them out, expose them to the light, find their message; then, if you want, upgrade them.

Do you need to upgrade, "I'm not selfish" into; "Caring for myself allows me to care for others better"?

We once thought 23 years old was "old". We've certainly updated that belief. Maybe it's time to upgrade other beliefs and values to more flexible, useful and enlightened versions. It's part of good self care.

This article includes the work, ideas and concepts of Robert Dilts and Judy DeLozier. Their NLP Encyclopedia is available online for those who want to explore 'values' further. It's easy to read. (www.nlpu.com). Pages 1519-28 cover values and includes several worksheet exercises which can be printed. As always, their words are in my head and hence permeate this article. I am deeply grateful to them both.

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