

STRENGTHENING FAMILIES: EXPLORATION OF ELEMENTS FOR SUCCESSFUL IN-HOME SAFETY PLANNING LEARNING COLLABORATIVE



JUNE 2024 UNDERSTANDING THE UNDERLYING DYNAMICS, TRIGGERS, OR CHARACTERISTICS OF PARENTAL BEHAVIORS

Understanding another person's behavior is a multi-layered concept, but at its core, it's about recognizing, appreciating, and empathizing with the diverse thoughts, feelings, and experiences of people different from yourself. It goes beyond just knowing facts about someone; it involves actively trying to see the world from their perspective.

Gathering information to assess and analyze dynamics, triggers and characteristics of parental behaviors supports safety plans that are Sufficient, Feasible, and Least Intrusive. As we continue to build a partnership and gain more insight into the active dangers, we can adjust safety plans. By understanding the dynamics of the behaviors, the Child Welfare Professional is better able to support when the danger is active, or likely to become active, rather than allowing risk averse thinking to cover for all the "what if" situations.





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Steps to Understanding Other People's Actions.

1

Take yourself out of the situation and let go of your reaction.

One of the first things people notice as they are telling their story is how the person listening reacts to the information. Does their action seem to make this person happy, sad, or angry? It's almost stranger to stare blankly at a person describing their actions so what can you do about how you want to respond?

What you can do is acknowledge your reaction and move on to focus on the action itself. Because it's so easy to get lost in your own head and response, you can lose sight of what the person is doing, saying, or how they are behaving. If you can't move past your own reactions, you'll never really understand the other person's actions.

2

What is their motivation?

Once you take yourself out of the situation, you can analyze their motivation. Every action or behavior has some sort of goal and intent behind it. It serves a need or purpose. If you look closely and ask questions, you might be able to figure it out.

Look at it from that person's point of view. Why would someone say or do what they did? What were they hoping to achieve with that behavior?

3

What was their desired outcome?

Sometimes what people intended to do and what they end up doing are two different things. For example, the father is grieving from his wife's death, so he starts taking sleeping pills to feel rested and able to parent the next day. The dreams are so bad he thinks about them all day as well, so he takes more pills to try to focus on what he needs to do. The father wanted to handle the grief to be able to care for his children, but he ended up becoming addicted and dependent on prescription pills that cause him to zone out during the day and unable to meet his children's needs.

The rational, the underlying dynamics, the triggers that prompt behaviors, they all provide a clearer picture. And with this clear picture, the safety plan becomes incredibly focused on what it needs to do – shield the child from the identified danger.



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Reflection on Content

Think about a dangerous condition currently operating in a household. What questions have led to a better understanding of when the danger is occurring, and when it is not? How do you ask questions about behavior that is non-judgmental?

Action Item

Is there a safety plan for one of your families that is covering for “what ifs” of things happening? Prepare for a conversation to gain a better understanding of the behaviors/conditions with a family and consider how information may impact the safety plan.