

Some of us explain a child's misbehavior by saying that he or she is bad, some say it's the child's age, teachers think there is something wrong at home and parents think there is something wrong at school. Perhaps the child is sick or hungry or tired.

While any of these simple explanations might be right - the most common reason that a child misbehaves is that he or she is not meeting their needs in useful ways - so they are opting to meet their need in a useless way. Here is an example. Let's say that a child has a need for attention and when they are good there is no particular reason to pay attention to them - so they act out - because this is a sure fire way of getting attention. Even if it's negative attention - it's still attention.

Adlerian psychologists believe that there are four goals of a child's misbehavior - the include Attention - Power - Revenge - and Avoidance. Of the four, Attention is seen 90% of the time in preteens with the other three making up the remaining 10%. Power is more common in teen years - though some family's have a 2, 3 or 4 year old power seeker that gives them fits at every turn.

Why do we care what the child's goal is for misbehaving? If they are acting out then they need to be punished, right? I love word pictures so lets imagine that your child is a house. Let's further imagine that only four things can go wrong with a house - Fire, Flood, Termites and Vandalism. Now let's say that while you are on vacation I phone you to say that your "house" is having a problem and I ask you what I should do to help. Your first question should be, "Well, what is wrong?". It wouldn't do any good to call the fire department if your house had termites.

So for every kind of problem - there is a correct solution...same with your kiddies. How do we know what their goal is when they misbehave? Again, the Adlerians came up with a creative solution. We simply ask ourselves how we feel when we see the misbehavior. If we feel annoyed - like a mosquito is buzzing around our ears then the child's goal is attention. If we feel like our authority is being threatened then the goal is power. If we feel hurt then the likely goal is revenge. And if we feel confused and helpless then the child's goal is avoidance.