

# Ep #86 Why children act up: Part 1

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This is episode 86. Let's begin.

Smarter Parenting welcomes you to our podcast series, The Parenting Coach for ADHD. Here to heal and elevate lives is your Parenting Coach, Siopé Kinikini.

Hello, my friends. How are you? I hope you're doing well. I'm doing great. And today, we are going to be talking about the [ABC's of Behavior](#). Now, before you decide whether or not you want to listen, I'm telling you right now, you absolutely should pay attention to what we're talking about, because we're going to go in-depth in talking about the ABC's of Behavior.

For those of you who are new to us and are listening to this podcast for the first time, this is one of the first skills that we teach on the Smarter Parenting website. [And it's important for you to understand what the ABC's of Behavior is all about in order to help you know the best way to intervene and change the behaviors that your children are experiencing.](#) So, let's begin.

The three things you are going to be able to take away from this podcast today, you will understand what the ABC's of Behavior are. You will also understand why it's important for you to use the ABC's of Behavior. And the third thing will be the benefits of using the ABC's of Behavior. Now, for those of you who are listening for the first time, you're probably wondering [what are the ABC's of Behavior?](#)

Well, it's an acronym or an initialism. Each A, B, C, each letter stands for something, for a word. And let me explain what they are. The A stands for antecedent. The B stands for behavior. And the C stands for consequence. The antecedent, the behavior, and the consequence. Let me define those terms.

The antecedent is an event or action or circumstance that occurs before a behavior.

Now, behavior is the behavior. That's how your children act or behave in a certain situation.

And then, the consequence is the action or response that follows the behavior.

You have A, B, and C. Antecedent, behavior, and consequence.

Now, as a parent, we are often focused on the behaviors of our children. And we often forget that there is an antecedent to the behavior. There's something that's happening before the

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behavior happens. And so, we move from behavior to consequence sometimes immediately and as a habit of nature.

What we need to be doing is looking at the entire thing. Understanding what is happening before this behavior occurs, and then understanding how that affects the behavior of your child.

Let me give you an example. I have been working with my sister-in-law and their 13-year-old daughter, who seems to be extremely moody after school. She does well in the morning, she comes home, and then it's just weird moods. This is what my sister-in-law is reporting. Moods could be super happy, or super sad, or up and down, or so many things going on in a child's life while they're in school, especially for a 13-year-old.

So, what I asked my sister-in-law to do was to talk to her daughter about what is happening before she comes home from school or what's happening at school before that behavior occurs.

Well, as they continued to talk about what was occurring before. We're not focused on the moodiness, we're focused on the antecedent, the events, actions, or circumstances that occur before the behavior, we started focusing on that.

And what my sister-in-law was able to discover is that her daughter, this 13-year-old girl, she didn't have enough time to eat her lunch because lunch was only for half an hour and she had a class clear across the school. And so, she would just grab something really quick. She would visit with friends during the lunch period. And she just didn't have time to eat.

So, when she came home, she was extremely moody. She wasn't necessarily hungry, but she was moody and tired and exhausted. So, she was able to pick that up as an antecedent. We also talked about with her exploring some additional things that are happening because it could be more than one thing that precedes a behavior. So, we started exploring that while she's on the bus ride home, she doesn't have any friends that are riding the bus with her. And so, she feels alone and she doesn't feel well.

We started to list all of these different things that were happening before she returned home and was in a moody state of mind. And my sister-in-law was able to determine that there are multiple things going on. She did not like the last period of her class for certain days because they had what they call odd and even days for school. There were certain days that she did not like the last class and she didn't want to be in the class.

So, as you can see, as we explore these things, my sister-in-law was able to determine that the moodiness her child was experiencing could be various factors. [And so, instead of just focusing on this behavior, she was able to focus on the things that happened before the behavior occurred in order to address the behavior.](#) This is super powerful, people. Let me tell you why this is super powerful.

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[It's because if you're just going to focus on a behavior without thinking about the things that are happening before, you are constantly going to be focused on just the behavior and it doesn't really fix anything that came before.](#)

My sister-in-law made the list of different things and they started to go through certain things that my 13-year-old niece could do in order to overcome the moodiness that she was experiencing at school.

Now, granted children are moody, children are naturally moody especially during their teen years. But what my sister-in-law was trying to do was reduce the moodiness and especially the negative emotions that she was exhibiting when she came home. She was too tired. She didn't listen to her mom. She didn't do her chores. She didn't follow up on all the things that were expected of her.

The first thing my sister-in-law did was focus on lunch. She needed her daughter to eat lunch and her daughter needed to eat lunch. So, they figured out a way for her to have some snacks throughout the day to keep her energized. And then, they focused on all the other things, the last class that she doesn't like very much and talked to the teacher and got more engaged in what was happening in that specific class.

My sister-in-law was able to communicate that and find ways that the teacher could engage with her in a more positive way. And then, riding home from the bus, someday she would have friends there and someday she wouldn't. So, mom agreed to pick her up every once in a while and then grab a treat to help be sure that she was getting nourished.

And over time, by addressing some of these antecedents, the behaviors that she noticed in her daughter, the moodiness that was happening started to decrease. Can you see how powerful that is? When we take the time to step back and not just focus on the behavior and the consequence, we're able to see a bigger picture and we're able to understand things better. My sister-in-law, kudos to her, grateful she was able to focus in on the antecedents and address the behavior before it became a behavior.

And it helped to decrease that behavioral problem that she was experiencing with her child. And that actually helped with consequences because she wasn't just giving additional consequences. And this is wonderful because, as you can see, as the mom was working with her daughter, their relationship was strengthened. Their relationship became one of friendship and one of trust. And one of, "Hey, I can come to you with problems and I can talk to you about these." And it put mom in a great light, that mom was there to support and to help her child succeed.

So, increased understanding with everyone involved. It was super fascinating to see the dynamic change and the way that they are working together to overcome some of the challenges that my niece is experiencing as she continues to grow. This is a crucial time too,

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because if you're able to do this with your children when they're 13, can you imagine what it will be like when she becomes 16, 18, 20? You've already established, when they're young, this idea that you are there to help them work through it, and that you are focused on the big picture, not just a behavior, but the big picture, things that are leading up to the behavior.

So, that's one way that the antecedent, being able to recognize what is happening before a behavior occurs, is going to be super helpful. I've explained what the ABC's are, antecedent, behavior, and consequence. And I've been talking about why it's important for you to look at the big picture and to see things beyond just the behavior, but understand things that are happening before, and then the consequence after the behavior happens.

This is really great stuff and it's deep stuff. And most parents don't think about that. They actually wait until a behavior happens. And then, they make assumptions about why that behavior happens. And then, they move straight into consequences. That is a dangerous path to go. You want to take some time to really evaluate your approach and where you can start to fix things.

Now, granted, sometimes it's difficult to determine what are the antecedents, what are the events, the actions, or the circumstances that occur before a behavior happens. Sometimes, there are so many things and the suggestion that I gave to my sister-in-law was to take one at a time and address those things in order to see if the behavior changed. So, be aware that it does take some mind energy. It takes some of your time to really think through this.

And you should be spending time really evaluating this because if you spend the time upfront, and I say this with all the skills, you spend the time upfront to learn, to master these skills, the payoff, the dividends that you will receive afterward are innumerable. You really will benefit long-term from putting in and investing that time upfront.

I've explained why this is important. I've explained it's important because it gives you a bigger picture. It helps you and your child communicate better. And I've also explained the benefits of it. Which are better relationships. Better connection with you and your child. Absolutely fascinating. I want to ask you, my friends, I want to ask you, are you taking enough time to consider what is happening before a behavior happens?

I want you to ask yourself, do I take into account everything my child is experiencing before a meltdown or before a negative behavior? Am I taking enough time to consider these things?

If your answer is no, I challenge you to actually take some time and figure that out. It will save you time. it will save you a ton of time.

Now, you're probably wondering how this works with ADHD because this podcast is about children who struggle with ADHD. Well, with ADHD, the benefits of using the ABC's of Behavior are innumerable because, and I use that word again, but I'm saying there's just so much benefit

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in a parent being able to do this that it saves a ton of time. I was working with a family who were unsure whether or not their child struggles with ADHD. And I asked them if they had gone in for an evaluation, if they have talked to their pediatrician, and they said, "Well, yeah, we're going to go talk to them."

And I asked them point-blank, "Okay when you talk to them, are you prepared to give them the information they need? Or are you going to go talk to them and then spend a lot of time listening to what they have to say, and then coming back home and having a plan?"

My suggestion to all parents who have children who struggle behaviorally is to keep a journal when they're using the ABC's of Behavior. And this journal is specifically for behaviors.

What you want to do is you want to list down the behaviors that your children are exhibiting, how long they last, how long they've been going on in the home. Does your child act out every day at a specific time of day? Has this been going on for a month? For six months? For a year? And then, the severity of that, also listing down what are the consequences, and the things that are happening before. So, the antecedent, behavior, and consequences.

I suggested to this family that they take the time to do this, to keep an ABC account, or record, so they can go into the physician or go into the pediatrician and share that information with them, because that will take a lot of the time necessary to come up with the diagnosis.

Parents who do not do this are often told by the pediatrician or by the person diagnosing the child to go back home and keep track of the behaviors, and then come back after a period of time. Because when you look at diagnosing ADHD, or any other disorder that may be out there, they're looking for consistency over time of certain behaviors.

And so, if you can already have that documented and prepared beforehand, that saves a lot of legwork. It saves a copay if you're for going in for that. It saves money and saves time. It saves energy. The way it works is you would keep just a journal of what's happening. [You would mark down the day, you would write down the antecedent.](#) So, the events, actions, or circumstances that occur before a behavior. You would list the behavior, the behavior they're exhibiting. What they're doing. And then, the consequences that followed after.

You're just keeping track, the day that it happened, and the time that it happened. You also want to include in there duration. For example, if a child has a tantrum, how long does the tantrum last? Because those are questions you will be asked. You will constantly be asked these questions in order for them to reach a diagnosis. So, super huge benefits. That's helpful for the pediatrician. Yeah, absolutely. But it's going to be more helpful for you as a parent. And let me explain why.

If you keep a journal of your child's behavior using the ABC's of Behavior, you're going to be able to see patterns and you're going to be able to know beforehand when a behavior is going

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to happen. You're going to become almost like the child whisper in a way, because you're going to be able to recognize, "Hey, we're getting to a point where this usually occurs around this time, and for this reason, what can I do to make a change?" That's a powerful thing.

Can you imagine what it would be like if parents knew beforehand. Before a negative behavior happened, if you knew it was coming, you could address it before it actually got there to relieve the impact of the behavior from escalating to something that is beyond your control. That is a huge benefit. To know beforehand, and to know that you can do something beforehand to keep it from getting to that point. Huge. Huge, huge. Huge. Because not only can you address the behavior before it happens, you also have a plan for what to do when the behavior happens, and you know what consequences work. Keeping track of your child's behaviors using the ABCs is going to be super helpful.

Now, with the family that I had mentioned before, they were unsure whether or not their child was diagnosed with ADHD. I recommended to them that they keep track and they keep track for a month, at least a month. And what was interesting is that they reported later that they started to notice the patterns, and because they started to notice the patterns, they could adjust before the behavior escalated. And they were able to decrease the impact of the negative behavior. This was even before they went for a first visit with a physician.

And so, they were able to be very proactive in their ability to help their child. It's so beautiful to be able to talk to a parent who has that much insight into what's going on with their child and to be able to recognize their child, their patterns, things that are occurring in their lives, and to be super engaged. The family that I was working with, after they kept a month, they actually continued to do that month after month after month.

They never did go in to talk to the physician about ADHD, because they were able to manage things on their own. They were able to implement consequences that were effective. That's another benefit of using the ABCs, is that if you keep track of the consequences you're giving your child for a specific behavior, you're going to be able to notice if the consequence works and if it's effective by the duration of the behavior. If it decreases the behavior, then the consequence works. If the behavior continues and you're giving the same consequences over and over and over again, and nothing has changed, then you need to change the consequence.

Can you see how this is just so connected to the whole spectrum of how you can help your child be more effective and really take the reign over what's happening with you and your child? These things are super important. Antecedents, the behaviors, the consequences, they all work in harmony with each other to help you.

This is a mind shift for parents really. I can't tell you how many parents, when I meet them to go through coaching, or to help with any of the behaviors of children are experiencing, immediately focus on the behaviors of their children.

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That's what we see and that's what we focus on, not taking into consideration the antecedent, things that are happening beforehand, or the consequence, things that we are doing to shape the behavior, but that aren't working. If we're able to step back and take a big picture of everything that's going on with our child, it gives us more power and more ability to help these children become successful.

Now, I can't tell you how many times I teach this concept. I teach this concept so much and so often because it is so basic and so easy for parents to do, that they can do it immediately. This is something you can do immediately. You don't need a special book to keep track of these things. You can keep on your phone in notes. I've known parents who have done that. I've known parents who keep it on a whiteboard in their room. They keep track of it in a book. In a planner. Whatever you have, you can start to implement this.

And so, you just need those columns in there. The first column will be antecedents, what is happening before the behavior? The behavior. What the child is actually doing, the negative behavior. And then how you respond to it, or what happens after the behavior, the consequence, and tying those together.

I will say this, when you have younger children, the antecedent is usually very close to the behavior. And what I mean by that is if you see a child throwing a tantrum, it usually is because something happened immediately before that behavior happened. Say he was playing on the floor with his sibling, and you notice that a tantrum happens. Well, the thing you should do is figure out what happened before he started crying or throwing the tantrum. And it's usually super close.

Young children, as far as the concept of time, they're very compact and everything is connected almost immediately after the other. As children get older, that timeframe expands. For example, with my sister-in-law and her daughter, things were happening throughout the day in order to reach the moodiness that she was experiencing at the end of the day.

So, just understand that, for younger children, that timeframe is super tight, super close. You'll always find an antecedent, a behavior, pretty close-knit together. And then, for older children, it can be a little more spread out. There's a little more time flexibility in there where something can happen in the morning, and then you reach your behavior later in the day.

Here's another benefit that I think you should be aware of and why it's important for you to understand this concept as a parent. I'm going to flip the switch here, flip the script, you call it what you want. But now, instead of focusing this skill on your child, we are going to turn the mirror and face ourselves as parents and look at the ABC's of Behavior in the lens of our own behaviors.

This is not unique to children. This whole idea of the ABC's of Behavior, not unique at all to just children. It applies to you as a parent.

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Now, evaluate your behavior with your child, positive, negative, indifferent, whatever your behavior is with your child, and I want you to think about the antecedent before that. What is happening before your behavior with your child, and how does that trigger you to behave the way that you choose to behave? And then, what are the consequences of that behavior?

If we take the example of the child who throws a tantrum because he was playing on the floor with his sibling, the antecedent could be, "Hey, I am busy cleaning the dishes and cleaning the house and trying to keep everything in order. And so, that is where I'm at." And then, my behavior when I see the tantrum is, "I'm freaking out. I'm just upset because I'm overwhelmed." And then, the consequence, "I end up yelling at my child."

Can you see how that is relatable to you as a parent, the ABC's of Behavior when you look at it at a lens through your own self and how you can change those things?

You also need to use the ABC's of Behavior for yourself as a parent. And oftentimes, as we teach the children this concept, parents are all over it and they love it. The harder part is turning the mirror and having parents look at their own behaviors and understanding that, hey, there are antecedents in your life that make you react in certain ways, and that lead to consequences that you do not like.

In that example, again, of the child who's playing with a sibling who's throwing a tantrum, the consequence of the parent behaving in a way that they're yelling at their child, the consequence of that is that the child is upset, the parent is upset, and there is a lack of communication and empathy and love there. That's a missed opportunity to connect during a difficult time.

I know you're probably thinking, "I don't know if I want to do that. I don't know if I want to look at myself like that." But it is essential for you to be able to do that. You have to be able to look at yourself using the same lens that you're using with your child.

If you were going to do the antecedent, behavior, and consequence with your child, why not implement it into your own life, keep a journal of your own ABC's of Behavior. What are the antecedents leading up to my behavior with my child in this certain way and the consequences of that?

Now, the reason that my sister-in-law came and asked me for this help with her 13-year-old daughter, as I explained earlier in this podcast, is because she was feeling more and more disconnected with her child. She was feeling like she was losing. These are her words. "I feel like I'm losing her. I feel like there's this wall that's being created because of all of this."

In our discussions, we talked about the ABC's of Behavior to help her figure out how to help her child. And then, when I had to flip it and have my sister-in-law look at herself, that was a little more emotionally difficult because it does require a lot of self-introspection.

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But I will tell you this if you are able to do that if you are able to use the ABC's of Behavior on your own self and be honest about it, you're going to find ways that you can change things up.

For my sister-in-law, and I'm sharing this because she has allowed me to, she realized that the antecedent to her behavior in reacting to the moodiness of her 13-year-old child was she felt overwhelmed already, midday. So many things were going on and demanded her attention, she didn't want to deal with a 13-year-old moody child. And so, her behavior ended up being very negative.

In what ways could we address those antecedents? She decided to take an hour before her child got home to really focus in on calming herself and almost having her own time to reset. So when her child returned home from school, she was in a better space herself. That's an amazing insight if you think about it. Amazing insight that she's able to apply this principle to her own life. She decided to do that. She decided to practice some deep breathing if she ran out of time and she was feeling those emotions rise where her behavior would become negative and accusatory towards her child and blaming.

And because she was able to switch the antecedents in her own life, in the way that she parented, she was able to alter the behavior and the consequences that followed. And in this sense, the consequences that followed as she applied this to herself as a parent, she felt more connected to her child. She felt like they had good opportunities to communicate about their day. They felt in touch with each other. Such a beautiful, beautiful outcome to this.

I often talk about these skills as we're teaching these to children and we're teaching these to parents, but the deep impact that you can get from applying these to yourself as a parent will be innumerable. I keep using that word during this podcast, but I want you to think about it. It is a fascinating thing to be able to be that introspective and that present for your child, especially when your child needs you.

My recommendations for you, I want you to start keeping an ABC's of Behavior for your child, for their behaviors. But I also want you to keep one for yourself. I want you to really turn that mirror and take a look at the reality of how you're behaving and the antecedents towards that behavior with your child, and if something needs to be altered or changed.

If you can approach changing a child's behavior in both ways, looking at your child's antecedent behavior and consequence, and then yourself, antecedent, behavior, and consequence, you are going to make miracles happen, absolute miracles happen with you and your child.

I say this often, that a family environment or the interactions that parents have with their children, it's a system. And if you change one part of the system, it influences all the other parts of the system.

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Well, in this case, if you are able to change the system from your child's perspective, what's happening with them, and change it from what's happening with you, you're actually changing the entire system at the same time. And so, progress is going to increase a hundred percent. It's going to go a lot faster if you're able to do that.

I don't know about you, but I'm getting chills over here. I'm getting chills about this because it is so powerful, and yet I think a lot of parents just overlook it and just think, "Yeah," and they'll focus on other things. I get that all the time. And when I explain it to parents they're like, "Well, that's simple enough." It is, it's simple. But often, the simplest things are often the hardest things to do.

So, my challenge to you, keep an ABCs journal prepared, one for your child and one for yourself, and constantly daily evaluate ways that you can address these things to improve behaviors in both of you. Make changes in the antecedents that are happening so the consequence will be one of love, of joy, of happiness, of gratitude towards each other.

I love you all. I'm not kidding. I cannot tell you how happy I am to be able to share this information with you for free during this podcast. And those of you who have reached out and have called in, the questions that have come in, I just have immense love and gratitude for all of you. Thank you. Thank you for doing that and keep them coming in. I love to hear from you. I love this part of being able to reach out and to help.

That's my challenge for you this week. I want you to do that ABC's of Behavior journal for yourself and for your child and watch the miracles happen. They're there for you. Total benefit, a hundred percent benefit for everyone involved. And all it takes is a little time and a little planning and a lot of humility and self-acceptance to make those changes happen. You can do it. I know you can do it. I'm proud of you.

Thank you for joining me on this podcast, and look forward to the next podcast where we delve even more deeper into the skills from the Teaching-Family Model that are super, super effective.

Don't forget, if you want to individualize this to your own family and to your own child, you can [sign up for coaching](#) on the Smarter Parenting website. That's it for me, and I will see you next time.

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[Ep #62: Teaching to behaviors instead of reacting](#)

[Ep #56: How to fix negative behavior](#)

[Ep #46: Understanding the ABC's of Behavior](#)

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**RESOURCES**

[Behavior skill: The ABC's of Behavior](#)

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