

Parenting – Misunderstanding children

When do parents misunderstand their child's behaviour?

As parents and children are in a different life cycle, it is quite easy for parents to misunderstand the child and the child to misunderstand the parent. Many parents tend to be protective or have expectations of the child and may be reactive to the child's behaviour without first clarifying. Therefore, this would seem like the parent is unreasonable when in fact they are not.

Parents sometimes forget how it was like being so young. It is inevitable as adults; we need to deal with stresses at work. In addition, parents constantly need to switch from "corporate-world" to "children's world". It may be somewhat difficult to do it especially if they have an idea of how they want their children to behave. When the parent sees a behaviour that is not appropriate, it is then difficult to be accommodating as the behaviour worries the parents.

There was a case where the parents brought a girl to a psychologist for therapy as she was scratching her private part. Her parents, being adults and being sensible, had scolded her and asked her to stop. However, she did not. The parents' reaction is normal because the behaviour is socially inappropriate and scolding and corporal punishment are normal in the Asian context.

However, through investigations, it was found that the parents were so caught up in this behaviour that they forgot that there may be other causes for it. She was sent to the gynaecologist and skin specialist to check for any infection as she did have eczema on her hands and feet. The results were that she did have some skin problems and was taught how to take proper care of her vagina so as to prevent itching.

Another area affecting her itchiness was more psychological. When the child was anxious, she would touch herself more. When the issue was dealt with, she no longer feel anxious and the behaviour stopped.

How would children react when parents misunderstand them?

Children would learn that the behaviour is wrong and they also feel that he or she is a bad person. Most children tend to be literal in interpreting issues.

Sometimes, children may be very affected by the misunderstanding. What parents and teachers can do is look out for any change in the mannerisms of the child. When a child is more withdrawn or tries too hard by talking incessantly to show that they know a lot of things, adults need to take note.

For example, in the case mentioned in the question above, when the girl was reprimanded, she was upset and felt that she as a person was bad because she did these actions. When she went for sessions with the therapist, she tried to prove that she

was a good girl and that she had not done any of the inappropriate behaviour. In addition, because the root cause was not found out until much later, she was taught to feel ashamed of herself. Although she was an intelligent girl, her self-esteem suffered.

She had to unlearn only her action was wrong. By going to therapies and doctors to find the cause, she learnt that it was not her fault.

Parents can try communicating with the children to try and resolve the issue. If not, parents can seek professionals for help. At The Therapy Room, a team of psychologists – led by Geraldine Tan, the principal psychologist – is experienced in working with numerous children. Should you have any concerns or inquiries, please feel free to click [here](#) to contact us and find out more.

How can being misunderstood affect a child?

If the root cause is not addressed and the behaviour persists, the child would feel that he/she is unable to do anything right. The sense of helplessness would be instilled as the child had not learnt how to manage the issue. The sense of injustice would grow and the child would react defensively to situations that he/ she feels that they are being picked on. They may then start to view the world as a place where everything is against them. Instead of trying to work out things or deal with issues in a more logical manner, they may give up.

Children are always learning when they are young. It is normal for all of us to assume or jump to conclusions. If the parents are able to admit their hastiness and listen to the child's perspective, they would be able to teach skills like analytical skills, rationalising skills and logical thinking. These skills are important for children when dealing with different issues. To elaborate further, this child would learn from his parents that people do make mistakes – both children and adults – and that it is okay to make mistakes. Adults may not be correct all the time and if one really did do something wrong, it is not shameful to admit and deal with the issue. If nothing was done wrong the child then learns to stand up for himself. As a result, the child would have a higher self-esteem.

Children who feel injustice done against them would have negative emotions and may be more reactive as compared to children who have skills taught to them on how to approach issues in a calmer and more rational manner.

In a nutshell, jumping to conclusions or having misunderstandings are common and are inevitable. However, if the parent is able to take a step back, the child would benefit greatly.