

A Child's Behavior is Like an Iceberg



Most of an iceberg cannot be seen from the surface, and it is this unseen portion that can cause the greatest problems for ships. After the death of a loved one, a child's behavior is similar to that of an iceberg in that the behavior you see is often rooted in deeper feelings that you cannot see.

Because children cannot always articulate their complex feelings, they may come across as whiny, belligerent, or irritated after experiencing an upsetting or traumatic event. Other kids may make statements of indifference, such as "I'm fine," "I don't want to talk about it," or "Leave me alone." It can also take children a long time to learn that their behavior, whether acting out or turning inward, may not always be successful in soothing their feelings or meeting their needs.

For parents and caregivers it is important to remember that beneath these surface behaviors are the child's real feelings, which may or may not match the behavior being expressed. Behaviors are typically triggered by feelings and feelings are linked to deeply-rooted basic human needs such as security, empathy, understanding, belonging, competency, respect, and love. If these needs are not met, which often they are not after a death, your child may feel insecure, afraid, or detached and you may see behavior triggered by the following feelings:

- **Anger**, triggered by questions such as "*Why did he/she abandon me?*"
- **Fearfulness**, triggered by questions "*Am I safe? Am I loved?*"
- **Guilt**, triggered by questions "*Is this my fault? What did I do wrong?*"
- **Sadness**, triggered by questions such as "*Why can't I stop crying? Will I feel this way forever?*"
- **Loneliness**, triggered by questions "*Am I understood? Am I included?*"

As a parent you're not expected to have radar vision and be able to see the rest of your "child's iceberg," but it is important to remember that 90% of what is going on is below the surface. Take time to talk with your child, to see if you can get at those deeper feelings, and then you'll be better equipped to satisfy their basic needs.

Further Reading:

Books to explore thoughts and feelings with your child:

- *Visiting Feelings* by Lauren Rubenstein
- *No Fits, Nilson!* by Zachariah Ohora
- *My Many Colored Days* by Dr. Seuss
- *When I'm Feeling _____* by Trace Moroney
- *The Way I Feel* by Janan Cain
- *The Way I Act* by Steve Metzger

Books to help parents understand their child's behavior:

- *Angry Kids* by Dr. Richard L. Berry
- *I'm Not Bad, I'm Just Mad* by Lawrence E. Shapiro
- *How to Talk So Kids Will Listen & Listen So Kids Will Talk* by Adele Faber





References:

- Bartlett, K. (2014, August 11). Behavior is an Iceberg. Retrieved June 23, 2015, from <https://parentingfromscratch.wordpress.com/2014/08/11/behavior-is-an-iceberg/>



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