

These signals start at infancy, when your newborn summons you with cries to attend to his needs. He then continues, throughout his life, to signal his needs with his behavior, employing increasingly sophisticated techniques over time.

Most parents, however, are programmed to view behavior in terms of defiance or compliance. So when a child throws a tantrum, refuses to be potty-trained, rejects dinner, pushes his little brother, forgets to do his homework, comes home late, tries drugs or gets a tattoo, parents are likely to react to the visible behavior by treating it as defiance, without understanding the motivation behind it. The child's motivation is to satisfy a need, and there are three key needs that every child has and that every parent should learn to recognize.

WHAT ARE THE THREE P'S?

Every child needs "The Three P's," and if you provide them, you will have a happy child and a harmonious relationship with him. The "P's" are: power, protection, and prediction.

"Power" is what your child feels when he can make decisions or participate in those that impact him. "Protection" is what gives him confidence that his basic needs will be met and that he is prepared for the challenges he will face. "Prediction" is your child's certainty about the future and his sense that he can rely on your word.

Your child's behavior is his way of signaling you about his need for one or more of these P's. You can have a remarkable parent-child relationship for the life of your child by learning to recognize his signals and know when the P's are lacking. It is that simple, and it applies to your infant, toddler, tween, and teen.