

## The Need to Feel Significant

Every child has a need to feel significant. This means that they have a feeling that they are special and that they feel like they mean something to others. So how do we know when a child is not feeling significant? What does their misbehavior look like? Remember, this connects to the concept of staying one step ahead of your child, going below the surface to understand when problems show up or they start misbehaving. So, if your child is misbehaving, sometimes it might mean that they don't feel significant. I have mentioned that I have twin girls and it is very likely that twins might have an issue with the need to feel significant. They were born together, they get to be seen together, they have a birthday together, etc. One thing that our society recommends is that twins get separated in the classroom so that they can feel significant and have their own experiences. In my situation, my children went to a small charter school where there was only one class per grade. So, from third grade until eighth grade, my girls were together all the time in school. Given this, I really had to go out of my way to be aware of feeling significant. Carrie is an easy-going off and flexible child who didn't often misbehave. She knew how to self soothe; she knew how to entertain herself. She is an easy-going child. So, when she started to misbehave it caught my attention. And of course, I could've stayed on top of the iceberg, on the surface of the problem and managed "her behavior" but when I saw her misbehave, I dug deeper and realized that her need to feel significant needed some attention. Keep in mind that her twin sister, who happened to be born first, was more challenging and demanding of attention.

It makes sense that Carrie did not feel significant since the spotlight was often on her sister. So, when the misbehavior started, I turned to Carrie and I asked, "What would you like to do with me that just you and I will do together?" She replied that she would like to walk dogs. (Which, as an aside, I found funny as she is not by any means an animal lover.) I followed up on her request by calling the local vets/kennels in our area asking if there was some way we could volunteer and walk the dogs. And we did that once a week for a half hour for about one month. The misbehavior stopped because I, in essence, hit the bull's-eye on the target as to what that misbehavior was trying to communicate. I also found many other ways to make Carrie feel significant. She was a sensitive eater and did not always care for the food that the family ate. So, she was able to cook her own parts of the meal or make requests for what she would like to add to the meal. I also wrote little notes to her and hid them somewhere she would find them later. For example, I left a note in her violin case that just said I love you with a heart. I think I put that in her violin case when she was about 13 and it is there still today at the age of 33.

# LESLIE COHEN-RUBURY, LCSW

PSYCHOTHERAPY • LICENSED CLINICAL SOCIAL WORK

It is important to note that making someone feel significant does not mean that you need to take them on a trip by themselves or spend 12 hours on a Saturday just with your one child. It's often the little things that can make someone feel significant, whether it's bringing home their favorite kind of bread, making sure you get their favorite kind when you buy bagels, listening attentively to someone's story as they're speaking, or possibly writing them little notes. Making someone feel significant does not have to cost money or demand a lot of time.