

## Seeing the Positive Intention of Another Person's Behavior

Seeing positive intention is a skill that reminds us there that there are two sides to every story or there are two sides to every behavior. People are complex and so are their behaviors. When we are trying to help our children change their behavior, we must first understand their behavior. We want to have a broad understanding and perspective of what's going on. Every behavior has causes. In Dialectic Behavior Therapy, behavior can be understood through the lens of a behavioral analysis which looks for the causes of that behavior. If we understand the causes of behavior, we can help create changes.

Let's take the example of when a child misbehaves. This story comes from a parent in one of my parenting classes who gave me permission to share this story. One day, the mother came into the dining room to find her 9 year old son had spilled paint on her oriental carpet. Normally, she would have exploded with anger and rage at her son for doing something he knows he was not allowed to do. But in that moment, using the skill "seeing the positive intention", she asked the question "you must have a very good reason for a painting in the dining room". And his answer was, yes, "Mommy, I wanted to make you a birthday card. And I wanted it to be a surprise". And then he started crying. He added through his tears "I'm so so sorry. I'll clean it up. I didn't want to make a mess".

So by asking that question which is paradoxical, she was able to understand the true cause for his misbehavior. And at that point, we see that we don't even have to give our children the limits, because he stated the limit himself, "I know I'm not supposed to paint in the dining room". He knew the limit. When we tell our children how could you do that? Why would you paint in the living room when you know you're not allowed to paint in the living room. I call it dumbing down our children, which is also very invalidating to them, it makes them feel dumb or stupid or like there's something wrong with them. So instead, we can change our approach and ask them "you must have had a very good reason for \_\_\_\_\_? You may very well be surprised how often you will get to the root cause. In this case, seeing the positive intention for his misbehavior allows the parent to come from a different point of view which then makes problem solving so much more effective. We can validate our children's intentions and desires and still set limits on their behavior or teach them more problem solving skills. This will do more to teach your child to be responsible than any shaming or blaming or punishing.

Seeing the positive intention is taking a broader perspective of your child's behavior and often helps us to connect to our children in a respectful way. Seeing the positive intention works really well in all relationships and not just with our children.