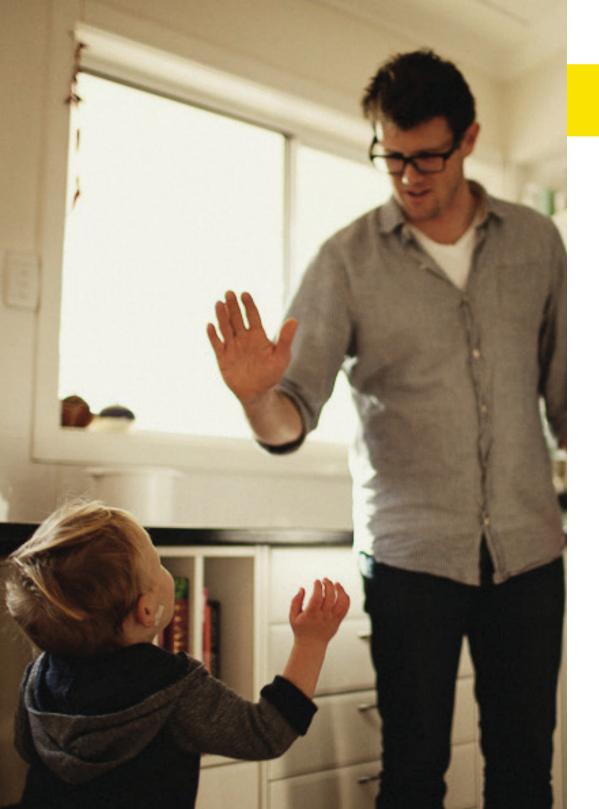
# DAY 9

**Understand** 



## DAY 9 **Understand**

Science tells us that we are not very good at understanding our children. We say things like, "Do you think the world revolves around you?" – when clearly we are suggesting that it revolves around us!

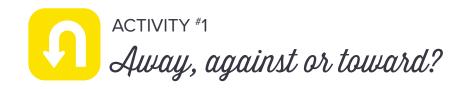
Understanding our children means we comprehend and perceive:

- Their development
- Their needs
- Their unique attributes and ways of being in the world and the family.

Once we have them, we quickly recognise that each child is different. They have unique characteristics and abilities, unique strengths, and unique way of seeing the world.

When we understand our children we experience less conflict in relationships with them, and we make them feel valued and worthy, which builds their resilience. Research indicates that children will be far more likely to become caring, loving people when their experience of us as parents is that we are caring, loving, and understanding.

Here are your activities to build understanding over the next few days (and the rest of your life!).



Dr John Gottman suggests that we turn towards our children and their emotions rather than turning away from them or turning against them.

When we turn against, we disapprove. We get mad. We become frustrated. We blame our children.

When we turn away, we dismiss. We ignore. We tell them not to worry because it's not a big deal.

When we turn towards, we see their emotion and behaviour as a chance to connect, to be together, to teach, and to build them - and the relationship.

Consider (or if you can, discuss, together with your spouse or partner) one example of each of these alternatives that you have personally experienced with your children in the past week. Each of you make some notes about your observations in the space provided below.

TURNING AWAY
This week I turned away from
How did my child feel?
How did I feel?

What was the outcome?
What would it have looked like if I'd turned towards, rather than away? What would I have done? What would I have said?
•••••
TURNING AGAINST
This week I turned against
How did my child feel?
How did I feel?
What was the outcome?
What would it have looked like if I'd turned towards, rather than against? What would I have done? What would I have said?

#### **TURNING TOWARD**

This week I turned towards
How did my child feel?
How did I feel?
What was the outcome?



If you have a soccer ball, a hackysack, or another kind of small ball that you can kick, take your children outside and try to "juggle" the ball on your feet. That is, kick the ball repeatedly without it hitting the ground. See if you can kick the ball ten times without it touching the ground. Now work as a couple, or as a family, and see if you can get ten consecutive kicks (or juggles) using only your feet without the ball hitting the ground.

If you fail (and the idea of this exercise is that you will fail), get everyone in trouble — but don't be too mean about it. Tell everyone that they have to try harder! If they still can't do it, offer them bribes. If they still fail (which they should, unless you're a soccer family), have a discussion about things:

- Did getting everyone in trouble help?
- What about offering bribes?
- Why not?

The answer is that when we get people in trouble, or offer bribes, we fail to understand the deeper reasons for the challenges. The real reason no one could juggle the ball ten times (or twenty times) without it touching the ground was because you haven't developed the skill to do it. It takes time and practice to be able to do some things. And that means teaching, and patience.



### HOW OLD IS THE AVERAGE CHILD BEFORE S/HE CAN DO THE FOLLOWING?

Tries to write name
Lifts head and chest when lying on stomach
Put on shoes (not tie laces)
Pedal a tricycle
Regulate/ Have control over emotions
Open doors, drawers and everything else
Can follow multiple commands (Get changed, wash hands, come and eat dinner)
Smiles when smiled at
Can brush teeth competently
Understands how other people are feeling
Knows if he/ she is a boy or girl
Can use the toilet competently
Identify several body parts
Walk with one hand held

We need to understand what our children are developmentally capable of before we start telling them off for not measuring up!

Answers: 4, 3 months, 3, 3, 8, 2, 6, 4 weeks, 5, 5, 3, 3.5, 2, 12 months

The Yale Centre for Emotional Intelligence suggests that using the RULER acronym we can better understand and work with our children's emotions. Dr John Gottman has a similar 5-step process for understanding our children's emotional world and working with them through their emotions AND setting limits.

#### R Recognise

Become aware of the child's emotion

#### **U** Understand

Recognise the emotion as an opportunity for intimacy and teaching

#### L Label

Listen empathically, validating the child's feelings

#### E Experience

Help the child find words to label the emotion s/he is feeling

#### R Regulate

Set limits while exploring strategies to solve the problem

Take time this week to practice implementing these ideas. At their simplest, recognise your child's emotion and give it a name. This will help him/her calm down. Patiently soothe him/her as things cool down - remaining calm yourself. Then, once things are calm, ask "What is the best thing to do now?" Encourage them to make their own decisions, and guide them as needed.

## Take home message

The take-home message? Our children don't need us to get mad at them. They don't need us to fix everything. They need us to understand. The steps are simple. First, see their challenging behaviour as a chance to connect. Second, understand the need that's driving the behaviour. Third, name their emotions. If you can name it you can tame it. Fourth, have it in your heart that you want to help. Fifth, problem solve together once they're calm.