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## Inside Story, Outside Behaviour

*“There’s usually an “inside” story to every “outside” behaviour. Though we may not be able to know that “inside story”, there’s generally some inner reason for what children do.”*

- MR ROGERS

Today, I want to share 2 stories.

### First, a story about me.

I had a tough moment a few weeks ago. I wasn’t getting quality sleep, I had a lot of pressure with my work and volunteering commitments, I was just getting over yet another cold (hasn’t this cold and flu season been just the worst?).

For 2 whole days, I was a raging ball of irritability. I was snappy with everyone. I got angry over tiny little things. I almost cried when my husband gave me a compliment because I didn’t think he was being genuine.

In short, my outside behaviour was atrocious. I didn’t want to be cranky with everyone, but I really couldn’t help it. I tried to exercise to stimulate endorphins... nothing. I tried going to bed early... didn’t help. I tried taking deep, calming breaths... which gave me about 2 seconds of calm. I tried eating too much chocolate... yeah, that didn’t work either.

Luckily for me, my husband was incredibly tolerant. When I snapped at him, or was short with the kids, or stormed off for a break, he never once made me feel worse because of the way I was behaving. He didn’t insist that I say sorry, or go to my room for a time out, and he didn’t push me to talk about my feelings if I wasn’t ready. Instead, he gave me what I needed – space to regulate myself, a hug when I was ready, and soft words.

### Now for the second story.

I took my eldest shopping for some new clothes, and we decided that because his younger brother mostly gets hand-me-downs, we should buy him something too. Together, we spent a long time browsing the aisles, trying to find something that we thought he would love. Eventually, we settled on a warm, red Spiderman hoodie. I was sure that we were on to a winner, given that he was just reminding me that very morning that he wants a spiderman suit for his birthday (which is in 102 days and counting... he’s very excited to turn 5).

Well, we picked him up from kinder, excitedly showed him his new jumper... and he lost it.

He yelled at me that he didn't want a jumper! He wanted a t-shirt!

He quickly escalated into hitting, and kicking, and trying to knock over tables. He was completely disappointed and angry, and boy was he showing it.

Some other parent, or even me in some other moment, might have snapped back at him. Might have told him that his behaviour wasn't ok and if he didn't calm down, he wouldn't get a new t-shirt or even keep his new jumper.

But I didn't do that. Because I knew that there was something deeper going on than just not liking the jumper. So, while I didn't know all the moments that led to this meltdown, this I did know.

It was the end of the week and he's tired. He was just getting over being sick. He's been dealing with the constant disappointment that his birthday is still 102 days away. Then his reality didn't meet his expectation, and he was disappointed.

And I remembered... I remembered how my outside behaviour wasn't good the other day. And I remembered how much better I felt by knowing that no matter how angry and cranky and irrational I was, I had someone in my corner who loved me unconditionally.

So I gave that to my son.

I did restrain him from him hitting and throwing things around. But I didn't scold him, or yell at him, or make him feel worse.

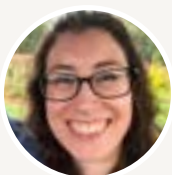
Instead, I did my best to hold space for his disappointment. I let him get his angry out, and once he moved past the anger to the underlying sadness, we cuddled.

There is always an inner story.

We just won't always know what it is.

But we'll never find out if we go straight to scolding and focus on 'correcting' the behaviour. Kids (and grown-ups!) act right when they feel right.

To improve behaviour, we need to work from the inside out.



**AUTHOR**

**Rebekah Delahoy**

Beck Delahoy is a homeschooling mum of 3 and microadventure enthusiast who somehow finds time to read and write about parenting. Find her on Instagram [@beckdelahoy](#) or [beckdelahoy.substack.com](#) about families and parenting.