

The 8 Causes of children's behavior problems

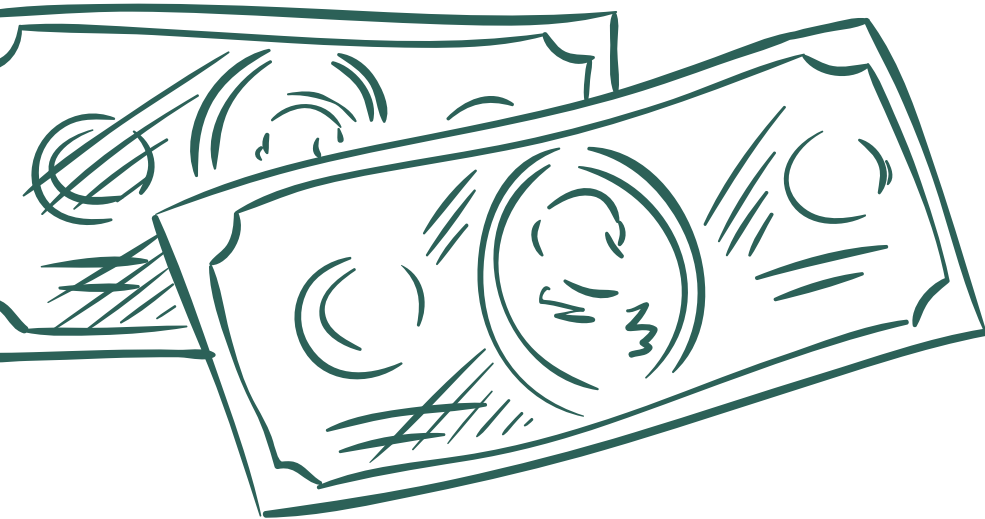


The 8 Causes of Child Behavior Problems

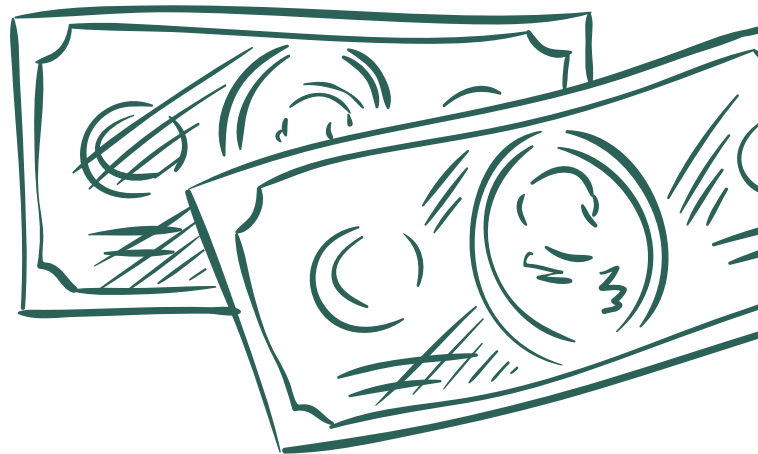


Cause #1: Bribing.

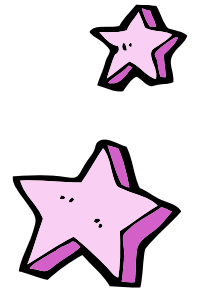
Have you ever felt at your breaking point? You're tired, overwhelmed, and the last thing you want to do is deal with a crying child. Or a child who refuses to do their homework. Or go to bed. And something in you wants to scream, "No, I don't have time for this right now." So what do you do? You bribe.



However, rewarding lousy behavior with material or food rewards can cause your child to have bad behavior. Bribing teaches your child their misbehavior has hidden payoffs. That although they're acting bad, they get a reward. Not because they listened but because you wanted them to stop. Bribing shows the child that their behavior affects others and that if they push the right buttons, they can control your actions. Especially if you've rewarded them in the past.



Cause #2: Tantrum trap.



Children learn that if their tantrums and problem behavior worsen, they are more likely to get what they want. For example, if your child asks for a cookie right before dinner and you say “No”, after several “no’s,” your child gets persistent, more demanding, and louder. As the parent, you may fall into a tantrum trap and give them a cookie so they stop. They are rewarded and learn. if I am persistent, get louder, or more demanding, I get what I want.



The same goes for the parent. For example, if the parent learns the only way their child listens to them is if they get louder, more demanding, and more persistent, they will repeat this pattern. However, the child then learns, I only need to take my parent seriously when they get louder. This causes the parent to believe this is how they get their child to listen.

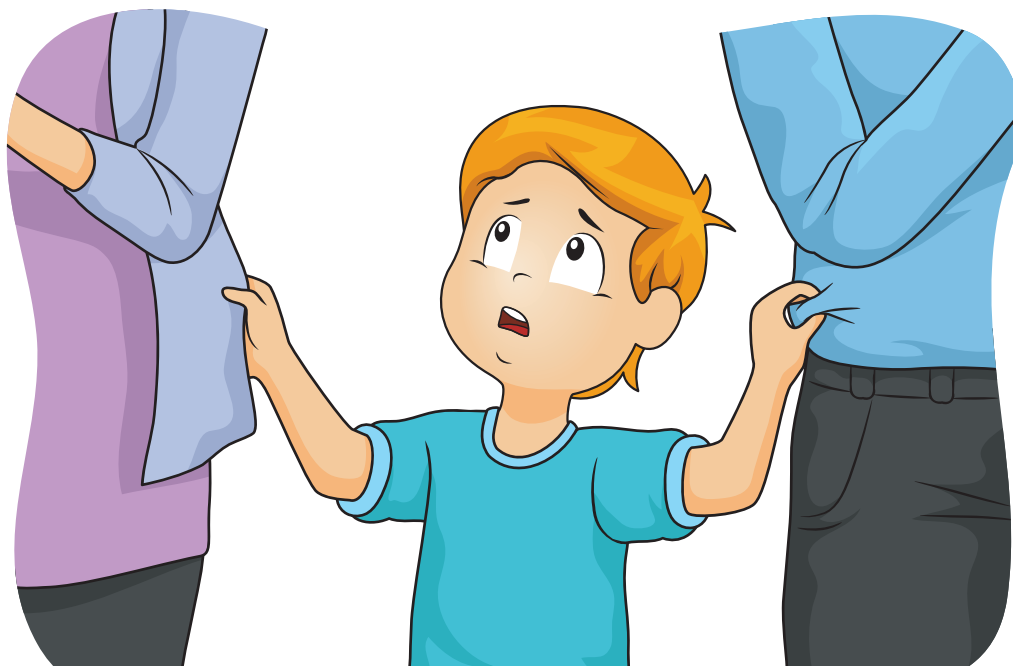
The parent benefits from tantrums, just like the child. The parent thinks, "If I could just get the child to do or not do certain things, I wouldn't have to yell or talk louder, the child will finally be attentive." But yelling, screaming, or threatening teaches your child to do the same.



Cause #3: Ignoring desirable behavior.

Parents tend to pay a lot of attention to undesirable behavior because it's how our brain functions. For example, have you ever been walking around your neighborhood and see someone doing something odd? It doesn't have to be something wrong, but something unexpected. You stare at it longer and try to make sense of it.

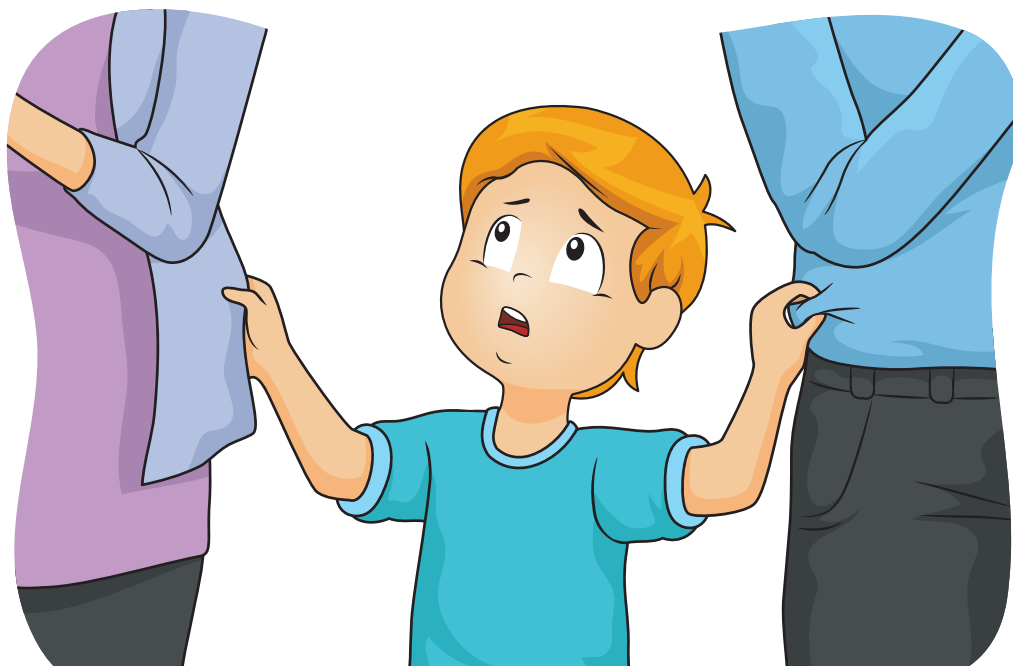
If you're focused on the odd behavior, then so is your child. Children learn to model what's unexpected because that's what their parent pay more attention to. How? By ignoring good behavior, with the parent focusing on what the child did wrong and talking about it.





On the other hand, adults usually don't make a big deal or spend a lot of time calling out good behavior. In their minds, they think, "That's what children are supposed to do." When children get attention when they act poorly, they don't know the difference between good-versus-bad-attention. The only thing they want is to be seen, heard, and validated. It doesn't matter if it's because of their bad behavior. Maybe that's the only time they get attention.

It's normal for a parent to point out when their child does something terrible. But when we highlight a particular undesirable behavior by reacting to it, we subconsciously embed this behavior into our child's personality. It's in this way we perpetuate our own misery.



Cause #4: Observing Others



Children learn by watching what others do. The problem starts when we begin acting like a child ourselves. Do you swear, call your child names, or threaten? Do you disrespect family members and scream at the other parent? Then you are normalizing how to throw a tantrum. If the parent cannot keep it together, how do you expect your child to? They watch you continually being pushed and pulled by your passing moods, and then turn around and do the same.





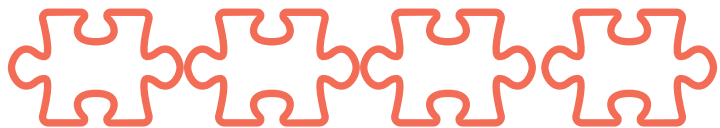
Your children learn how to express demands, cope with strong emotions and handle conflict by watching you. How you interact with the world teaches them how they should act. This requires you to look in the mirror and ask, “Do I show respect? Can I become what I need my child to be? And do I believe in myself enough to do so?” Children learn by example, so remember, you’re the role model.



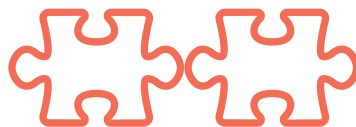
Cause #5: Giving Directions.

The way parents give instructions can influence whether or not the child listens. Some common mistakes include:

Too Many.



Children feel overwhelmed when the parent doesn't give them the space to assert their voice. If the parent is giving too many instructions, they are over-controlling. You can recognize signs of this based on your child's response. While doing a fun activity together, whether that be art, playtime, or doing something messy, your child shuts down. Do they appear frustrated when they lose interest? I sense that most children quit engaging in an activity because an adult entered the equation and "messed things up", not because they don't like it anymore. An adult has harped on the importance of listening or emphasized the need for perfection. Another way a parent can be controlling is when they already assume resistance. As you can imagine, that way of thinking can affect the parent's tone and mental state, making them have strict or rigid instructions.



Too few.

This parent gives hardly any instructions. Perhaps there is little to no control in the home. The child doesn't feel close to any adult in the house, except when they get basic needs met (e.g., food, clothing, and shelter). Here are some questions to reflect and ask yourself: has your child ever said, "You don't love me!" and, on top of that, have depression or anxiety? Do you limit interactions with your child because they're too overwhelming or you feel overwhelmed by your problems? Do you ignore them? Do you provide little or no supervision? Set few or no limits? Do you skip school events and parent-teacher conferences?

Too hard.



Children may be disobedient when parents expect too much, not because of their laziness, but because the instructions given are beyond the child's abilities. For example, asking a 3-year old to clean up a very messy room, a teenager to get straight A's, or a middle-schooler to take care of their four younger siblings is simply unrealistic. Here are some questions to ask yourself: are your expectations too high for your child? Do you emphasize the need for achievement? Do you feel your child manipulates you when they don't clean their whole room or do their chore?



Poorly timed.

As soon as your child comes home from school, do you demand they do their chore or start their homework? Children, just like adults, need a break after a long day at work. They need time to get a snack, rest, and blow off steam by playing. Instructions given when a child is doing something for recuperation, such as watching sports or a favorite TV show, are likely to be ignored.

Too vague.



Children may not follow instructions if they are unclear and especially if their choice is a yes or no response. If instructions are vague, the child may not know what to do. For example, a mother telling her preschooler, "Noah, listen to me! Listen to me! Use your words!" The 4-year-old doesn't know what words to use so the parent has to tell them. Some questions to consider: do you know what your boundaries are? And are you consistent with your limitations? When expressing a limit, do you ask a question? E.g. "Would you like to go to school now?"

Cause #6: Ineffective use of discipline.

The way parents give punishment can influence whether or not the child develops behavior problems. Some common mistakes include:

Limits not carried out.



Children know when the parent is inconsistent with limits or boundaries. The child remembers the last time when you said, "If you don't listen, I'm going to put the game away for 5-minutes," and when you didn't follow-up with the logical consequence. The next time you say, "If you continue to fight over the game, I'm going to take it away." your child will ignore your instructions. Any future threats of punishment will serve as a dare to the child to test what happens.



Punishment given in anger.

Managing your anger is the best lesson any punishment can offer. Does your child trigger you? If so, take responsibility for your anger and realize that you are a co-creator in every situation. When your child pitches a fit, how do you respond? Instead of bringing calmness to the situation, do you increase the tension by upping the ante? Remember that when you're no longer in control of your feelings, there is always a risk of hurting your child. Please talk to your practitioner if you're worried this might happen.

Punishment as a crisis response.



Parents let misbehavior build-up until the behavior becomes unbearable. The parent overreacts and punishes the child severely, resulting in the punishment not fitting the crime.



Inconsistent use of limits.

If the rules are applied some days, but not every day, the child will have difficulty learning how they should behave. And if you cannot decide if a limit is negotiable or permanent, then your rule is further made unclear. Therefore, your child can determine if they want to follow the rule or not. Also be aware that inconsistency in a two-parent family can arise when parents contradict each other or do not back each other up, especially in front of the children. If you are inconsistent in your limits, do you fear that you won't be liked or selfish?

Limits not carried out

Punishment given in anger

Punishment as a crisis response

Inconsistent use of limits

Cause #7: Parents' relationship.

There are other influences that can affect the relationship between parent and child. Some common influences include:

Parents' relationship with each other.



There's a disconnection between the parents' relationship. Disconnection can look like strain, tension, and conflict in the home. Does your child model the drama or resistance by pushing you away? Problem behavior can occur when parents' relationship with each other is distant. Do you show warmth, love and affection towards the other parent?



Parents' emotional state.

Parents who cannot regulate their anger, depression, or anxiety cannot be consistent in managing their emotions. If your child has a meltdown and the parent feels irritable and annoyed, can they model emotional regulation? When a parent is having a tough day or is not in the best mood, their sadness or depression affects their children. The parent is more likely to micromanage or neglect the child's behavior. The parent spends less time investing in the relationship.

Stress



. All parents experience stress, whether that be financial, work pressures, taking care of elderly or sick family members or moving. When life's stressors affect our household routine, children may become upset if these stressors disrupt the family routine for long periods.

Cause #8: Effects outside the home.

Factors outside of the home can influence whether or not your child develops behavior problems. Some common influences include:

Peers.

Do you know your child's friends and parents? It's important to know who your children spend time with as this can influence their behavior. If your child has low self-esteem or is aggressive and disruptive, they may have a hard time making friends. They may associate with the wrong crowd and feel peer-pressured into problem behavior.



School.

Children who struggle with academics may develop behavior problems if they get little to no praise. Their self-worth and success can influence how they view themselves at school and home. If a child believes they are not smart, they may give up altogether. Do you know what your child's strengths are? Do they need a tutor?

Media/ technology.

If your child is learning bad behavior, monitor what they watch. What movies, television programs, comics, and computer games is your child watching, reading or playing? Make sure there is little to no aggression or swearing.



Intervention

Plan for Change



Now that you have jotted down the information you have collected on the graph, the baseline measurement will help you compare and contrast if the interventions are working.

Think about changes you would like to see in your child's and own behavior. As the parent, it is up to you to decide what skills you want to teach. Skills like managing their feelings and communicating with others will help them be independent and interact with their peers.

**But let's be honest.
Teaching new skills
is challenging**





If we take a closer look at the word “discipline” from the Latin word *disciplina*, we learn discipline means “instruction and training.” When we discipline, we instruct and train our children in the correct behavior and focus less on punishing (as we will later discuss does not work).

**There are no
quick fixes or
Band-Aid
solutions.**



Parents can give logical or natural consequences while setting up limits and boundaries. And remember that screaming, hitting, and threatening isn't discipline.

Teaching your child how to be the change you want to see requires you to become the change you wish your child to be. Think about what skills your child needs to learn to help them manage their target behavior.

What skills do you want to encourage in your child?

Look at the list below and think about the skills you would like to encourage in your child.

Circle a maximum of two to focus on so that you don't feel overwhelmed

How to communicate and work well with others

- Helping
- Sharing
- Cooperating
- Empathy/perspective-taking
- Self-confidence
- Manners

Emotional Regulation

- Patience
- Self-control
- Express feelings without harming others
- Emotional Intelligence


How to problem-solve

- Asking questions
- Finding win-win solutions
- Negotiating
- I-statements
- Teamwork

How to be independent

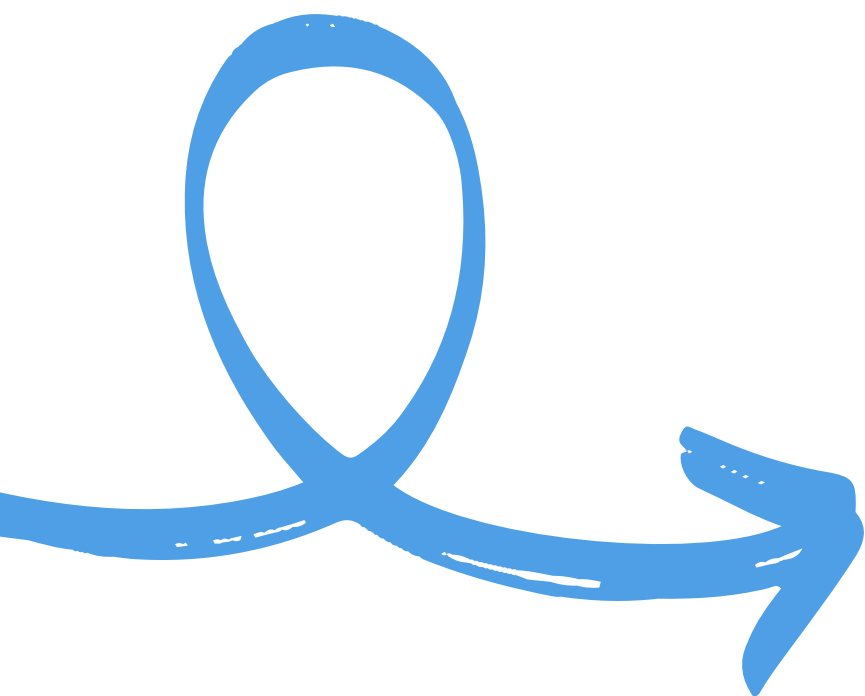
- Developing resiliency
- Being responsible
- Completing task without adult supervision
- Being responsible for own actions

Causes of behavior problems I need to work on

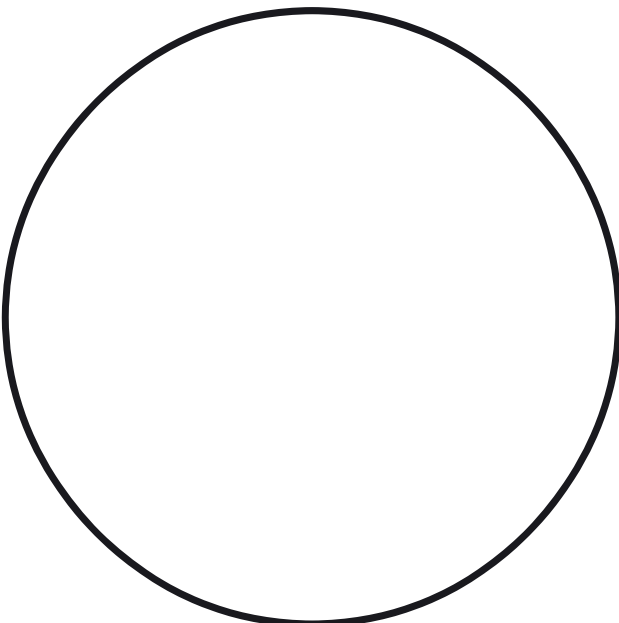
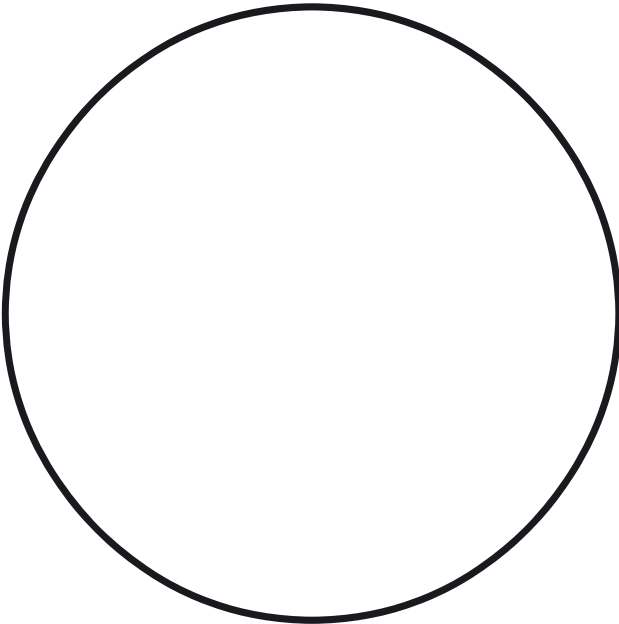
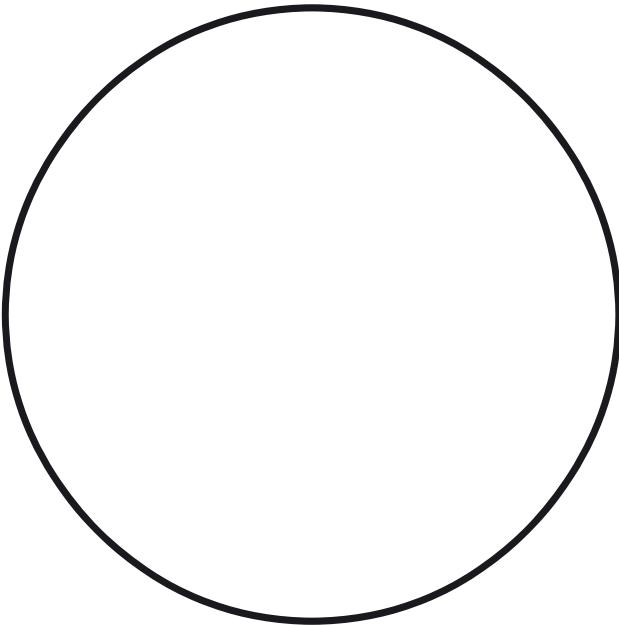
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- bribing: Material rewards
 - bribing: Food rewards
 - tantrum trap: child escalates
 - tantrum trap: parent escalates
 - ignore desirable behavior
 - watching others
 - instructions: too many
 - instructions: too few
 - instructions: too hard
 - instructions: poorly timed
 - instructions: too vague
 - limits not carried out
 - punishment given in anger
 - punishment as a crisis response
 - inconsistent use of limits
 - parent's relationship with each other
 - parent's feelings
 - stress
 - outside factors: peers
 - outside factors: school
 - outside factors: media/technology
 - _____
 - _____
 - _____

Choosing Goals for Change

If you're open to emotional growth, your child will always show you where you need to work on yourself. In the space below, write down the changes you would like to see in your child's behavior and in your own behavior.



**Goals for your growth
in your child's behavior**



**Goals for your growth
in your own behavior**

