

# Observing Your Child's Challenging Behavior

## A guide for parents and families

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Children are complicated—you may have noticed—and taking notes on challenging behaviors can help you notice patterns and gain new insights. But it's hard to take notes while a behavior is happening! Here are some tips on how you can write things down to help you see things you didn't see before, and understand both your child and yourself better.

To make sure to keep track of the important stuff, educators often use the “ABC Model, which is short for “Antecedent, Behavior, Consequence.” Don't let the big words put you off—antecedent just means “what happened right before”; behavior means “what happened”; and consequence means “what happened right after.” Here are some explanations and examples:

<b><u>Antecedent: What happened before?</u></b> When did it happen? What was going on? Was it loud or quiet? Crowded or empty? Hot or cold? What was the child doing? What were other people doing?	<b><u>Antecedent:</u></b> <i>End of breakfast, getting ready to leave house. Cold morning. Everyone rushing around finding things. Zach finishing his toast alone at table.</i>
<b><u>Behavior: What happened?</u></b>	<b><u>Behavior:</u></b> <i>Me: “Zach, time to get yr shoes on.” Zach: “I don't want shoes!” &amp; knocked his plate off table, ran into his room, hid under covers.</i>
<b><u>Consequence: What happened after?</u></b> How did people nearby react? How did they treat the child? What changed? How long was it until things got “back to normal”? What happened to make things better (or worse)?	<b><u>Consequence:</u></b> <i>I went to him, “It's time to go, you have to come downstairs.” No response. I picked him up, carried him to car without talking to him any more. Brother carried Z's shoes. (No one cleaned up toast.) Zach sulked in car seat for awhile, but singing by time we got to school. I put shoes on him, he went into school without problem.</i>

Write down as many quotes and specific details as you can remember—instead of *He yelled*, write *He yelled “Augh, I feel so mad!”* And try to write down actions instead of feelings—instead of *She was mad*, write *She stamped her foot and made a fist*.

It might feel like a lot to ask. In the moment, when stressful things are going on, taking notes may be the last thing on your mind. Do what you can in the moment, because details fade in your mind quickly—even a few words can help you remember more later, and you can always add more afterwards. Sometimes you can even have the child help you. “Zach, remember this morning the thing with the shoes? I was trying to write down what I said. Can you help me remember?” They remember, and are often surprisingly open to debriefing with you.

On the next page there's a blank chart you can fill in—print out a few and carry them around.

The good news is, if you manage to take these kinds of notes even just a few times, it almost always helps show patterns that will help you help your child, and you'll see things you didn't see before. It's worth your while, I promise.

<b>ABC Observation—Date &amp; Time:</b>		
<b><u>Antecedent</u></b>	<b><u>Behavior</u></b>	<b><u>Consequence</u></b>

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