

# Why???

a.k.a.

## Understanding Human Behaviour

Why? It is the one question that frustrates parents more than any other. Why are they doing that? Why are they saying that? Why can they be good one minute then terrible the next? Why do they behave for one parent but not for the other? Why are they great in school and terrible at home? Why are they so angry? Why are they so mean? Why don't they seem to care? Why won't they listen? Why would they say that to you?

As parents, we all want to be able to understand our children, especially when their behaviour starts going downhill. The feeling is that if we don't understand why they are currently behaving this way, it makes it very difficult for us to try to get them to make other choices and to behave differently. As a parent, we know that we have a job to do but that job can be terribly frustrating when we don't know how to do it. How can we raise them effectively, help them to grow into happy, healthy, functional adults when we don't know why they are not happy, healthy, functional children. If we knew **why**, then we could do something about it; fix the problems, which would then fix the behaviour.

Thus begins our desperate search for answers. We read books, talk to doctors, psychologists, teachers, other parents – all the while hoping that someone will be able to tell us **why**. We start out with hope - that we will find out **why** and then fix the problem (or at least try to) and sometimes, along with hope, we worry – worry that maybe the problem is us. Maybe we are to blame for their behaviour. After all, we are their parents. All too often, we believe that people who see our children misbehaving are judging us, criticizing us, blaming us. How can they not think that if even we wonder about it ourselves? Unfortunately, there are also times when those we turn to for help do cast the blame on us – tell us that we are being inconsistent as parents, that it is our fault and yet offer no real solution.

In many ways, we feel as though we are damned either way: would we feel better knowing that we were not doing anything wrong as parents (thus meaning that something is wrong with our child or that they are mentally ill) or knowing that there was nothing terribly wrong with them (thus meaning that we are the ones who are to blame)? Some parents will insist that it has to be their child that has the problem and so they need to be fixed by the doctors since there is nothing that they can do, while other parents will continue to blame themselves and shoulder the responsibility for their child's behaviour, protecting them and refusing to acknowledge that their child might have a problem. Perhaps it is the desire to be able to fix it that motivates this last position taken by some or perhaps it is the fear of being powerless to help their children that does not allow them to admit that there may be something wrong.

The search for the answer to the question of **why** is often frustrating. There is so much information to sift through, much of it contradictory. Everyone seems to have their own opinion as to **why**. Different doctors give different diagnoses. Different medications are prescribed or therapies/classes/programs recommended which may or may not work, which may fix some things but not others or which may do nothing at all and unfortunately, sometimes they will make things worse. Chances are that you have heard many opinions as to **why** but none of them have provided effective solutions for the problems... and if the solution is based on the reason **why** and it does not work, then you cannot help but question

the explanation of **why**. If you are reading this, you are likely still searching for an answer that explains **why**, that also offers a solution that, if done, will fix things.

If you still want to know **why**, please pay close attention to the next section. Please don't read the following section while you are tired or distracted or have other things on your mind because in it, I will answer the question of **why**. This is likely going to be a new way of thinking about things, a new perspective on their behaviour and the outcomes of their behaviour. Understanding this next section is critically important not only for you but also for your children because if you understand it and if you implement the program as outlined later on, you will be able to control their behaviour and 'fix things'. I guarantee it. Let me say that one more time... if you are capable of implementing this program and you understand the principles that it is based on, it will work in 100% of children, 100% of the time. It does not depend on the cooperation of the child but rather is entirely dependent on you and your efforts (which does **not** mean that it is your fault!!!). It is not an easy program and it will require a lot of effort on your part but I believe that our children are worth it.

## What Controls Behaviour?

To understand the specifics of why children (and in fact, all humans) do the things that they do, we have to start by understanding what drives behaviour in general.

There are only 2 forces or drives that control our behaviour. The first one is the Harm Avoidance drive and the other is the Pleasure Seeking drive. Think of these drives as 2 different people/voices in our heads that are constantly directing our behaviour, telling us what to do. Consciously or subconsciously, every time we do anything, these two drives are on and are telling us what to do and how to do it. The volume of these voices represents how strong that drive is; the louder the volume, the stronger the drive.

### The Harm Avoidance Drive a.k.a. Bob



I'm going to refer to the Harm Avoidance Drive as Bob. Bob's primary goal and the reason it exists in our brains is to protect us from bad stuff. This little guy, sees everything that we see, hears everything that

we hear and essentially, experiences everything we experience. He is constantly scanning the environment, looking for possible sources of danger. If he suddenly becomes aware of a possible source of danger in our environment, he jumps into action and starts talking to us, telling us to do things that are supposed to help us avoid that bad thing. The bigger he thinks the danger is (in terms of how bad he thinks it is, how likely he thinks it is to happen, etc), the louder he will speak to us. He often has very good vision, but very poor judgement (in terms of the likelihood of the event occurring). He tries to predict the bad things that might get us and then tells us what to do to avoid those bad things.

Bob is not logical, not reasonable, does not think about things or analyze them using reality as a criteria. He is there from the day we are born and will be there until we die. He is part of who we are and he is often referred to as a part of our personality or our temperament. There is a genetic component to the volume of his voice and that volume level is often transmitted genetically along with many of the other characteristics that we pass on to our children.

The following example should help to clarify the concept of Bob. Let's assume that your Harm-Avoidance Drive (Bob) considers spiders to be dangerous. Maybe when you were a young child, you were attacked by a horde of tarantulas and barely escaped with your life; or maybe one day, your dad screamed like a terrified little girl and ran away in a panic to hide in the bedroom and then you saw the horrible beast and realized right then and there that this was a **HUGE, BAD, VERY VERY VERY DANGEROUS THING!** It doesn't really matter why, but let's just assume that your Bob thinks that spiders are very, very dangerous. Bob knows exactly what spiders look like and can spot them a mile away. Now, picture yourself doing something – anything at all and then imagine that suddenly, a big, hairy spider drops down from the ceiling right in front of your nose. Imagine what your reaction is going to be to that situation. You are going to freak out, probably scream and run away or some other similar reaction.

Right at that point in time, it is important to recognize that things that are normally under your voluntary control (your muscles, your voice, etc.) stopped being under your voluntary control. You did not *decide* to react the way you did, you just automatically did. But this is not just like a reflex or some other subconscious behavioural habit; those behaviours (jumping away, screaming, etc.) came about as a direct result of Bob suddenly yelling at you to get away and making you do whatever it takes to avoid that possible danger (run away, call for help, etc.). When Bob starts barking orders at us, we obey! The behaviours that he will make us do are very much automatic, almost instantaneous, extremely powerful and outside of our voluntary control.

## The Pleasure Seeking Drive a.k.a. Jim



I'm going to refer to the Pleasure Seeking Drive as Jim. Jim's primary goal and the reason it exists in our brains is to make us go and get the stuff that we like. Primarily, these things are food, water, warmth – things that are absolutely essential for our survival – but also anything that we like, anything that we enjoy. The reason for this is that as far as our brain is concerned, there is one main 'currency' for good stuff - **Dopamine**. Anything that tastes good, feels good, smells good, is fun to do or experience releases Dopamine in our brain. What this means is that our brain treats things that we like, things that are fun but not really essential for our survival (ie. chocolate, playing video games, watching TV, winning, etc.) as though they were as important as food, water, warmth.

Just like Bob, Jim also sees everything that we see, hears everything that we hear and experiences everything that we experience. He is also constantly scanning the environment but he is on the lookout for possible sources of Dopamine. Jim is very short-sighted though and doesn't look for Dopamine much beyond what is right in front of him, and available pretty much right here, right now. When Jim becomes aware of a possible source of Dopamine in our environment, he will lock onto it like a little homing missile, jump into action and start talking to us, telling us to do whatever it takes to get that Dopamine. Certain things will tend to make Jim's voice louder. These include how long he has been without Dopamine, how important he perceives that source of Dopamine to be, how much Dopamine he figures he will get from it and most importantly, how many other possible sources of Dopamine are there.

Jim is the reason why we can't stop at just one chip, one Dorito, one square of chocolate, one bite of that brownie, one mouthful of ice cream, etc. He is the reason why we struggle to roll ourselves out of our nice, warm beds in the morning to get to the gym even though we know we should and made it a New Year's resolution. His instructions are the reason why people smoke. When he has Dopamine in his sights, he will take over and much like Bob, make us do whatever it takes to get what he wants.

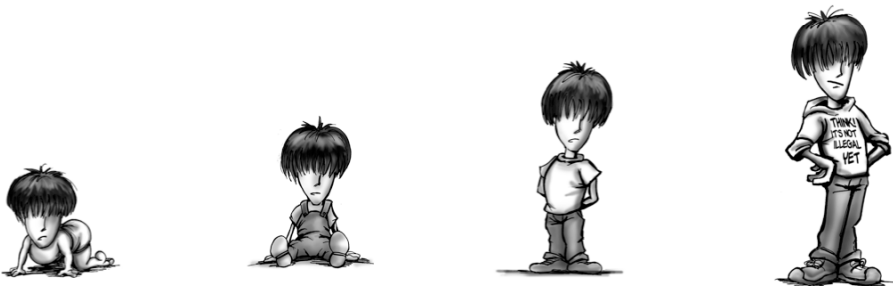
Jim and Bob's instructions to us are not heard in the same way we hear someone talking to us, through words. Rather, they are 'heard' by our brains through 2 mechanisms: 1) *thoughts* and 2) *feelings or emotions*. The usual, everyday communication is primarily through our thoughts; they make thoughts 'pop into our heads'. But sometimes, when the message is more urgent and they need to push the issue, then they message us through our feelings. Whenever we 'feel like \_\_\_' or experience an emotion (like anger, anxiety, sadness, excitement, etc.), we are 'hearing' **loud** instructions from either Jim or Bob.

**In Children, these two drives are all there is controlling their behaviour. They will act based solely on what either Jim or Bob is telling them to do right at that point in time, based on what they are experiencing right then and there. Whoever's voice is loudest is going to win and be the one in control of their behaviour.**

## The Missing Link – a.k.a. Logic and Reason



In adults, there is one other factor that is involved in the decision of what to do when faced with any situation and that is the part of our brain that we call Logic and Reason (a.k.a. willpower). Logic and reason is the part of our brain that develops whose job is to listen to both voices, to reason and think about what makes sense and then to try to exert his own influence over our behaviour. Logic and Reason is essentially the ability to take information learned in one setting and apply it over a space of time to situations that are different yet similar in nature. Children do not have Logic and Reason as part of their decision making process. Logic and Reason develops only once we hit puberty. It is not there before this. As a child, the world does not need to make sense but once we turn 10 or 11, it starts to need to make sense. The development of Logic and Reason is the reason why, even if no one ever said a thing about it, by the time most children turn 13, they know that Santa Clause is not real, and neither is the Easter bunny ... or the tooth fairy. They simply do not make sense and therefore they start to not believe any more. Prior to this, there was no pre-requisite that things needed to make sense in order to be true. This is the beginning of Logic and Reason. The process of maturation of the brain takes several years, just like the process of physical maturation. By the time children are roughly 17 years old, this process is pretty much complete and they are no longer a child, either in body or in thought but have basically completed the transformation from a child to an adult. All that's left now is the fine tuning.



Early teen years → → → → → → → → → → → → → → → → → Late teen years