

Week 1: Behaviour Expectations



Welcome to Week 1 of Sharing Control: Discipline Across the Ages where we will focus on Expectations for Behaviour. I'm going to start with a pretty big proclamation here and it's one I hope you'll learn is almost always true (there are always exceptions) when it comes to our children's behaviour:

The root of problems with our children stem from a mismatch in our expectations and what they are capable of.

If it was easy to fully grasp this and know how to use it to implement discipline and boundaries and expectations, then I could end this course right here, but sadly there is a need to unpack this more and really get to where we need to be to have a healthy, happy, and generally harmonious relationship with our kids, no matter their age. But please do keep this in mind throughout the next month as we work to see how various factors impact our expectations, their capacities, and then our relationship with them.

This week, we will start with a fuller look at expectations for behaviour based on our children's development including what we can expect in certain common domains, what situational factors influence these behaviours, and of course a bit about what is going on with those mystery "well-behaved" children. We end with an examination of the common problems and how we may set expectations across development.

Week 1: Behaviour Expectations

Section 1: Your Child's Development

Obviously it should go without saying that depending on your child's age, the expectations you have will vary. However, in our culture, much of what we expect from kids is actually well beyond what they are capable of and this leads to some very difficult times where parents struggle to "control" their child's behaviour and if this doesn't work, the type of control can end up escalating or we see parents giving up and feeling like failures. So the first question is where is your child from a developmental perspective?

Section 1a: Neurological Development

Neurological development is what will often dictate other forms of development. Most of us don't realize how the brain develops over time and although this is a topic for an entire university course (or degree), we will briefly summarize what is relevant for you, as parents, here.

Building and Pruning.

Most people think of brain development as simply a building of synapses and connections, but it isn't quite so simple. Development actually refers to both the building of synapses and connections, but also the *pruning* of synapses and connections. During the first three years of life, a child's brain is making tons of connections based on the environment he or she is in. So, for example, the more you respond to your child when distressed, the stronger the connection becomes between you and a sense of safety or security. At 3 years, a child's brain has approximately 1000 trillion connections. Seriously. Now, at 3, although the brain continues to form connections, it is now in a "pruning" stage as well where it starts to get rid of all those connections that aren't very strong. This means that if we've only experienced something once or twice, that event is likely to be pruned away and not have a long-term impact on the person we will become. So much pruning happens that by the time we reach adolescence that estimates of the number of connections is down to 500 trillion, but some think even lower.

What does this mean? The main take-home message is as follows: Experience matters. How you set up the strength of these connections is wholly dependent on how regularly you do certain things. The more you love your child, the more you connect physically with them, the more you comfort them, the more their brain is built upon those connections. The more you punish, yell, get angry, or ignore them, the more their brain is built upon those connections. And of course, how we see the world as adults is shaped by the connections we have. Now, mistakes happen for all of us and in the vast majority of cases, they will not have a long-term impact because of this issue of pruning.

One key point: The brain does continue to learn so even when we make mistakes, we can take advantage of the fact that we are able to change these connections (something called "neuroplasticity"), but it can take much longer and more effort than doing it in the first three years.

Week 1: Behaviour Expectations

Order of Development.

The other area that is highly relevant is the order in which the brain develops. You see, the brain is not just one unitary organ, but rather it is made up of various parts that develop at different rates. In fact, the brain develops much like it has developed on an evolutionary scale so we can kind of see the neurological development of babies to adults as the evolutionary model for how us humans got the brains we did. Now, the following is very basic and focused on the parts of the brain, not the differential types of development within each area, which also has implications for behaviours, but I believe this level of understanding is enough to get us forward-moving in talking about discipline.

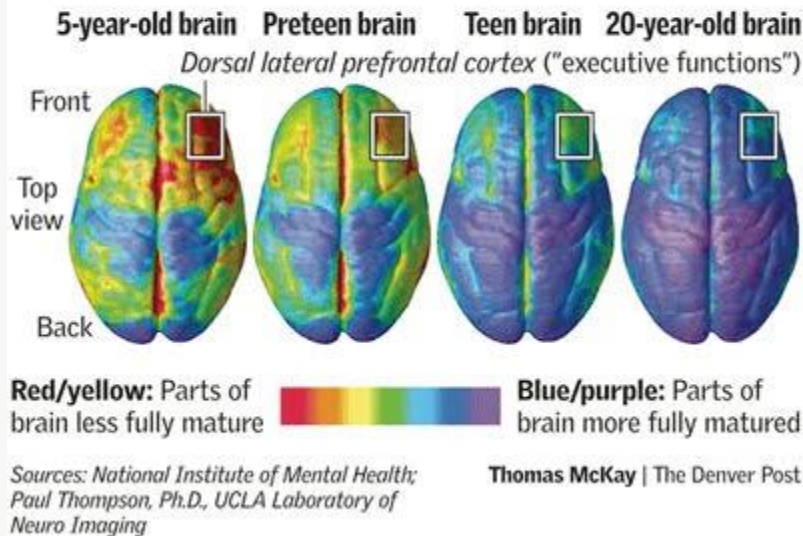
The four main parts of the brain are (in order of most basic to most complex): the brain stem, the cerebellum, the limbic system, and the cerebral cortex. The brain stem is the most basic part of the brain and is responsible for our most basic functions, like breathing, heart rate, etc. When there is damage, it is often incompatible with life. This part of the brain is predominantly developed at birth. The cerebellum is next and is responsible for reflexive movements like eye blinking and the various reflexes we see at birth, so again, the cerebellum is well-developed at birth.

Then comes the limbic system and it is more developed than the cerebral cortex at birth, but far less so than the brain stem and cerebellum and has a lot of maturation to do over many years. The limbic system is responsible for our emotional processing, some behaviours, long-term memory, and motivation, but it is predominantly known for our emotional life and development of memories, both implicit and explicit. Starting at birth, children experience emotions and as the brain builds connections they will form implicit memories of these emotional events, even if they cannot later access them or speak about them due to their lack of language at the time of consolidation. As the limbic system develops, it allow for emotions to help motivate us and drive behaviours, and helps us form longer-term, explicit memories.

The last area to develop is the cerebral cortex, the part of the brain that is responsible for our more cognitive processes, including language, abstract thought, inhibition, and more. We see very small developments take place early (think language), but this is the part of the brain that is highly immature at birth and even by age 5, it has a long, long way to go, as you can see in the image below from Dr. Thompson at UCLA:

Judgment last to develop

The area of the brain that controls "executive functions" — including weighing long-term consequences and controlling impulses — is among the last to fully mature. Brain development from childhood to adulthood:



Notably, the developmental trajectory of the prefrontal cortex is actually a bit in debate. While some have thought there is general immaturity until our mid-20s (which would explain a lot of adolescent behaviour as they are often what we deem to be impulsive and reckless), others suggest that the evidence does not support this as many studies find adolescents actually do know the risks, but choose to make them anyway. Instead, what is immature are *systems* related to *processing* information, particularly as it pertains to risks and rewards, and it is these areas that are developing between adolescence and early adulthood.

It thus shouldn't be surprising that after the first three years of development, adolescence is the next period of rapid neurological development. This means that while the neurological development of our youngest children is highly susceptible to the effects of their environment, so too is our teens; the key difference is that our teens often have a greater capacity to discuss things *if we have the relationship with them that allows them to see us as a safe person to go to*. If we view the changes in adolescence as being related to information processing, we have to realize that how they perceive the world around them, and what experiences they *expect*, will be highly relevant to their behaviour and how they respond to us as adults which leaves us with a lot to do in terms of making those perceptions and expectations positive.

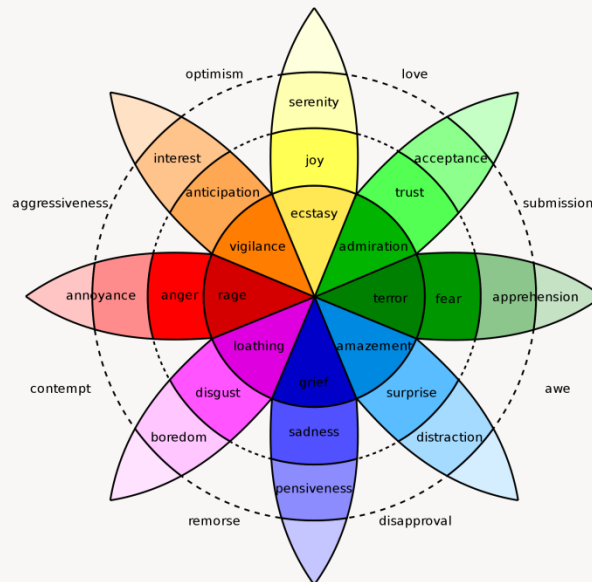
What does this mean? I think there are three main takeaways from this section:

1. Your child is capable of experiencing and having deep memories of events that they may not consciously recollect or discuss later. It does not mean these events don't impact the way they develop and how they interact with the world.
2. Inhibition – the ability to stop something – is incredibly hard for kids. At the root of most discipline issues is us asking kids to stop things and watching them fail.

Week 1: Behaviour Expectations

3. The teenage years are also especially important for neurological development and the likelihood that we can help during that time will be partially dependent upon how we respond to our children when they are younger and being aware of the unique situation they are in from a processing perspective.

Section 1b: Social and Emotional Development



The Emotion Wheel
Copyright: Robert Plutchik

We could really talk about the development of social and emotional skills separately, but because our emotional lives impact our social lives and vice versa in ways that we don't always see with cognitive skills, we tend to lump them together. Our emotions matter so much because they impact how we behave towards and with others and of course our ability to engage appropriately with others has a huge impact on our emotions. This means we have to examine the development of understanding emotions, emotion regulation, and social skills.

Understanding Emotions

In terms of development, our *understanding* of emotions is actually far more advanced than most of our other systems. In studies looking at our ability to identify other people's emotions based on visual cues or context or even non-linguistic vocalizations, children do astonishingly well; however there is some variability and some nuances that continue to develop through young adulthood. Specifically, our understanding of happiness, fear, surprise, and disgust has been found to increase with age, but our understanding of sadness and anger seems to peak by about age 6 (yes, 6). From an evolutionary perspective, sadness and anger may be thought to be the most important emotions because they highlight social information about how to respond to others (think empathy or asking forgiveness) (one would assume fear should also be there from an evolutionary perspective, but in reality it is one of the harder emotions to identify for children). Sadness and anger are central to group cohesion and this may be the reason for their prominence, and the fact that fear is not as prominent but can have a key role in safety, should tell us how important our social lives are to our evolution. So in terms of

Week 1: Behaviour Expectations

emotion understanding, children's abilities are good – even for those emotions that are still developing, children are doing quite well at younger ages.

This means that our children are capable of reading faces quite young – an important skill in social groups – and their early, automatic responses to others' emotions set the stage for later emotional skill development. That is, early reactions to sadness can include one's own experience of sadness (the first stage of empathy is called 'emotion contagion' because infants seem to catch the sadness from others) and early reactions to anger include sadness to elicit empathy (and are the first stages of restitution). Thus understanding emotions lays the framework for the development of appropriate social skills.

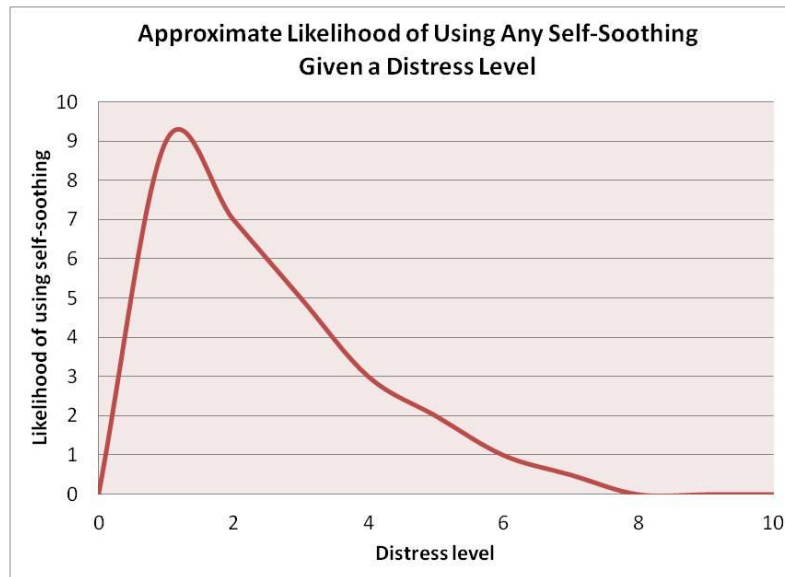
Emotion Regulation

For the purposes of discipline, the more important factor is the issue of how our children handle these emotions, a process called *emotion regulation*. The development of emotion regulation is a wonderful way to better understand how important social skills and experiences are to the developing affective system. The first stage of emotion regulation is really no regulation at all; our infants are unable to regulate and even their cries for us are not based on an active attempt to seek help, it's just what they do. After this stage comes co-regulation and this is a crucial part to emotion regulation and one that is often overlooked in mainstream parenting discussions. Co-regulation refers to the active attempt of the child to seek comfort from a caregiver; this is your child crying for you specifically, coming to you for cuddles when upset, and so on. The infant or child now knows that you have the capacity to calm their system so they are seeking that input as they still lack the capacity to do this on their own. After this stage comes attempts at actual self-soothing, or actions that help a child calm their own system on their own. This is something that is an ongoing process for years and years and years to come. In fact, it's something most of us adults continue to work on as well.

It's important that I stress that this process isn't wholly linear, but rather interacts with the *degree* of stress a given situation causes a child. That is, for minor stressors that cause the child some upset but not a lot, they will be able to engage in self-soothing much earlier than for events that cause greater stress. This is why you can see an infant place his hands in his mouth and seem to have some calming effect from it, but still require a lot of parental input and assistance in most other situations.

I cannot stress enough how important it is to realize that our children's capacity for self-soothing is limited by how they experience the event. The more stressful it is, the harder it is to self-soothe. This means comparing children or even the same child between situations will be moot. (This also has implications for the orchid child who is known to have heightened responses to stress.) Often when presented with a child who struggles emotionally, we are not looking at a child *without skills*, but a child who experiences negative events much more deeply than others. And thus that experience of co-regulation is crucial. I have used the following image before (created by me, nothing scientific, just an example) to help illustrate this:

Week 1: Behaviour Expectations



The other factor that is important here in setting emotion regulation expectations is *who* causes the distress. This is a factor that has been discussed by neuroscientists and studied in younger children. In short, it seems that distress caused by people we trust and love – and especially those who we would turn to for co-regulation – is far more difficult to self-soothe from than distress caused by others. When people we rely on cause us stress, we find it *far more stressful* and thus struggle to respond with our maximum skills. I think here of parents who tell a crying child to be quiet or just expect them to silence themselves as actually adding fuel to the fire instead of working with the child’s emotional capacity to help calm the system.

When we think about these skills, there is not just the development of skills that relate to self-soothing and our ability to remember to use them and use them, but also how we experience and perceive events, and finally who we see as causing our harm. These nuances makes it very difficult to set reasonable expectations based on age alone and why some older children can seem so immature when it comes to emotion regulation. As a general rule, the older one is, the more we can expect some emotion regulation and coping skills; however, this will vary based on some of the following variables:

- The degree of co-regulation that has occurred up to this point that has helped the system develop
- Individual differences in stress reactivity (as mentioned, high-needs kids often respond stronger to situations and thus experience greater stress)
- Who caused us harm
- Who is there to support us if we need it (yes, kids often try self-regulation on their own, but do better if someone is there as a back-up, like a safety net)
- Self-awareness of emotions
- Cognitive limitations, like low working memory (as this can cause us to be more likely to get overwhelmed)
- Other factors that would impact our ability to cope such as being hungry, tired, left out, etc.

Week 1: Behaviour Expectations

In Brief: The Role of the Vagus Nerve

I briefly want to mention the vagus nerve because it is central to our coping skills. The vagus nerve runs throughout our body and is central to our response to stress; it can cause us to go into the 'fight, flight, or freeze' response or it can calm us entirely. It develops early in infancy and certain things have been linked to its optimal development; specifically, things like breastfeeding, human contact and cuddles, massage, and parent-child positive interactions. Notably all elements of responsive parenting.

Now, sometimes something like a tongue-tie can actually negatively affect the development because the tongue on the top of the mouth is one way we activate and develop the system. If your child has had anything that may have impeded early vagal development (e.g., ties, NICU for extended periods, a parent with post-partum depression, and so on), then you may have a child that is just a bit behind in terms of emotion regulation development. It's not all over though and you just may have to be more patient in terms of building and using these skills.

Social Skills

The final area to discuss in terms of social and emotional development is the role of social skills. Much of our interactions with our children depend upon us understanding each other – what we want, how we feel – and these require certain skills that aren't always available. Perhaps the most important of these skills is Theory of Mind, which is a fancy way of saying Perspective Taking or our ability to know what other people are thinking and feeling. If we think about it, obviously our ability to engage meaningfully with others depends upon our ability to understand their needs and behaviours; if we can't do that, we may behave inappropriately.

Theory of mind develops over the first five years, but is something that we can always struggle with, even as adults. Without going into too much detail (I wrote a dissertation on this after all), children start to show reliable early signs of theory of mind around 18 months when they identify that others have preferences different to them. They can start to offer people things they want, not what the child wants (this is the classic broccoli-cracker experiment which you can look up if interested). Around age 3, children start to be able to identify false beliefs in the context of jokes. They know they can trick people, and some research suggests they may understand the idea of a false belief, but seem unable to respond behaviourally as if they do. By age 5, most children are good at identifying when people have false beliefs and can work with that information in making predictions about other people's behaviours.

Of course, there are things that inhibit the use of these skills and we can see deficits in theory of mind in adults when we are taxed. This is because our brains seem to be hardwired to think first and foremost of our experiences as our anchor for other people's minds and then we modify accordingly. Depending on how taxed we are at the moment, how well we know the other person, and how strong our experience has been in this regard, we are more or less good at making these predictions.

One thing worth talking about here is called the 'Curse of Knowledge' and I think it's something parents have in abundance, especially when dealing with our older children. The curse of knowledge refers to the fact that if we know something, we are more likely to assume more people know it than actually do. As parents, when we think about our expectations for our older children and teenagers, we can often fall into this trap. We know the

Week 1: Behaviour Expectations

perils of too much TV and so we behave as if they must know and appreciate them as well, but they don't. We aren't as bad with our younger kids because they *seem so different* that we better appreciate those differences, but as our kids get older, we are more likely to see them "like us" and assume they have the same information. This leads to erroneous expectations and then conflict.

The second element that is worth discussing here is the role of social inclusion. Our entire lives are based on being part of a group – a social group – as this has been what has allowed us as a species to thrive and for our children, at an individual level, to survive. Our children are reliant upon us and thus work hard to be a member of social groups. This is an incredibly strong urge that we see in young babies who form very strong attachments to caregivers, but it also exists in older children and definitely adolescents. They have the family unit as a social group, but they are also seeking inclusion into other groups – namely peer ones. This strong drive to belong can lead to behaviours that are less than ideal and too often parents dismiss this need to belong as trivial yet it's so much more.

Now, one thing that has been noted by many psychologists and researchers is that children and adolescents who struggle with a feeling of belonging at home will be more invested in finding and belonging to another social group (however, virtually *all* children will aim to find this inclusion with peers so don't feel that you can somehow prevent it entirely or that their search for it speaks to your parenting). As peers are often not the best source of guidance, this can lead to many problems. It is normal for our children to want to belong and strive to belong, but as parents, we want the family unit to supersede the drive to belong in a peer group so that if the peer group is asking our children to do things they aren't comfortable with, or feel anxious about, they don't override those feelings in that quest to belong. If they already belong somewhere they like, they can then keep seeking a social group that better fits them and their needs.

Week 1: Behaviour Expectations

Section 2: Other Factors That Affect Expectations

Like anything, we can't talk about expectations without acknowledging the many, many things that impact them on a daily basis. I provide a list here, but it is likely not exhaustive. The first group of things are longer-term and person-specific and they include: sensory issues, developmental delays/differences, health problems, learning difficulties/differences, and temperament. For temperament, the more high-needs child tends to struggle more with our expectations and needs more time to adapt and learn and this requires more patience on our behalf. For the rest, the presence of any of those things can mean we need to change our expectations to those that better suit where our child is at a given moment.

The second group contains those things that are huge events in a child's life and thus result in temporary periods whereby we need to modify our expectations because the child is being taxed in ways we may not realize. This is particularly important for teachers too as they will likely face kids who may have been okay suddenly struggling and this is the category of events that can cause this. This includes things like: death or illness of a parent, the arrival of a new sibling, moving to a new home, starting a new school, loss of best friends (moving away or even worse, death), and being bullied.

The final group is made up of the temporary, situational items that impact our expectations in a given moment. These are things we need to be aware of on the fly and be able to work with or understand when children seem to violate our expectations for them. These can include: being tired, hungry, feeling lonely or sad, being angry over something, being sick, and being overwhelmed in a given environment (whether it's lights, people, noise, and so on).

We have to consider these things in any given moment when we are finding ourselves frustrated with the behaviours of a child.

Week 1: Behaviour Expectations

Section 3: The Well-Behaved Child: What's Happening?

Many people think about this whole issue of expectations and immediately come to thinking about those well-behaved kids they see out in public with their parents or the classroom that seems totally under control. They wonder why their child isn't that child and what have these parents or teachers done that is so right whereas it seems that you must be wrong because yours are speaking back, running around, melting down, and so on.

Although I can't say that you haven't done anything (though probably less wrong than you think if any wrong), the fact is that these are not the cases you want to compare to. I find there are three main reasons why you see kids behaving like this:

1. The best-case scenario: The parents are parenting in a respectful manner and setting the right boundaries and they just happen to have that child who has a chill temperament. In the case of older kids, those children now have the skills to perhaps behave in more socially acceptable ways and don't have any of the situational factors going on that would inhibit their use of these skills. This is the best case and probably not the majority of what you see given today's parenting advice.
2. The so-so scenario: You are seeing a child who may be highly anxious and thus is withdrawn which is often mistaken for "behaving" in our culture or a child with other developmental delays/differences which may be associated with inhibiting behaviour. These are not cases of "well-behaved" in as much as these kids may be struggling with the situation, but they turn those struggles inward and it results in them looking like the good kids. Speaking to adults with anxiety, I can't tell you how many admit that everyone thought they were "good" and their struggles were regularly ignored because of it.
3. The bad scenario: The child fears acting out because of repercussions at home. This is often in younger children, but can happen when you see teens out with parents who they fear. As children become older, they will separate themselves and you would see the "well-behaved" child in the company of the person they fear, but then a very different person may emerge when that person is no longer there. They have not internalized any moral behaviours based on fear, just learned not to express certain things in the presence of certain people.

The fact is that it is *normal* for kids to be hyper, loud, act out, meltdown, and even get upset with us. When you don't see these behaviours at least on occasion, you want to figure out what might be going on because often then you're looking at reasons 2 or 3 above. Even the most chill temperament will lose it once in a while, but these parents will be accepting and not try to change that, but accept it as a part of being human.

Section 4: Common Issues - What Can We Expect?

Over this course we’re going to take the following common issues and explore them through the focus lens each week which means we start with expectations. For each of these issues, there are the expectations you may set in a general sense for a child of given ages, but of course there will be unique variables that affect this for every child so you will need to take a look at your child’s development and that may be something that is worth discussing in office hours.

Issue	Infant-Toddler	Preschool	Middle Childhood	Teenage Years
Physical Aggression	As Paul Bloom so wonderfully states, “The only reason we survive the ‘terrible twos’ is that our children are not yet strong enough to kill us.” Yes, toddler years are the most violent in human development. Expect it due to the mismatch between inhibitory control and strong emotions.	Violence has ebbed, but still comes out as the first response when highly stressed which can happen frequently. (It actually is a natural response for most of us at any age without skills to help us.) These children can learn that physical aggression is wrong, but need external help to avoid these triggering situations.	Of all the times, this is perhaps the best for physical aggression. Skills to cope with stress have increased so there is less need for physical aggression, but there is not the influx of hormones that plague teens. You should expect a decent amount of self-control, but of course any large burst of emotion may come with aggression.	Hormones and the shifting of the brain again can lead to physical outbursts when faced with stress. However, for most this is less physical against a person and more vocal (yelling, slamming doors, etc.).
Relational Aggression	No. Children here are not capable of relational aggression because they lack the necessary parts of theory of mind. Any behaviours that look like relational aggression come from other motives.	Theory of mind is developing and you may see early relational aggression (or as some parents call it, “f*%king with people”, usually a sibling). It’s not often intentionally aggressive though and more a path of understanding other people’s minds. By the end of the preschool years though, you may see some of this.	Relational aggression increases and is often a form of bullying that occurs throughout elementary, middle, and high school. Although the nuances of it will often increase with age, the capacity for it is there in early elementary school when children know exactly what others desire and can use that against them when they feel threatened in some way.	

Week 1: Behaviour Expectations

Issue	Infant-Toddler	Preschool	Middle Childhood	Teenage Years
Disrespect or Speaking Out	You may think of a toddler as disrespectful but they are just brutally honest – there is a difference.	Again, preschoolers are often more brutally honest than intentionally disrespectful, but you may actually have occasions where they do things intentionally to lash out at you.	Children are testing boundaries and definitely can speak out. The expectation is that they will try this, but it is often to do more with underlying issues as opposed to attempts at independence, hormones, etc.	Very common as teenagers struggle with social demands and a desire for independence they lack in our society. Remember that most teenagers in human history may be married and have kids. Not saying this is great, but there is a reason they look to be in charge of their lives.
Tantrums	You should expect tantrums. This is the common response for young children to being completely and utterly overwhelmed. Without many skills to cope with this type of overstimulation, they respond by blowing up.		Tantrums still occur in periods of high distress (or at times when learned, but this shouldn't be expected and will be discussed later), but with increased coping skills to stress, often our kids can avoid that. Tantrums also look different.	Tantrums don't really occur so much as overwhelming situations or stress lead to anger and explosive behaviour.
Obedience (“My child doesn't listen to what I ask them to do”)	It's very difficult for this age to actually stop and do things when asked. The brain simply struggles to shift gears, even when the child has a social desire to help. They need lots of help here.		Children can stop and change gears when asked from a developmental perspective, but lots of other things will influence the chances of them doing this.	
Listening and Sitting Still	During these first five years, children actually <i>need</i> movement to help brain development. They also seem to listen better when they are moving; thus, standing still or sitting still to listen results in less listening. If you want your child to retain something, you may need to let them move around or do an alternate activity while you're speaking. Regardless of how you tell them, you should always have them repeat back (if verbal) to ensure they did hear you.		As childhood progresses, they are able to sit still for longer periods, though still not as long as we often expect. They should be moving for about 15 minutes of every hour, whether at home or in the classroom.	Teens can sit for much longer periods, though it's unclear if this is due to conditioning. The need for movement is still strong though and so moving every 45 minutes to an hour is a good plan.

Week 1: Behaviour Expectations

Issue	Infant-Toddler	Preschool	Middle Childhood	Teenage Years
Homework	Hopefully N/A; if it is, have a long chat with wherever your child is!		School days are very long for many kids and so expecting them to sit more and do work is unreasonable. They need lots of active time after a school day. Homework should only be expected in small chunks and after a long period of free and active play.	Teens are capable of homework in larger chunks. The same idea of needing some down time after school applies still, but there are issues around <i>wanting</i> to do homework which we will discuss next week.
TV/Video Games	I will start by saying the recommendations are no screens before 2, but realistically many families use them. You will often find behavioural differences when children watch as they can easily become “addicted”. Thus they are likely to be negatively influenced and you will need to be aware they cannot self-regulate this behaviour at all.		Throughout childhood some children will be able to better self-regulate than others, but it is still a developing capacity, especially for those who are more addicted.	Given the massive brain changes in adolescence, this is another time when addiction can spike. Kids who are pretty good with screens may start spending more and more time and this can have negative effects on behaviour, depending on the individual child.
Remembering Things	Just don’t assume they have much memory for anything you say or ask them to do.	There is memory here, but it’s limited and very reliant upon visual cues to remember. There is large growth in working memory between 3 and 5 years of age.	Memory capacity increases and children can often remember simple things over some periods of time, especially when habitual. Memory aides can be very helpful.	Teenagers have again a better memory, can store multiple things in longer-term and working memory. You can expect much more in terms of being able to retain things, but like all humans, it’s not perfect.

Week 1: Behaviour Expectations

Issue	Infant-Toddler	Preschool	Middle Childhood	Teenage Years
Cleaning Up	Ha! Seriously, young kids may try to “help” you clean and this is a good sign, but it probably won’t look much like cleaning.	Kids can start to take part in cleaning up, but very rarely on their own or in a way you might want.	Kids are definitely capable of cleaning up at this stage. However, longer or larger clean ups will be taxing.	Completely capable of cleaning up (whether or not they want to or care is something entirely different).
Eating	You should expect an infant to predominantly rely upon breastmilk or formula until a year or so (solids before that are for fun). After a year, you will see exploration of foods and typically less picky behaviour unless there is a history of allergies or intolerances.	Picky eating is much more common at this stage and is often thought to be related to our evolutionary history of children being more independent and needing to stay safe. Most poisonous foods are not sweet so an aversion to non-sweet or plain foods can be helpful in that respect.	Picky eating subsides at these stages, but not all kids and adolescents eat a huge variety. Most problems at this age stem from children who are perceived to eat too little or too much or parents have expectations about eating what they provide. No child will eat what they don’t like. Heck, you won’t either. So expect a more limited palate, but not too picky and stronger feelings about what they will and will not eat. <i>A note on eating disorders: Childhood is when eating disorders may emerge. Eating disorders, at their root, are seen as issues of control, not eating. Thus having appropriate expectations and boundaries can be one of the ways you can mitigate (not eliminate) risk.</i>	
Sleeping	Babies and toddlers naturally wake throughout the night for feeds, cuddles, contact, and assistance getting back to sleep. Expect this for up to 3 years as a regular thing (there is so much more, but as I offer a whole course on this, I can’t repeat it in this little column)	Most preschoolers have dropped naps (but not all) and are sleeping longer chunks at night. A waking for a bathroom break or water is quite normal. Bedtimes often are earlier than for babies and toddlers, but there is huge variability, and they will still expect comfort and contact as they fall asleep if not all night.	Wakings for the bathroom can be normal as can the need for water at night. Sleep duration lowers from preschool years but is still highly variable. Kids are often capable of calming themselves down to sleep, but many will still enjoy being snuggled or having company before they fall asleep at night.	Bedtimes become much later naturally – their circadian rhythm shifts – and they need a chance to sleep in. They are at risk of sleep deprivation with early school start times, but will struggle to fall asleep earlier because of their hormonal levels. It’s important to be aware of other factors that may impact sleep like screens and lights to help maximize what sleep they can get.

Week 1: Behaviour Expectations

Issue	Infant-Toddler	Preschool	Middle Childhood	Teenage Years
Sharing	Not going to happen naturally.	Sharing starts to emerge, but often only with people the children know and like and only with items they don't strongly value.	Sharing continues to increase and kids have a greater sense of equity. They are more likely to share with those they don't know, those who they don't necessarily like but are worse off, and to think about how fair things are in general. However, special items are still rarely shared and sharing in general is not as often as parents and teachers may like.	Sharing is much like adults here. There is a lot of sharing with those they know and like, even some sharing out of a moral responsibility, and strong ideas of fairness have emerged. Like us, some items are off limits to some people, but they are more likely to share items of worth to those close to them.

Please take a look at the homework for this week to help you identify the inaccurate expectations you may have for any given child in your life and to think about the factors that may influence what expectations you can make.