Discovering YOUR CHILD'S MENTAL MODELS

REFLECTION AND JOURNAL PROMPTS

If we can understand some of the Mental Models that are driving our kids' big, baffling behaviors, we may feel more regulated and able to offer more compassionate, boundaried, responses to those behaviors. Brainstorming what our kids' Mental Models are can give us ideas about how to help them.

1 Think about your child's earliest experiences, and make some guesses about what they learned about self, relationships, and their sense of safety in the world.

CHILD'S SELF	RELATIONSHIPS	SAFETY/WORLD

2 How does that help you understand or interpret their behavior in a different or new way?

3 How can you use that knowledge to stay more compassionate and boundaried in response to behavior?

4 How can you respond to their behavior in a way that will change what they believe about self, relationships, and their sense of safety in the world? *(i.e.: If a child has a Mental Model that their caregiver is unpredictable and unreliable, they need lots of experiences of predictability and reliability.)*

Learn more at RobynGobbel.com/MentalModels

A Mental Model is a specific kind of implicit memory that creates generalizations about how we expect the world to work, including relationships, and even our general sense of how safe or not the world is.

Our Mental Models about **ourselves**, **what we can expect in our relationships**, and our **sense of safety in the world** are developed inside the attachment and relational experiences that kids have with their grownups or their caregivers, specifically, in the first year of life.
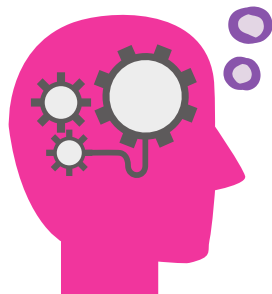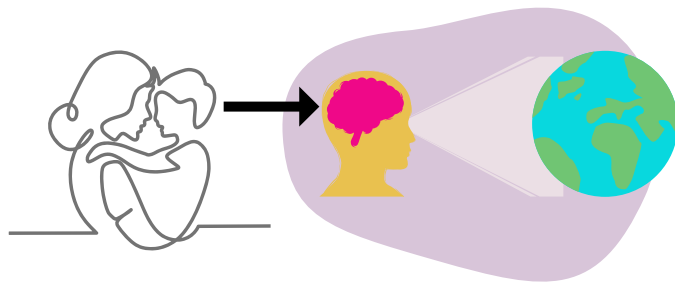
The Mental Models your child developed are related to the degree to which your child felt:

SAFE   SEEN   SOOTHED   SECURE

(Bryson and Siegel)

Children with big, baffling behaviors may have some of these early life experiences:

abuse   neglect   neurodivergence   sensitive sensory system   neuroimmune condition, (PANS/PANDAS/Lyme)

chaotiic environment   vulnerable nervous system

EXAMPLES OF MENTAL MODELS

When babies have **enough experiences of feeling safe, seen, soothed and secure**, their Mental Models may sound like:

- People are good, and they'll take care of me.
- I'm a good baby, and I'm worthy of being taken good care of.
- I am not bad when I'm in distress.
- I can be in distress, and I can vocalize that distress. But that doesn't mean I'm a bad baby.
- The world is not perfect, but generally a safe and predictable place.
- When things aren't going well, or I don't feel safe, there are people out there who will soothe, protect, and take care of me.

When babies **DON'T have enough experiences of feeling safe, seen, soothed and secure,** their Mental Models may sound like:

- People are unpredictable--sometimes they take care of me and sometimes they don't. I have no idea what to expect.
- When I'm in distress, it's because I'm bad.
- The world is not generally a safe or predictable place, so I have to be in charge of my own safety.
- People are mean and they hurt me, even when I'm already in pain.

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