



FORM AND FUNCTION

Children let us know their wants and needs through their behavior long before they have words or know how to verbally express their feelings. They give us cues to help us understand what they are trying to communicate.

Children who are dual language learners may be trying to express themselves in both their home language and in English, therefore especially benefit from parents and teachers observing their behaviors, emotions, and expressions. Additionally, labeling children’s behaviors in the child’s home language and in English will support children’s growing vocabularies in both languages and promote children’s confidence in expressing themselves.

Culture also plays a key role in children’s behaviors and parent’s expectations. For example, in some cultures parent-child communication may not be a family expectation whereas in other cultures, child and adult communication is a cultural norm. So, it is important for the education staff to understand the family’s cultural expectations to better support the family.



Each behavior has a:

FORM = the behavior the child is using to communicate

AND A

FUNCTION = the reason or purpose the child is using that behavior

Below is a list of common **FORMS** and **FUNCTIONS** to help you figure out the meaning of children’s behaviors.

CHILD’S AGE	FORM	POSSIBLE FUNCTION	
Infant	crying	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I’m hungry I’m tired I’m wet 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I want you to hold me I miss my mommy It is too noisy in here
Toddler	biting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I want the dinosaur Joseph is playing with I’m teething This is my space—I don’t want you in my space 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I am really frustrated You just told me “no” and I don’t like it I want to play with you
Preschooler	hitting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I feel mad and don’t know how to express it I don’t want to stop playing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I don't want to share my favorite toy with Katie I want to play by myself