

PART III — BEHAVIOUR & RELATIONSHIP

Behaviour Through the Attachment Lens

Behaviour reflects internal state. When children feel safe and regulated, behaviour stabilises. When regulation collapses or attachment feels threatened, behaviour often shifts.

Instead of asking:

“How do I stop this behaviour?”

Ask:

“What emotional state is driving this behaviour?”

This shift changes response from control to containment.

The Anger–Shame Cycle

Anger often protects vulnerability. Beneath anger may lie:

- Shame
- Fear of failure
- Feeling misunderstood
- Loss of control
- Emotional overwhelm

When shame activates, anger may restore a temporary sense of strength.

If correction feels humiliating, the child may internalise:

“I am the problem.”

Repair protects identity.

Withdrawal vs Opposition

Some children escalate outward; others withdraw inward.

Withdrawal may reflect:

- Emotional overwhelm

- Shame
- Fear of failure
- Exhaustion

Opposition may reflect:

- Defensive control
- Frustration
- Perceived injustice

Both signal strain, not simply defiance.

Respond to withdrawal with gentle presence.
Respond to opposition with calm boundary.

Emotional Dysregulation Patterns

Dysregulation occurs when emotional activation exceeds regulatory capacity. It may appear as:

- Escalation
- Collapse
- Withdrawal
- Tearfulness
- Anger

Often, dysregulation reflects both nervous system overload and relational trigger activation.

Containment must precede correction.

The Parent–Child Emotional System

Children regulate within relationship. Emotional states move between parent and child.

Child escalates → Parent escalates → Cycle strengthens.

Child escalates → Parent regulates → Cycle stabilises.

Predictability, emotional safety, and repair strengthen the system.

Boundaries Without Rupture

Children require structure and emotional safety simultaneously.

Control escalates.
Containment stabilises.

For example:

“I understand you’re upset. The boundary still stands.”

This preserves dignity while maintaining authority.

Consistency matters more than intensity.

Repair & Reconnection

Rupture is inevitable. Repair is protective.

Repair communicates:

- Connection remains
- Conflict is survivable
- Identity is safe

Simple repair:

“That felt tense earlier.”

“I care about you.”

Repair strengthens attachment and resilience.

Persistent Behaviour

Concern increases when behaviour becomes:

- Escalating
- Persistent
- Detached from emotional vulnerability
- Paired with emotional numbness
- Resistant to usual containment

Aggression requires calm containment:

“I won’t let you hurt anyone.”

“We will calm this together.”

Safety first. Shame avoided.

When Behaviour Signals Risk

Seek support if:

- Behaviour worsens across settings
- Emotional withdrawal deepens
- Risk-taking increases
- You feel unable to maintain safety

Early intervention stabilises development.
