

Early Childhood Mistaken Goal Chart (How adults may contribute)

The child's goal is:	If the adult feels (thinks):	And tends to react by:	And if the child's response is:	The belief behind the child's behavior is:	The adult may contribute by thinking:	Coded messages	How the adult can help and encourage:
Undue Attention (To keep adults occupied or to get special service)	Annoyed Irritated ("I'm overwhelmed by how much you are demanding of me.") Worried Guilty ("What if I'm not doing enough for you?")	Reminding Coaxing Doing things that the child could do for himself	Stopping temporarily but resuming the same (or another) challenging behavior. Stopping when given one-to-one attention or something "special" is given.	I belong only when I'm being noticed or getting special service. I'm important only when I'm keeping you busy with me.	"I'm afraid I will hurt you by not giving you enough attention." "I feel guilty when you're not happy." "You won't feel supported if I don't clap and cheer for you." "It hurts to watch you struggle so I will do things for you."	Notice me and involve me usefully.	Redirect into contributing behavior ("I could really use your help."). Allow the child to experience feelings, including disappointment. Strengthen routines. Use more encouragement and less praise.
Misguided Power (To be the boss or to make sure the adult isn't)	Challenged Threatened ("You are NOT getting away with this! I'm going to make you do what I say.") Defeated ("It's just not worth fighting you over this.")	Pushing back harder. Setting rigid limits. Giving in just to avoid the battle.	Being angrily defiant. Escalating the battle. Throwing a tantrum	I belong and am capable only when I feel powerful on my terms. You can't make me do anything and you can't stop me, either	"This is a power struggle that I have to win!" "If I give in even an inch, this child will never learn that adults are in charge." "I can't bear the screaming. Just do what you want."	Let me help. Give me choices.	Use asking instead of telling. Seek help and contribution instead of compliance. Model withdrawing from the conflict to calm down. Find developmentally appropriate ways for the child to be powerful. Stay focused on finding solutions together (instead of arguing or giving in).
Revenge (To get even and hurt others)	Disbelieving Hurt Disappointed Embarrassed ("I can't believe you actually did this") Enraged: ("I'm going to hurt you back so you know how it feels".)	Retaliating and punishing angrily. Feeling personally injured. Worrying about what others might think.	Retaliating back. Hurting others. Damaging property. Escalating and perhaps finding an even more hurtful behavior.	I do NOT belong. This hurts me so deeply, I want to hurt you and others to show how it feels to be unloved and unvalued.	"This child is just mean!" "If I don't come down hard on this, the child will never learn." "If I let him get away with this, others will think I'm weak."	I'm hurting. Validate my feelings.	Validate hurt feelings first even when that seems difficult. Help the child manage emotions until he or she can do it without you. Use physical closeness as silent encouragement. Help make amends to those who have been hurt.
Assumed Inadequacy (To give up and simply be left alone)	Despair Hopeless ("I don't have a clue about what to do.") Helpless Inadequate ("Nothing is helping and nothing will help.")	Backing off and leaving the child alone. Giving up. Over-helping. Showing a lack of faith in the child.	Withdrawing even further inward. Showing no improvement or response. Refusing to try.	I can't belong and I am not capable. I can't live up to your expectations, so why try? It's no use trying because I won't do it right anyway.	"What is the problem? This isn't that hard." "I expect you to live up to my expectations." "I know you can't do this. Let me just take care of it."	Don't give up on me. Show me a small step	Teach skills by breaking them into small steps. Do with but don't do for the child. Use physical closeness as silent encouragement. Build on strengths and interests.