



## FORM & FUNCTION

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

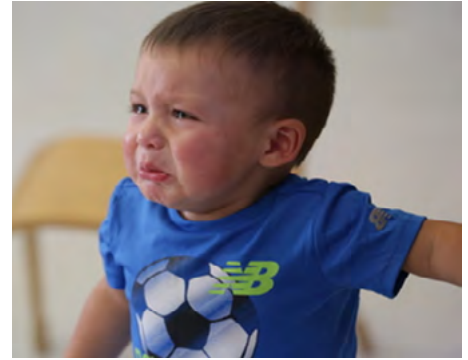
Each behavior has a reason or purpose and it is up to adults to figure out what the child is trying to communicate.

Each behavior has a:

**FORM** = the behavior the child is using to communicate

AND A

**FUNCTION** = the meaning of the behavior



Here are some examples of common forms and functions.

- Your infant cries about 30 minutes after she has had her bottle. The **FORM** is crying and the **FUNCTION** could be that she is tired and ready for a nap or is wet and needs a new diaper.
- You announce that dinner is ready, but instead of coming to the table, your preschooler runs around the living room. The **FORM** in this example is running around the room and the **FUNCTION** could be that he is excited that you made his favorite meal.

As you interact with your child, look for different behaviors that your child shows you and try to figure out the meaning of the behavior. When you respond to your child’s efforts to tell you what they want or need, they feel valued and important. They learn that you will “hang in there” and try to understand what they are communicating through their behavior.

Below is a list of common behaviors and their possible meanings to better help you figure out what your child is trying to communicate with their behaviors.

CHILD’S AGE	FORM	POSSIBLE FUNCTION	
Infant	Crying	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ I’m hungry</li> <li>■ I’m tired</li> <li>■ I’m wet</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ I want you to hold me</li> <li>■ I’m awake—come get me</li> <li>■ It is too noisy in here</li> </ul>
Toddler	Biting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ I want the toy another child has</li> <li>■ I’m teething</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ I am really frustrated</li> <li>■ You just told me “no” and I don’t like it</li> </ul>
Preschooler	Hitting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ I feel mad or frustrated</li> <li>■ I want you to stop talking on the phone and play with me</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ I don’t want to share my favorite toy</li> <li>■ You told me to stop doing something but I don’t want to stop</li> </ul>