

The Refrigerator List
Suggestions for decoding behaviors -- possible explanations
by Robert Spottswood, M.A., Norwich, Vermont

=====

Violence, picking fights

- (Chronic fear of being deserted. Feeling abandoned usually triggers rage in humans and primates.) The surest way to prevent desertion is to keep you mad and angry at me for fighting.
- Please stop me! I'm begging to feel contained and safe!
- I need closeness but do not deserve it; hitting is the safest way to be close, while disguising both my need and shame.
- My endless fear, sadness and loneliness only gets a moment of relief when I put it into other people and then laugh at them for feeling it for me. That temporarily numbs my own anguish -- when I can laugh at seeing others feel my anguish for me, outside of me.

Bizarre goofiness, endless pestering, whining

- I have to be in your thoughts all the time or I'm afraid I'll disappear (I feel empty inside; don't yet know who I am.) Are you thinking of me now? How about now? Now? Still? What about now?....
- I didn't have much for role models, so I provoke other people to react so I can observe them and try to learn.
- I'm so under-socialized, this is the best I can do. I'm so used to being called 'weird' it feels normal.
- Closeness terrifies me. This behavior keeps people annoyed and at a safe distance. Not hard at all.

'Hiding' behaviors (sneaking, tricking, lying, stealing, hoarding, cheating, shoplifting,.....all very annoying!)

- I know I'll be kicked out of this home, so I have to practice hiding and sneaking for when I must survive on my own.
- I don't deserve to have my needs met. You don't realize that yet, but I realize it. Nobody will give me anything I need after they realize how bad I am. Sneaking will be my only way to survive.

- Depending on adults is like volunteering for a concentration camp; not possible, not on radar, can't happen ever again!
- Since I am a shameful being, but you think I'm good, I'll try to preserve our doomed relationship as long as possible; I will sneak around and lie to protect you from the horrible reality of who I am; because you are so nice.
- Lying is my way of trying to tell you about my past; it's what I had to learn in order to get along in my old life. Can you talk to me about that, or are you just too freaked out by lying to help me integrate my past nightmare life?

Oppositional defiance

- I need to feel safe by maintaining control. So whenever you suggest something, I immediately say NO, to create some safe space to think it over. Then maybe I can say Yes. This is me coping. And it starts over every time. Sorry. Help!
- Saying 'I'm not coming!' and then screaming 'Don't leave me!!' recreates an early conflict drama, over and over. I'm trying to work it out, and need help, but can't accept help. (If that doesn't make sense, welcome to my world.) All my shame about this I must project onto you: you're wrong, you're mean, you're stupid; I have to make my failure be about you. (It hurts too much that it's really about me.)

Letting adults down, disappointing them

- Positive adults make no sense to me. All I can do is humor them until I run away or fight again, and watch their fragile dreams for me crumble over and over. Are they stupid?
- The horrors I lived through (including neglect) are not even in the middle class vocabulary of conceivable experiences, so what do I do with these nice people? Let them think their big thoughts and make their big plans for me, until I have to act out my real shame, letting them down over and over. Sorry, nice people.
- Get over your disappointment and stop caring about me. I did.

Avoiding

- You're moving too fast. First I need emotional safety. Second I need you to co-regulate my emotions. Lastly I might talk about all your great ideas..... But make me feel safe first.
- Getting involved with closeness or even with conversation means getting vulnerable. Can't happen ever again, thanks to my past.
- I never learned normal conversation, so I feel stupid when you talk to me. Just leave me alone so I don't feel stupid.

Blowing up when told No; zero frustration tolerance; big rages when limits are set

- I'm stuck back in the Toddler's Dilemma, back when kids normally come to accept that grown-ups who love us can also say No, and may set limits. I never had to resolve that back then, and I'm still trying to intimidate and terrify people into always saying Yes. I need help learning this lesson late, sorry. Please help. (But remember that I have to reject your help. Good luck, and don't give up!)
- Too much choice, freedom, and independence! And too soon! I can't handle it, but I can't refuse it either – just like if you let me drive the car. I'm stuck! Please step up to the plate, take charge, and don't let me intimidate you out of it, because I'm really stuck. Did I mention that I'm stuck? Need more Momma! Need more Papa!
- Though I can't ask for help, I need help – it is scary to be aging with only infant skills to handle frustration. So please be confident, be in charge, figure me out, and set loving yet firm limits I can struggle with, early and often until I am done with that struggle and can move on. I don't need screen time, electronics, or stuff. I need parents and I need them to be in charge. I'm just a kid trying to figure out complicated stuff. (This is so frustrating....)