

When Your Kids Push Your Buttons

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Part One

I. Identifying Your Buttons

"She's doing that on purpose!"

II. Changing Your Perception

"Wait. She's having a problem, not being a problem."

III. What Did You Expect?

"Why won't he do what I want?"

IV. Adjusting Your Expectations

"Do my expectations meet up to my child?"

Goal for this class:

To raise awareness of the assumptions and expectations we hold about ourselves and our children that result in our ineffective reactions to our children's behavior; to take responsibility for those assumptions and expectations and reframe them into conscious intentions of parenting that break old patterns and foster connection with our children.

Identifying Your Buttons

You know your button has been pushed when:

- You react in ways you hate and blame your child for your reaction—The Road Rage of Parenting
- You feel anger, rage, hopelessness, guilt, resentment, etc.
- You regret your reaction and know it is not effective
- You get into power struggles and are out to win
- You hear your mother or father coming out of your mouth saying words you swore you never would
- You either explode or implode
- You project your child into later years and catastrophize
- This behavior often doesn't phase your spouse
- Your child reminds you of a relative you hate
- You know you could never have gotten away with what your child just did

What does your child do that pushes your buttons?

How do you feel when that happens?

How do you react when that happens?

Your Agenda – Example

Recently, when my agenda was to get to the supermarket before my older
(get somewhere or do something)
child was due home from school my child pushed my button by
having a tantrum when I was trying to get him to put his coat on.

I reacted by getting really angry and yelling at him because I thought
he should realize that I had to do this and be considerate of me for once
(what you expected your child to do)

My reaction may have had a lot to do with my agenda because I was in a hurry
because I had been on the phone and now I didn't have much time

Some other things that were loading my agenda might have been the fact that
my husband criticized the dinner I made the night before saying we have
the same thing all the time. I wanted to tell him to make dinner from now on.
Also I had just found out that my cousin was diagnosed with cancer.

My child's agenda at the time was to stay home because his favorite show was
coming on TV. And he hates going to the supermarket. The last time we
there he had a tantrum and I got angry at him.

If I had acknowledged my child's agenda, I could have said I know you don't want
to go. Let's tape your show and you can watch it as soon as we get home.

Your Agenda

Recently, when my agenda was to _____
(get somewhere or do something)

_____ my child pushed my button by
_____.

I reacted by _____ because

I thought _____
(what you expected your child to do)

My reaction may have had a lot to do with my agenda because _____

Some other things that were loading my agenda might have been _____

My child's agenda at the time was to _____

If I had acknowledged my child's agenda, I could have said / done _____

The Gap

Intention:
To motivate

Message Received:
Opposite of Intention

Why can't you just do your homework?!! You're so lazy. Do you want to flunk the 5th grade??

I can't get anything right. Nobody understands me. Mom expects me to be perfect. I'm not wanted in this family.



Reaction



Agenda
Stressed
Worried
Catastrophizing
Hurried

Agenda
Tired
Slow temperament
Feels powerless
Peer problems

Intention

Gap Example:

Adam has just screamed, "I hate you" at his mother, Ellen, after she turned off the television and insisted he begin his homework. Ellen got her button pushed.

Ellen's intention	Ellen's Agenda	What Ellen yells	What Adam hears
To teach Adam to treat her with respect	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> tired and tense hard day at work thinks Adam is rude fears her son will grow up to be disrespectful is upset about a fight she had with husband has to get dinner ready and doesn't know what to cook forgot an important phone call 	"Don't you ever talk to me like that again. You get to your room this minute. And no TV for the rest of the week."	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> You can't ever do anything right. You're always a problem. <p>And thinks</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Nobody cares about me or lets me do what I want. I always have to do what she wants. I'll show her.

Ellen's intention is to teach Adam to speak respectfully.

Adam's temperament, stage of development, present emotion and present activity all influence the state in which he receives the message. He may even scream more, stamp off and slam doors. The message has not been received as Ellen intended. Trust, respect, connection, and balance cannot be attained when there is a GAP.

Respecting Adam's agenda:

Had Ellen said, "I know I'm interrupting your program, but I need to know when you are planning to do your homework. I understood it was now." Adam would not feel blamed and probably would not react so defensively. If he still reacted with anger (due to more agenda pieces) and Ellen had not taken Adam's words personally, she could have then said, "You sound really angry with me. I'm going to come back in 3 minutes and would like you to tell me then what you want to say in a way that I can hear it."

This can lead to problem-solving the situation so that both Ellen and Adam can feel acknowledged and come to an agreement about homework.

When your button gets pushed:

Typically we think:

BEHAVIOR



REACTION

Words
Attitude
A look
An event

Yelling
Punishing
Blaming
Giving up

Your behavior causes me to REACT the way I do:
"Why do you always make me yell at you?"

Or we think:

BEHAVIOR



EMOTION



REACTION

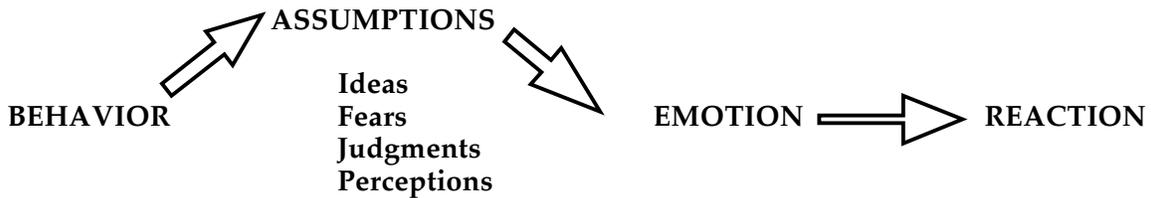
Words
Attitude
A look
An event

Anger
Frustration
Resentment
Exhaustion

Yelling
Punishing
Blaming
Giving up

Your behavior causes me to FEEL the way I do:
"You make me so mad!"

But what really happens is:



When you behave this way, I make up IDEAS that provoke feelings that cause me to react the way I do:

When you behave like that, I THINK that you are being mean and AFRAID that I have not taught you how to behave properly. It is this PERCEPTION that causes me to FEEL angry and then to REACT.

Naming Your Buttons – Homework – Week 1

In the left column write the behaviors, attitudes, words, etc. that your child does that push your buttons. In the middle column, write how you feel when they happen. In the right column, write what you typically do, how you react.

Behavior	Emotion	Reaction

Now write down what thoughts, judgments, perceptions, assumptions of *you* or *your child* lead you to feel the way you do when your button gets pushed.

When my child _____
(button pushing behavior)

The instant thoughts that go through my head are _____

Some typical assumptions:

She's a spoiled brat
He's a monster
He never listens
She's rude and disrespectful
He's just like my brother
She's out to get me
He's looking for a fight
She's being so mean
He's going to end up a bum

I'm out of control
I'm a failure as a parent
This feels hopeless
Here we go again
What have I done wrong?
I can't ever get her to do anything
He's so lazy
She forgets everything
She's just manipulating me

Steps for Reframing Your Assumptions

1. Acknowledge and accept the emotions you feel. Don't try to change them.
2. Take responsibility for your emotions and reactions. Don't blame your child.
3. Realize that it was an automatic assumption that caused your reaction.
4. Ask: What must I have been thinking in order to make me feel that way?
5. Realize that your assumptions (thoughts) are your perceptions, and that your child or anyone else may have a very different perception.
6. Check accuracy. Ask yourself how realistic your assumptions really are.
7. Write down some corresponding but different ideas—observations—that might be more accurate.

Here are some additional questions to stimulate your thinking:

- What am I afraid of?
- What is it about my child's behavior that gets to me?
- Who does my child remind me of?
- How would my parents have reacted if I had done that?
- Do I secretly wish I could express the same impulses she does?
- What is it about my child I am not accepting?
- What was my agenda at the time?
- What was my child's agenda?
- What was my intention when I reacted? What happened to it?
- How did my child hear it across the gap?
- What is my child's behavior trying to tell me?

Reframing Assumptions

Old Assumption (Judgment)	Reframed Assumption (Observation)
She thinks the whole world revolves around her.	She is in an egocentric stage of development and naturally wants what she wants when she wants it.
He's being mean and hurtful to his brother.	He has a very hard time when his brother is around. He is probably feeling jealous right now.
Her demands are sucking me dry.	She is a very persistent child, and I have a hard time parenting her alone.
He's lazy and he'll never graduate.	He hates school. He is having a hard time being motivated to do anything he doesn't want to do.

Now try your own:

Old Assumption	Reframed Assumption

Assumptions Cause Emotions – Example

When my child acts stubborn and persistent about everything he wants
(button-pushing behavior)

I feel angry and scared and I often react by punishing him - sending him to his room - yelling at him to leave me alone.

My assumptions about my child when I see this behavior are that he will never take no for an answer, he will never listen, and nobody will ever like him.
(even the horrible thoughts you would never tell anybody!)

My assumptions about myself are that I will never have control over him and I will never get a moment's peace. I don't have a clue how to handle him.

I can change my assumptions to be more accurate when I say to myself that my child doesn't like to be told "no" but listens when I say what he can do instead
(a different perspective of your child or the behavior)

and that I can learn how to handle him better and can acknowledge his agenda more often. I need to make sure that I take time for myself to get refueled.
(a different perspective of yourself or your behavior)

These new assumptions help me feel calmer, a little more confident, and more understanding of where he's coming from and what I need.
(different emotions generated by new perspective)

If I feel this way more often, I will be able to stop screaming so much and listen to what he is trying to tell me.

Assumptions Cause Emotions

When my child _____
(button-pushing behavior)

I feel _____ and I often react by _____
_____.

My assumptions about my child when I see this behavior are that _____

(even the horrible thoughts you would never tell anybody!)

My assumptions about myself are that _____
_____.

I can change my assumptions to be more accurate when I say to myself that my
child _____
(a different perspective of your child or the behavior)
and that I _____

(a different perspective of yourself or your behavior)

These new assumptions help me feel _____

(different emotions generated by new perspective)

If I feel this way more often, I will be able to _____
_____.

Identifying Your Assumptions - Homework - Week 2 – Example

Identify Behaviors

Take special note during the week of the behaviors (may even be minor or insignificant) of your child pushing your button. Write down a phrase or two that describe the behavior. These are behaviors that are persistent rather than a one-time inappropriate behavior, such as:

- *My son is so loud, even when he's happy, he's loud.*
- *He talks to me with an attitude that says, 'you stupid jerk.'*
- *She demands my attention endlessly.*

Identify Your Assumptions, your thoughts / perceptions / fears / catastrophizing about you or your child:

- *When he's so loud, it's like he's yelling at me, like I've done something wrong, and he's punishing me!*
- *When he gets that attitude, I think he's a spoiled brat, who never thinks of anyone else. He's going to be a bum, alone and friendless. Who will ever like him with an attitude like that?*
- *When she demands my attention, I'm afraid I'll never get anything done, that there's nothing left of me, that I'll never get to do anything I want. There's either something wrong with her or me. I can't give her enough.*

Identify Your Emotions, the feelings your assumptions provoke in you:

- *When he's so loud, I feel shut in—like the walls are closing in on me.*
- *When he gets that attitude, I feel enraged.*
- *When she demands my attention, I feel angry and resentful but also guilty and hopeless that I'm not enough for her—that I'm not a better mother.*

Identify the Agendas

Yours:

I had a very unpleasant phone call from my mother. I felt rushed and like I can't ever get anything done. I had to do the bank work that is way overdue. My husband is away on business and I had to do everything myself. I had a cold. I really wished I could have just taken a walk or gone to a movie by myself.

Your Child's:

He wanted me to play with him. He was frustrated with his legos not doing what he wanted - he couldn't get the pieces together. He's always angry at his sister because she's bigger and gets to do things he can't. He's strong willed and stubborn and has a hard time letting go of what he wants and moving on. He was hungry and tired. He wanted me to himself.

Your Reframed Assumptions

- *He's a loud, boisterous child. He's not doing it on purpose. It's who he is. When I calmly ask him to lower his voice or go outside, he will.*
- *When he gets that attitude, it means he's feeling really frustrated with something. It's my cue.*
- *She is a high needs child. She has a hard time being or playing by herself. She likes constant interaction. It's tiring, and I can't do it all myself.*

Identifying Your Assumptions - Homework - Week 2

Identify Behaviors

Identify Your Assumptions

Identify Your Emotions

Identify the Agendas

Yours:

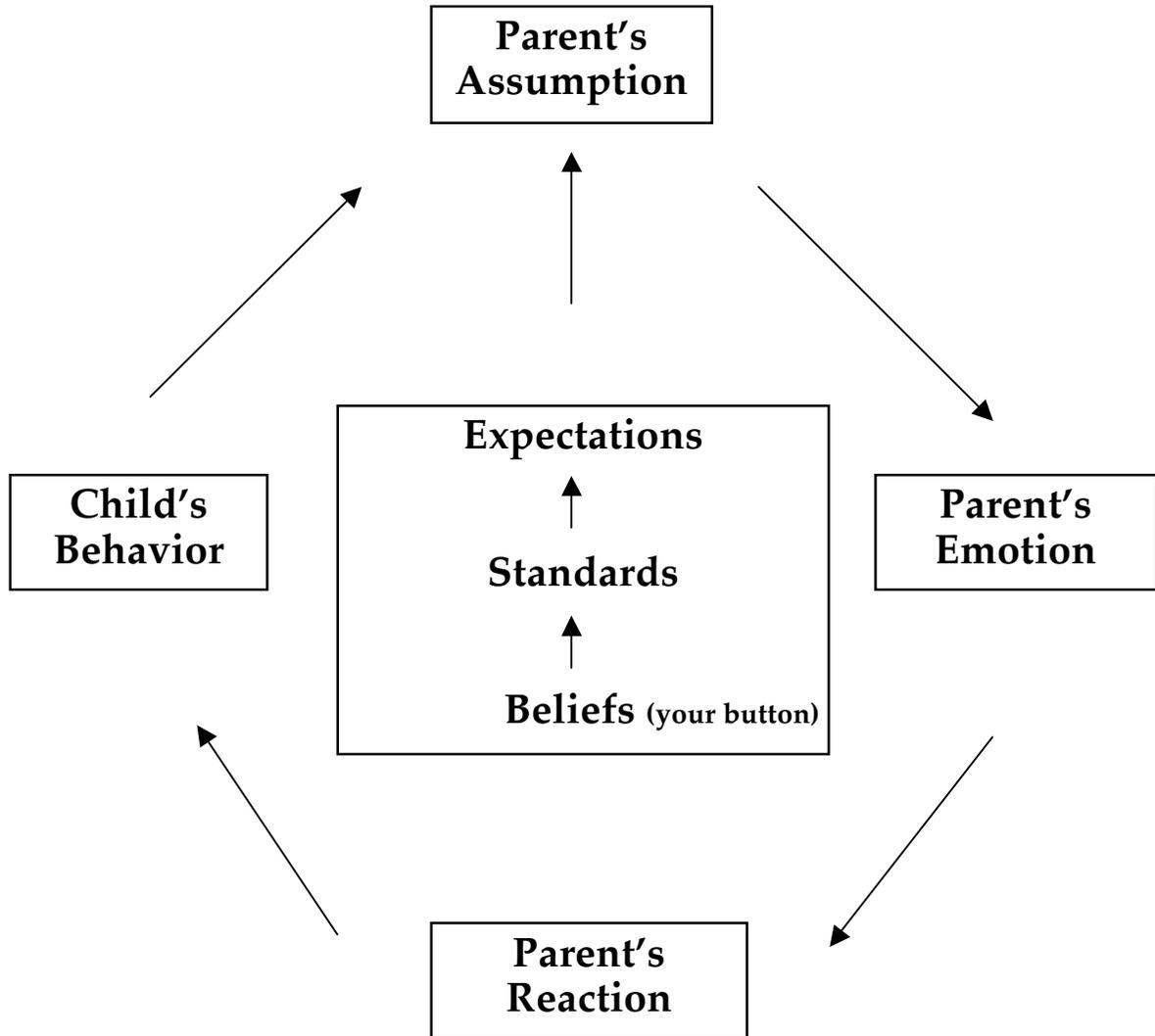
Your Child's:

Reframe Your Assumptions

Practice 1: Become aware of your thinking

- When your child has said or done something that triggers feelings of anger, resentment, guilt, etc. in you, know that those feelings generate from your thinking. The key to defusing your buttons is to stop your thinking for the moment so you can drop into a state of just being in the moment. In that state, you will not catastrophize and can connect.
- Notice your emotions rising. Notice the pain/emotions you are feeling.
- Do everything in your power to *not react*.
- Become aware of what your mind is doing - what it is saying to you—
"How dare she do that to me," "Why won't he ever do what I say?" "She's driving me crazy," "I can't take this anymore."
- Your mind is creating the pain not your child. Your child is triggering your mind.
- The pain you are creating is always some form of non-acceptance and resistance to what is happening based on fear (what you or your child are not doing right). That fear is based only on the thoughts your mind is generating. It is your *perception* of what is happening.
- Become aware of your perception as being just yours. Perhaps not the same as someone else's. Your perception is not the Truth. It is your mind's creation which then becomes thought.
- For now, do nothing more than become aware of this process. Remind yourself of what your mind goes through again and again. You don't need to know why, you don't need to correct it or stop it, just become aware of it. It happens to everyone.

The Expanded Chain Reaction



Expectations that may lead to ineffective reactions:

My child should:

- listen to me and do what I say
- be polite and considerate
- love his sister and be kind
- be outgoing
- be ready to leave when I tell her
- be appreciative
- not be so needy
- wear a coat, use the toilet, go to sleep, eat or not eat when I say
- be happy at the party, circus
- share toys
- love school and do well in it
- go to bed when I want
- want to get out of diapers
- be cautious, careful
- be cooperative

add your own:

I should:

- be patient
- never get angry
- always be understanding
- be able to parent the way I want to
- raise children who do well in school
- know everything about child development
- be able to sit down and read a book if I want
- not have to always be the one to be understanding
- be available to my children all the time
- have my children well behaved
- train my children to be good
- be consistent
- never have to remind
- to always have the answer

add your own:

Add "always" and "never" to understand how these expectations are perceived by your child.

Determining My Expectations – Example

Recently when my child pushed my button by saying I couldn't make him put his shoes on – that he was staying home, my assumption/ fear/ perception was that he was being defiant and disobedient and would never listen. What I expected my child to do/ not do was to listen to me and put his shoes on when I told him to

S/he could not be successful meeting this expectation because he hates being told what to do and has a hard time making transitions of any kind

The expectation my child heard across the Gap was You will do what I tell you to do when I tell you to do it – always
(add always, never or at all times)

I reacted by forcing his shoes on and telling him that he'd better listen to me in the future

which was not effective because he resisted and made the job harder and longer

My child's agenda at the time was to stay home and play with his trucks

And my agenda was to get out the door because I had nothing in the house for dinner

If I had considered all of this, my expectation might adjust to of course he wants to play with his trucks. He will be more cooperative when I respect his agenda. If that had been the case, I would have responded by being more patient, acknowledging what he wanted and motivating him to help me.

Determining My Expectations

Recently when my child pushed my button by _____

_____, my assumption/ fear/ perception was that

_____. What I expected my

child to do/not do was _____

S/he could not be successful meeting this expectation because _____

The expectation my child heard across the Gap was _____

(add always, never or at all times)

I reacted by _____

which was not effective because _____

My child's agenda at the time was _____

And my agenda was _____

If I had considered all of this, my expectation might adjust to _____

_____. If that had been the case,

I would have responded by _____

The Buttons

The Approval Button
The Control Button
The Appreciation Button
The Fix-It Button

The Responsibility Button
The Incompetence Button
The Guilt Button
The Resentment Button

Some characteristics of each:

Approval: You often see your child as a reflection of yourself and fear embarrassment or exposure as a bad parent if your child misbehaves. You may have to still work hard for your parent's approval and seek it from others.

Control: Controlling parents are a step away from the fear that they will lose control if they "let up" or "give in." You likely demand a certain degree of obedience and perfection in yourself and your children. Your agenda is most important. You do not have a hard time saying "no" to your child.

Appreciation: You likely lacked appreciation from your parents, or you were forced to be appreciative so now when your child doesn't appreciate all you do for him, i.e. the new pants you bought him, how lucky he is, you see red. Appreciation from others helps you feel okay about yourself.

Fix-It: Fixers feel responsible for everything going smoothly and everyone feeling good. You want to make life easy for your child and go out of your way to cheer her up and solve her problems. Either it's simply easy to do it yourself or you see it as your job. You are there to pick up the pieces for everyone but you.

Responsibility: You probably tend to hover, nag, and patrol your children's activities, because you feel responsible for them doing everything right. You fear your child's incapability without your prodding, pushing, and directing them about what to do and when to do it. Everything feels like your job.

Incompetence: You likely feel powerless, sometimes hopeless, to make your influence felt or to be authoritative. You may feel that your children walk all over you. You are at a loss as to how to get them to stop, listen, or cooperate.

Guilt: Guilty parents tend to do too much, buy too much, give too much to their children who they assume is losing out or missing out on something. You tend to put more importance on your child's needs than your own to make up for something.

Resentment: The resentful parent loses it when she feels taken for granted. You want your child to have to pull his own weight so will not have to constantly do for him. His neediness causes resentment when you think that you have done enough and shouldn't have to keep going the extra mile.

Read Part II for more details and stories.

Your Expectations – Homework – week 3

This week pay special attention to a button-pushing situation and answer the following:

1. How did you react? Why?
2. What did you expect of your child in that situation?
3. Could your child meet it successfully? Why / why not?
4. What did you expect of yourself?
5. Could you meet it successfully? Why / why not?
6. What was your child's agenda at the time? And yours?
7. How could you have balanced them or respected them?
8. What was the behavior – both yours and your child's – trying to tell you?
9. How could you adjust your expectation so your child would be more successful meeting it?

Old Expectations

Adjusted Expectations

<p>My children should be considerate and respectful of others—never selfish.</p>	<p>Children are naturally egocentric and selfish. They are focused on their own agendas. With respect and modeling, they will respect others.</p>
<p>She should love her brother and always get along without fighting.</p>	<p>She has a hard time when her brother is around. He gets in her way and in her things. I expect her to feel angry about it.</p>
<p>I expect him to be able to take care of himself and not be so needy.</p>	<p>He has a hard time being on his own. He has different needs than his sister and needs more help from me.</p>
<p>She should get good grades. If she doesn't, that means she's lazy and will never be successful in life.</p>	<p>I can't make her succeed the way I want her to. If she's not doing well, it means she's not feeling motivated or something is going on that is upsetting her.</p>
<p>I expect my child to listen to me and do what I say without repeating myself ten times.</p>	<p>Of course my child will be focused on his own agenda. To gain his cooperation, I need to acknowledge his agenda, allow him to have his feelings, and motivate him to help.</p>
<p>It's my job to make the right choices and decisions for my children all the time.</p>	<p>I do my best to make good decisions, and I know that I am not perfect. I can't expect to do it all alone. I don't have to have all the answers.</p>
<p>I am responsible for my child's happiness and success in school and life.</p>	<p>I am responsible for everything I say and do and the opportunities I provide. My child is responsible for what he does with this and how he feels about it.</p>

Adjusting My Expectations – Example

When my child pushes my button by getting really clingy and needy,

what I expect of my child is that he should be able to take care of himself,

be self-reliant and not dependent on me for help and what I expect of myself

is that I should know how to raise my children to take care of themselves

What I experienced as a child in this area was being left to myself and my own

devices. No one really cared where I was or what I was doing - very laissez-faire.

because my mother / father were both involved in their own lives and didn't have

much time for me. There were 4 of us and my parents had had it by the time I arrived

The message I got on the other side of The Gap was I wasn't as important as my

sisters, and no one really cared about what I did

This negatively affects my parenting today by keeping me from helping him

and forcing him to do things himself. I worry that he's never going to be able to take

care of himself and will always be dependent on others

My expectation can change when I understand that I am pushing him away

when I react the way I do which makes him need me all the more. He will be more

independent when he can trust that I am there for him.

Adjusting My Expectations

When my child pushes my button by _____

What I expect of my child is _____

_____ and what I expect of myself is

What I experienced as a child in this area was _____

because my mother/father _____

The message I got on the other side of The Gap was _____

This negatively affects my parenting today by _____

My expectation can change when I understand that _____

The Nine Habits to Defusing Your Buttons

1. Become aware of what happens to you physically when your button gets pushed. Do your hands sweat, does your throat tighten, stomach hurt, etc?
2. Breathing is not to be overlooked or underrated. Focusing on the breath, counting inhales and exhales, can help you cool down and feel more grounded.
3. Note the feelings that come up for you when your button gets pushed. Be specific. Anger covers up fear, many feelings fall under anger.
4. Ask yourself, *What must I have been thinking to feel the way I did?* Make note of these thoughts, whether or not you think they are justified. These assumptions are what provoke your emotions and then your reactions.
5. Don't take it personally. You can't see the situation objectively, nor respond effectively when you do. Try not to react at all before you breathe and detach. You can always come back to a situation when emotions are calm.
6. Detach. It's not about you. If your child is doing something inappropriate, even to you, it's not about you. He is having a problem. Detaching means maintaining a degree of neutrality and objectivity so you can help.
7. Witness. Watch yourself. Develop that witness voice that watches you react and says, "Why are you doing/saying that? You know that's not going to work." Listen to it. With detachment, you will be more creative with problem solving.
8. Use affirmative self-talk, which is a counter process to the easily accessed negative voices that put ourselves and our children down.
 - silently go over what happened and why
 - remind yourself of the assumptions you made
 - consider both agendas
 - reframe your assumptions so your perception and thus feelings change
 - consider whether or not your expectations are realistic or appropriate.
9. Adjust your expectation to one your child can meet successfully.

What to Do When My Button Gets Pushed

- **Stop! Don't React!** Walk away
- **Breathe** - focus on inhale and exhale
- **Detach! Detach! Detach!**
- Look for the **root** of the **Behavior**
- **Self- Talk:**
 - What's my **Agenda**? What's my child's?
 - What am I **Feeling**?
 - If I **feel** that way, what must my **Assumptions** be about my child or myself to provoke those feelings?
 - What do I **expect**? Of my child? Of myself?
 - What is my child's **behavior** trying to tell me?
- **Change** my perspective
 - Don't take it personally
 - My child is *having* a problem, not *being* a problem
- Reach across the Gap and **Connect**
- Identify my Limiting **Beliefs**
- Adjust my **Expectations**

Defusing Your Buttons Worksheet

Behavior _____

Emotion _____

Reaction _____

Assumption _____

Expectation _____

Reframed Assumption _____

Changed Emotion _____

Adjusted Expectation _____

New Response _____

Behavior _____

Emotion _____

Reaction _____

Assumption _____

Expectation _____

Reframed Assumption _____

Changed Emotion _____

Adjusted Expectation _____

New Response _____

Behavior _____

Emotion _____

Reaction _____

Assumption _____

Expectation _____

Reframed Assumption _____

Changed Emotion _____

Adjusted Expectation _____

New Response _____

Notes:

Notes:

This workbook was designed to accompany a "When Your Kids Push Your Buttons" parent workshop. If you are using it on it's own, be sure to work with it along with reading the book, "When Your Kids Push Your Buttons and What You Can Do About It".