

The attack-defend process causes us to lose the ability to reach or teach others. It also leads us to punish ourselves when we make a mistake. The blame we heap on ourselves keeps us in the lower centers of our brain, believing the messages on our CD-Roms. We often feel bad about ourselves (limbic state) but seem paralyzed to resolve our problems (problem-solving is an executive state function). We cannot simultaneously feel bad about our situation and focus on what we must do to change it. It is our choice to bask in guilt or improve our lives.

There is a better way to help our children handle conflict. Since conflicts arise when we proceed without first winning cooperation, we must do something to confirm ourselves as allies at the very beginning of an exchange. We can do this by assuming that the child's motives are positive. Instead of seeing the child as bad or trying to make life difficult, shift that perception! Assume the child is simply trying to achieve a goal but lacks the appropriate skills to do so.

Activity to Determine Mark's True Intent

When Mark grabbed the bears, what do you think was his intention? Check one:

- He wanted to keep the other children from learning math.
- He wanted to humiliate the teacher in front of the other children.
- He wanted to disrespect the teacher's authority.
- He wanted to make sure he got enough counting bears.

Answer: The truth is we don't know Mark's intention. We make it up. If we are going to make it up, we might as well make it positive. When we define children positively, we hold them in high esteem, keeping both the child and ourselves in a higher brain state. The first three choices attributed negative intent, while the last response attributes positive motives to Mark.

If we are going to make up a child's intention, we might as well make it positive!

When we attribute positive motives to a child's behavior, we position ourselves to teach and the child to learn. We also model respect and loving kindness. Picture yourself again as little Mark. You have just grabbed all the counting bears. Your teacher approaches and says, "Mark, you wanted to be sure you have enough counting bears. I want you to have enough, too. Count out 10 bears for yourself and 10 bears for each person at the table." Can you feel how beginning the interaction with positive intent is more likely to elicit cooperation? The following further illustrates the contrast between negative and positive intent: