Ashling Podmore
Child Emotional Wellbeing Educator

Free Parent Guide

7 Things Children Quietly Believe

When a Grown Up's Behaviour Feels Unpredictable



Understanding the thoughts children often carry silently.

Ashling Podmore

Children's Emotional Well being Educator

What Children May Be Thinking Beneath the Surface

Children do not always say what they are thinking.

When something in their world feels confusing or unpredictable, they often try to make sense of it quietly inside their own minds.

Many children come to conclusions about themselves that are not actually true.

These beliefs are rarely spoken out loud, but they can shape how safe a child feels, how they respond to big feelings, and how they see themselves.

When we understand what children might be thinking underneath the surface, it becomes much easier to respond in ways that support their confidence and emotional safety.

This guide contains the seven beliefs children often carry quietly, the behaviours you may notice as a result of these beliefs and the simple things you can say and do to help.



Reminder!

The behaviours we see often begin with thoughts children cannot yet explain.



1. “It must be my fault.”

When a grown up reacts suddenly or behaves in ways that feel confusing, children often assume they must have caused it.

They may replay the moment in their mind and wonder what they did wrong. Children’s brains naturally look for causes and patterns.

You might notice:
Your child apologising frequently, becoming very sensitive to perceived criticism, or sometimes having emotional outbursts that seem unrelated.

What helps:
Children need to know that grown ups are responsible for their own feelings and reactions.

Children need to hear:
“It is not your fault.”

2. “I need to fix this.”

Some children begin to believe it is their job to make things better. They may try to be extra helpful, extra quiet, or extra good.

Over time, this can lead children to feel responsible for other people’s emotions.

You might notice:
Your child trying to keep everyone happy, stepping in to calm situations down, or taking on a “little helper” role when tensions rise.

What helps:
Remind children that their job is simply to be a child. Grown ups take care of grown up feelings.

Children need to hear:
“It is not your job to fix grown up feelings.”





3. “I need to be very careful.”

When reactions feel unpredictable, some children become very aware of tone of voice, facial expressions, and small changes in people’s mood.

Their nervous system is simply trying to stay safe by predicting what might happen next.

You might notice:
Your child seeking reassurance by asking if everything is okay, or repeatedly checking that they are not in trouble.

What helps:
Consistency and predictable routines help children’s nervous systems relax.

Children need to hear:
“There is nothing you can do that will stop me loving you.”

4. “My feelings might be too much.”

If a child senses that their feelings make things harder for a grown up, they may begin hiding them.

They might stop sharing worries or sadness because they do not want to cause problems.

You might notice:
Your child going along with what others want to do, hesitating to express their own wants or opinions, or changing how they behave depending on who they are with.

What helps:
Children need to know their feelings are welcome and safe to talk about.

Children need to hear:
“It is okay to have different thoughts to others. Your feelings matter too.”





5. “I should keep this to myself.”

Children are often very protective of the adults around them.

Sometimes they feel responsible for protecting family members from information that might cause conflict or upset.

You might notice:
Your child becoming unusually quiet or guarded when conversations touch on something they feel they must keep secret.

What helps:
Create spaces where children know they can talk freely without fear.

Children need to hear:
“It is better to share it so we can solve it together than keep it inside.”

6. “Love can disappear quickly.”



If warmth and upset appear close together, children may begin to worry about whether love will suddenly change.

Because connection feels uncertain, some children begin looking for extra reassurance that they are still safe, loved and valued.

You might notice:
Your child showing attention seeking behaviours to gain reassurance, or asking questions such as “Do you love it when I do this?” or “Do you still love me?”

What helps:
Consistent reassurance and stable relationships help children rebuild their sense of security.

Children need to hear:
“I will love you forever and always.”



7. “Maybe I just need to try harder.”

Some children respond by trying to become perfect. They hope that if they behave well enough, everything will stay calm.

While this can look like very good behaviour on the surface, it can also place a big burden on a child.

You might notice:
Your child trying very hard to be perfect, becoming upset over small mistakes, or sometimes demonstrating controlling behaviours because they believe that if they manage the situation carefully enough they can manage the outcome.

What helps:
Remind children that they are valued for who they are, not for being perfect.

Children need to hear:
“You are loved exactly as you are.”

Important reassurance for parents

If you recognise some of these patterns in your child, please know this is more common than many people realise.

Children are very good at trying to make sense of confusing situations.

Their behaviour is often a signal of what their nervous system is trying to manage.

The good news is that small moments of understanding, reassurance, and consistency can make a powerful difference.

Children do not need perfect parents.

They need adults who help them understand their feelings and remind them they are safe, valued, and not responsible for adult emotions.



HELLO, I'M ASHLING.

I am a mum of two and step mum of three.

A few years ago, after leaving a difficult relationship, my children began transitioning between two homes.

Over time I began noticing changes in their behaviour.

They would ask questions that were hard to answer.

"Why did they shout for no reason?"
"Why does my tummy feel funny when it's time to go?"
"Do you think they will be nice this week?"

At the same time they began coping in different ways.

My daughter began having meltdowns, night terrors and attention seeking behaviour.

My son became increasingly compliant. He apologised constantly and often sought reassurance that everything was okay.

What struck me most was that they rarely spoke about how they actually felt.

Not because they did not feel anything, but because they simply did not have the words.

That is why I began writing the **Sam series.**

These books help children understand confusing adult behaviour in a child friendly way and help them recognise feelings they may not yet know how to express.

I also created the **Alex series**, which helps children understand the protective coping responses they sometimes develop and explore healthier ways to grow beyond them as they get older.

These books were written for my own children first. I am now releasing them so other families can benefit from them too.

Today I support parents as a child emotional wellbeing educator, helping them understand their children's behaviour and respond in ways that support emotional safety and confidence.

You can find all my book series plus additional free guides and resources for parents on my website here:

https://ashlingpodmore.systeme.io

I would love to have you there.

Ashling