

Illustrated Card Sets — Quarter 1

Two new methods for Reading the Signal and Regulating Together, each fully explained before a single card, then a print-and-prop card sequence.

Document 6 of 12

Introduced in Weeks 3 and 8 of your Quarter 1 Roadmap

What Is the Function Detective Method?

Before a single card, let's make sure this idea is completely clear — nothing here is assumed.



WHAT DOES THIS ACTUALLY MEAN?

The Function Detective Method is a repeatable, four-step way of looking at any hard behavior: notice what happened right before it (the antecedent), notice the behavior itself plainly, notice what happened right after it (the consequence), and make an honest guess at which of four common functions — escape, attention, access, or sensory — it's most likely serving. Think of it like a detective walking a scene: nothing is assumed, everything is observed first, and the guess comes last, not first.



WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF DOING THIS?

The purpose is to replace guesswork and frustration with a genuine process you can return to for ANY behavior, at any age, for the rest of your child's life — not a one-time fix, but a permanent way of thinking.



WHAT DO WE HOPE TO ACHIEVE?

We hope that, over time, reaching for this method becomes as natural as reaching for a first-aid kit: automatic, calm, and genuinely useful, whatever the specific behavior turns out to be.



HOW DOES THIS ACTUALLY HELP THE CHILD?

Functional behavior assessment — identifying the message or purpose behind a behavior before choosing a response — is a recognised, evidence-based practice for supporting children with autism ^[1]

LAGOS, NIGERIA

A mother used to feel completely stuck every time her son refused to leave the park. The first time she walked through all four steps on paper, she realised the refusal reliably delayed the walk home — a request she'd been giving with almost no warning at all.

The Function Detective Method — Cards 1–4



THE FUNCTION DETECTIVE
METHOD · STEP 1 OF 7

The Function Detective Method

A repeatable four-step way to understand any hard behavior.

Gentle Progress Family · Cut along the dashed line,
prop it up



THE FUNCTION DETECTIVE
METHOD · STEP 2 OF 7

Pick ONE specific behavior to investigate —
not every hard moment at once.

*Why: Investigating one behavior at a time keeps
the method usable instead of overwhelming.*

Gentle Progress Family · Cut along the dashed line,
prop it up



THE FUNCTION DETECTIVE
METHOD · STEP 3 OF 7

Write the Antecedent: what happened in the
five minutes right before it.

*Why: Most antecedents are invisible until you
deliberately rewind and look for them.*

Gentle Progress Family · Cut along the dashed line,
prop it up



THE FUNCTION DETECTIVE
METHOD · STEP 4 OF 7

Write the Behavior plainly: exactly what
happened, with no judgment words.

*Why: A plain description, free of labels like
"difficult," keeps the process genuinely curious.*

Gentle Progress Family · Cut along the dashed line,
prop it up

The Function Detective Method — Cards 5–7



THE FUNCTION DETECTIVE METHOD · STEP 5 OF 7

Write the Consequence: exactly what happened right after it.

Why: What reliably follows a behavior is often what's quietly keeping it going.

Gentle Progress Family · Cut along the dashed line, prop it up



THE FUNCTION DETECTIVE METHOD · STEP 6 OF 7

Guess the Function: escape, attention, access, or sensory — pick your best guess.

Why: Even an imperfect guess changes what you try next far more than reacting blindly.

Gentle Progress Family · Cut along the dashed line, prop it up



THE FUNCTION DETECTIVE METHOD · STEP 7 OF 7

Two mistakes to avoid: skipping straight to the guess, and treating a wrong guess as a failure.

Why: Both mistakes remove the honest observation this whole method depends on.

Gentle Progress Family · Cut along the dashed line, prop it up

Sources for this guide: [11] Steinbrenner et al. (2020). Full list of references in the Start Here document.

What Is the Repair Ritual Sequence?

Before a single card, let's make sure this idea is completely clear — nothing here is assumed.



WHAT DOES THIS ACTUALLY MEAN?

The Repair Ritual Sequence is a short, repeatable way of reconnecting with your child after a hard moment has fully ended — whichever of you lost regulation during it. Think of it like resetting a table after a meal: the meal itself is over, and resetting isn't about re-discussing what was eaten, it's simply about making the space ready again.



WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF DOING THIS?

The purpose is to give your family a genuine, honest way back to connection after rupture, instead of either pretending nothing happened or turning the moment into a lecture about what went wrong.



WHAT DO WE HOPE TO ACHIEVE?

We hope repair becomes a fully expected, un-awkward part of your family's rhythm — something you both know how to do together, the same way you both know how to end an ordinary conversation.



HOW DOES THIS ACTUALLY HELP THE CHILD?

The strength of a parent's own co-regulation is closely linked to how well a child's own emotional regulation develops over time ^[24]

KIGALI, RWANDA

A father used to feel unsure what to do after a hard morning, so he usually said nothing at all until the tension quietly faded on its own. The first time he tried a short, deliberate reconnection instead, his daughter visibly relaxed within a minute.

The Repair Ritual Sequence — Cards 1–4



THE REPAIR RITUAL SEQUENCE ·
STEP 1 OF 7

The Repair Ritual Sequence

A short, repeatable way back to connection after a hard moment.

Gentle Progress Family · Cut along the dashed line, prop it up



THE REPAIR RITUAL SEQUENCE ·
STEP 2 OF 7

Wait until the hard moment has genuinely, fully ended.

Why: Attempting repair while either of you is still escalated usually restarts the rupture instead of closing it.

Gentle Progress Family · Cut along the dashed line, prop it up



THE REPAIR RITUAL SEQUENCE ·
STEP 3 OF 7

Offer a short, physical reconnection: a hug, sitting close, a gentle hand.

Why: Physical closeness often communicates safety faster than any words can.

Gentle Progress Family · Cut along the dashed line, prop it up



THE REPAIR RITUAL SEQUENCE ·
STEP 4 OF 7

Say one honest, short sentence: "That was a hard moment for both of us."

Why: Naming the moment honestly, without blame, is often all the words that are needed.

Gentle Progress Family · Cut along the dashed line, prop it up

The Repair Ritual Sequence — Cards 5–7



THE REPAIR RITUAL SEQUENCE · STEP 5 OF 7

Stop there. Do not attach a lecture, lesson, or
"but you shouldn't have..."

*Why: A lecture attached right after repair quietly
reopens the very rupture you just closed.*

Gentle Progress Family · Cut along the dashed line,
prop it up



THE REPAIR RITUAL SEQUENCE · STEP 6 OF 7

Return to something ordinary together — a
snack, a walk, a quiet activity.

*Why: Moving on to something ordinary confirms,
in action, that the relationship is genuinely fine
again.*

Gentle Progress Family · Cut along the dashed line,
prop it up



THE REPAIR RITUAL SEQUENCE · STEP 7 OF 7

Two mistakes to avoid: skipping repair
entirely, and repairing before the moment has
actually ended.

*Why: Both mistakes leave the rupture quietly
unresolved, even when it looks calm on the
surface.*

Gentle Progress Family · Cut along the dashed line,
prop it up

Sources for this guide: [24] Ting & Weiss (2017). Full list of references in the Start Here document.