

# RSAC Tips: “Why” Matters

For both children and adults, behaviors have a *function* – that is, behaviors happen for a reason. We all tend to engage in behaviors that are the most consistent way of getting what we need and want.

## Why does the cause of a behavior matter?

Once we identify what rewards are causing a behavior to happen, we can increase or decrease those rewards to make that behavior happen more or less. Consider the example below:

### Schoolwork Meltdowns

Your child is halfway through her stack of virtual schooling work for the day while you are answering emails nearby, and she suddenly begins to have a meltdown.

- » If we know that your child is having a meltdown to get your attention, then we can design a behavioral intervention to teach your child how to ask for attention instead of having a meltdown (for example, saying, “Mommy, can you talk to me please?”)
- » If we know that your child is having a meltdown to get a break from her schoolwork, then we can teach her a better way to ask for a break (for example, “I need a 10 minute break please!”)

### How do we determine a behavior’s cause?

For more serious behaviors, behaviors that could cause harm to your child or to someone else, or behaviors that are occurring consistently, a Board Certified Behavior Analyst can help. He or she can conduct assessments to determine why a behavior is occurring.

### Most Common Reasons for Behavior

**Attention:** Your child is saying “Spend time with me”, “Talk to me”, or “Play with me!”

**Escape/avoidance:** Your child is saying “I don’t want to do this” or “I don’t want to be around this anymore.”

**Access to things:** Your child is saying “I want that toy/activity/candy,” or “I don’t want to give up this toy or turn off the TV.”

**Sensory reasons:** This is one of the least understood causes of behavior, but typically these behaviors happen because it makes the person feel better, provides stimulation they need, or alleviates negative feelings.

### Want More Details?

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✉ [rsac@rollins.edu](mailto:rsac@rollins.edu)