

DNA-v tip sheets for families



Families can grow using DNA-v

This tip sheet is for kids under 12 and their parents/carers. The first section is for adults to read. The second section has activities to do with your kids.

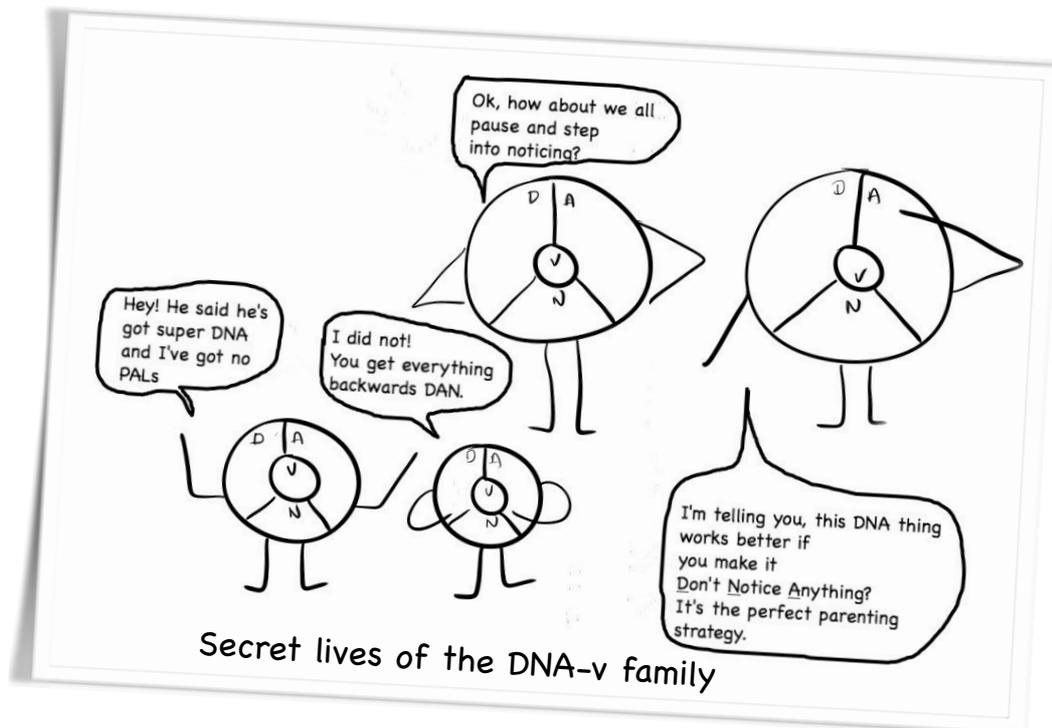
The promise to be loved “just as you are”

Do you remember those mornings when your child was small, when you stumbled half asleep to their crib and they looked into your eyes and smiled, a beaming smile as if to say, “Hey, you’re still here. You’re amazing. Pick me up.” They were searching for love, connection and their safe base. They didn't care if your hair was wild and you had terrible morning breath. You looked in their eyes and met their greatest need — love through connection.

This need for others is in adults too, maybe when we look into the face of our child and feel our hearts swell. Or when you read that story to your child one more time even though you're exhausted, and you notice how warm your toddler feels sitting on your lap.

At these times you know you can do this parenting thing. Right?

Except, there are all those tough times, the times when the daily grind of child rearing



seems overwhelming. Never ending rounds of teaching, instructing, disciplining, sharing, stopping fights, getting chores done, cooking, cleaning, and on and on.

DNA-v² can help you in these tough times. It can help you return to what you care about over and over, even when you, like all parents, don't behave like the perfect parent.

Model with your own DNA-V

DNA-v is an easy and powerful way to help children learn about others and how to build relationships. You can use DNA-v to help yourself and your kids manage the emotions, adventures, challenges, and difficult choices of daily living with other people.

Think of developing your own DNA-V skills as a way of showing your child how to develop these skills in themselves. Take care of

yourself with DNA-V, and you will take care of them. It is not selfish. Here are some ways you can do this.

You might want to read this alongside the Discoverer, Noticer and Advisor Tip Sheets ([link](#))

Keep value as your centre

Values occur in small actions. They help us connect to what brings our life energy and meaning, and what gives our child the "psychological nutrition" to grow — small actions of giving and receiving love.

Televisions, fancy toys, nice furniture or super clean houses will never be a substitute for sharing love. We need each other, and this need is deep in our humanness. We have decades of research showing that connection, feeling safe and being loved is the most important ingredient for growing strong flexible kids, perhaps even more essential than food ¹.

Gulp. Now it sounds like you have to be super parent, right? Wrong. You're human, and you're allowed to make mistakes. You can make mistakes, and you can create loving moments again and again. Every moment is a new chance to choose to value yourself and your child.

Valuing is about remembering what you care about and keeping what you value in parenting in your mind. Then you can choose small actions that help you build value. This means, be a noticer, use your discoverer and advisor skills flexibly.

Here are some small D, N and A things you can do that will model DNA-v for your child.

Practice A-N-D

A — Pause, become **aware** of body and breath

N — **Name** sensations in body. they can't hurt you

D — **Describe** what you are feeling. The feeling may be unpleasant but it is not in charge

(see noticer tip sheet for more on this)

Noticing parents

- Practice noticing and appreciating your child, in the moment, without trying to change or fix anything.
- Take 5 minutes once a day to be together: read, draw, walk in the garden. Just be — just 5.
- Take another 5 minutes to be alone. Just be, practice mindfulness, sit quietly, walk, whatever you need.
- When emotions run hot, remember to practice AND. You can have tough feelings AND build love.
- Model by saying out loud how you are doing A-N-D practice on yourself. Your child learns more by watching what you do.
- For younger children guide them gently through their own noticing skills. Pause.

Breathe. Help them use A-N-D to hear their body's messages.

- Practice allowing the feelings to be there before reacting. Say out loud, "I need pause time, I am angry right now".
- Practice allowing all emotions to be ok. Catch yourself before you send the messages that sadness is bad and happiness is good.

Advisor parents

- Remember your advisor will often say you are not parenting well enough.
- Your advisor sometimes helps you navigate life by evaluating, judging, and problem solving. Your advisor will also be judging you as a parent, and your child as a 'student,' or 'sibling,' etc. Your child is such an important part of life, that your advisor is likely to be on double duty with problem solving. You don't always need to listen to your own advisor, and neither does your child.
- Rest in the knowledge that at the end of each day, if your child knows they are loved, safe and accepted, on their good days and bad days, you are doing a pretty good job.
- Connect with what you value, decide if your advisors 'advice' will help with this value.
- Pause, step aside from your advice, step into noticing and take a breath before you speak or act.

Stop trying to control me!

- Kids, parents, carers, well all of us humans really, we hate to feel like someone is making us do something, controlling us, or bossing us around.
- For a child, for example, if an adult demands in a public place, "Be quiet because I said be quiet!" their child might do the exact opposite just because they feel controlled. They might even scream and throw a tantrum.
- For a parent/carer, a child's challenging behaviour can leave them feeling out of control or like they are bad parents. We adults then lose our cool too. We might scream back or making extreme threats ("You will lose TV for the whole month if you don't stop it.").
- When control battles like this kick in, you might think of it as you and your child's advisors battling to be right. Or, it might be more like your noticers' are reacting to emotions and body sensations, instead of pausing or taking a moment to breathe. Or either of you might just be acting out, and doing what you've done before in these high stress situations instead of discovering new things to try.

Sharing perspectives is the way through

- If your child is over about 8 years old, on a calm day, take a few moments to use DNA-v to discuss what it is like for them to feel bossed around or controlled. Then share how you feel when it happens to you too. Then:
 1. See if you discover how you are the same?
 2. See if you can use noticing to make space for those feelings next time it happens.
 3. Share how you might try to pause before reacting to that inner voice that says you are right.

An important note: Children won't have the skill to fully explain or see your perspective, but they are going to gradually learn it if they see you trying it. Go slowly.

- Remember that discipline, rules, and instructions are a parent's job and your child won't always like them, but they will need them. It's ok to be firm as long as you explain and communicate unconditional love at the same time. This can be easier if you think of how you both value being always loved, no matter what.

Discoverer parents

- Learn to meet challenging behaviour by noticing what follows from your behaviour. When you do something, what happens next? And is what happens next what you wanted? If not, maybe it is time to try something new (see discover tip sheet on 'Tracking' for more on this).
- Sometimes we think our child "should" be behaving better, or they "should" be listening to us. Being a discoverer means stepping out of the advisor's 'shoulds' and trying something new.
- If you find yourself doing the same thing over and over, practice the 4 steps of tracking (see the discoverer tip sheet).
- Help your child to notice what happens after they behaved a certain way, and ask if this is what they wanted to happen.

- Use curiosity, exploration and strength building to help yourself and your child grow. Ask your child, "How could we do this in a new way?"
- Let them explore, create and try new things. If they are scared, help them utilise their noticing skills and make room for fear with your own noticing skills. Remember that fear is often needed for new tasks.
- They need lots of free time to build their discoverer skills. Free play, creating games, playing and socialising all help.
- Boredom can be useful, kids need time to learn how not to be busy, and how to discover and create things themselves.

Return to value

- At the end of each day, come back to value. Grab a small moment: hold their hand or put your arm around them, and say something you liked about today. Or pause and catch their eye with a wink, let them know today no matter what the day's events, they are loved and safe.

Build perspective taking skills with shared walk of life discussions

If you have ongoing difficulties around particular issues, you can use the DNA-v disc (at the end of this tip sheet) or simply draw a disc shape, and do "The walk of life" together. This is best for kids over 8 and for specific or frequent issues. Choose a calm time when you feel able to talk and guide a discussion.

Step 1 - What are we stuck in?

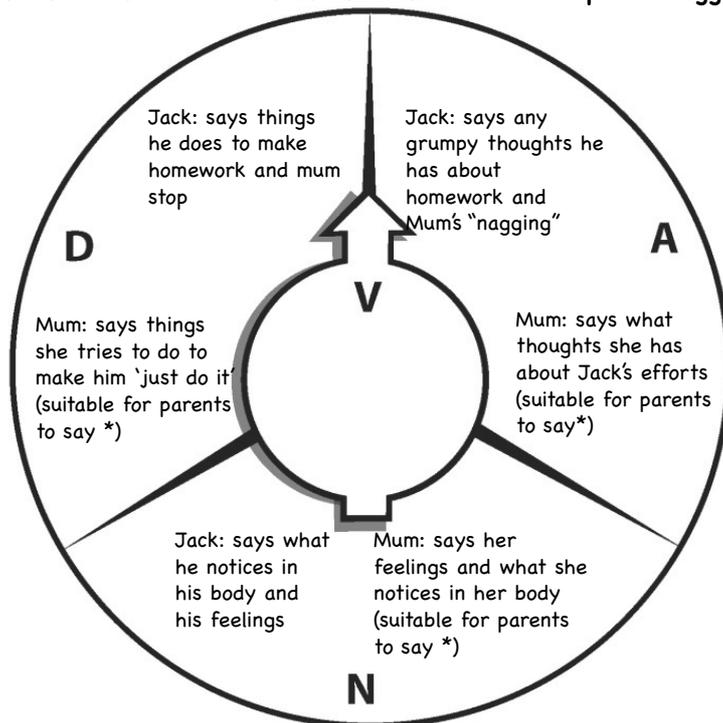
First, using the disc as a guide, allow each person to say what is happening with their own D, N and A when this problem comes up.

*Note for parents, in this exercise it is ok to say what you think and feel, but keep in mind that some information your child is not old enough to know, for example we don't want to burden children with adult worries. Just keep it simple, and at an age suitable level.

Two rules:

1. Listen — “no butting in and no disputing’
2. Speak about your own DNA, not the other person’s DNA (I think, I feel, I do this - never - You think, you feel, you do)

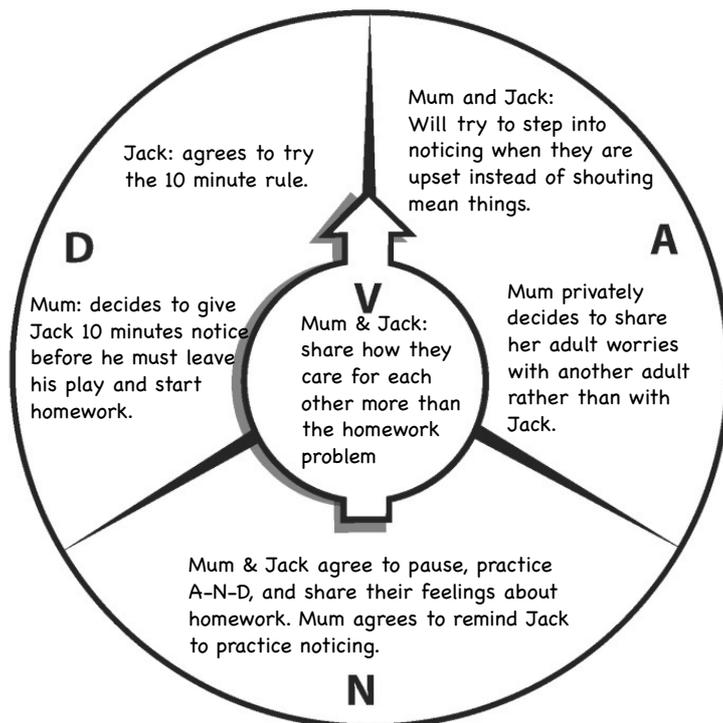
Situation: Jack doesn't want to do homework. Mum fed up with nagging him.



Step 2 - Do we value each other?

Second, step into the middle of the disc and find a way to share what you care about in your relationship. As a parent, what do you care about in your relationship with your child? And at an age suitable child, as you child what they care about too.

Ask yourselves, can we use this shared value to help us as we try to find a solution?



Step 3 - Can we use our DNA skills to work it out?

Finally, beginning anywhere you feel comfortable, share what skill D, N, or A skill you can use to broaden perspectives and find a way through. Note, we have provided examples in all 3 skills, but you might decide just to choose one skill, for example, you might decide to step into noticing when you get upset. It is important to note, that we don't expect this walk around to give you a miracle problem solver and it will probably feel a little artificial. Think of it is just one way to practice skills that allow you and your child to gradually learn to take each others perspective.

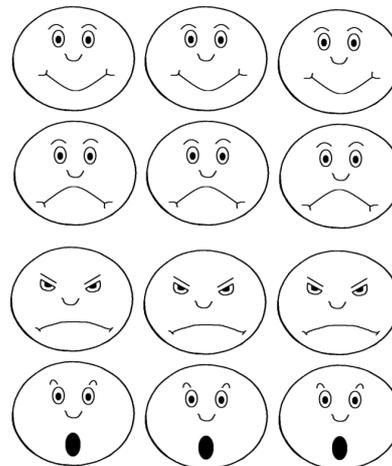
What are we noticing today?

Print out a feelings faces chart and put it on the fridge.

Give each family member a coloured dot and tell all family members they can move their dot around to match a face whenever they want.

You and your child can talk about how members of the family are feeling. Use the detective questions above to find out what is going on with their D, N, and A behaviours too.

A chart like this on the fridge can be especially helpful for kids who just cannot find the right words, have language difficulties, or when there are difficult experiences happening. It gives them a



chance to tell you something is up, without too many words, and it gives them a chance to see that others might have struggles too.

(Go here to print a feelings faces chart of your choice - <http://tinyurl.com/zuy3baa>)

Play the DNA-v game

One of our friends, Sarah Mooy, has created a DNA-v board game. It is a fun and creative way to help kids and parents learn. Sign up for our newsletter to receive them in your inbox - www.thrivingforkids.com **Coming in 2016.**

Resources

- Coming soon - **DNA-v tip-sheet - social view for friends.** Sign up for our newsletter to get it as soon as it is released www.thrivingadolescent.com.
- Coming soon - www.thrivingforkids.com
- For information on adolescents go to www.thrivingadolescent.com

References

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Hrdy, S. B. (2009). *Mothers and others: The evolutionary origins of mutual understanding*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
2. Hayes, L., & Ciarrochi, J. (2015). *The thriving adolescent: Using Acceptance and Commitment Therapy and Positive Psychology to Help Young People Manage Emotions, Achieve Goals, and Build Positive Relationships*: Oakland, CA: Context Press.