



THE MISSING PIECES FRAMEWORK

When nothing *is working,* something has been *missed.*

A field guide to the 5 foundations of children's health & the hidden pieces most doctors aren't trained to look for — for parents of kids with behavioral challenges.

*You haven't failed. Your child isn't broken.
You're not out of options.*

Prepared for the parent
who has tried everything and still feels in the trenches.

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A NOTE FOR THE PARENT READING THIS

If you're holding this guide, you've probably been *in the trenches* for a while.

You've taken your child to the pediatrician. To the therapist. Maybe the psychiatrist, the OT, the behavioral specialist. You've tried medications — or agonized over whether to. You've read the books, joined the support groups, and tried every "5 strategies" post that promised to help.

And your child is still struggling. **You are still struggling.**

Here's what I want you to hear: when behavior doesn't improve despite everything you're doing, it's almost never a behavior problem. It's a sign that your child's body is overwhelmed — and the missing piece is usually somewhere most professionals aren't trained to look.

This guide walks you through that map. It starts with the 5 foundational pillars of children's health, and then moves into the deeper, often-overlooked pieces I work with families on every day inside **The Missing Piece Method™**.

My hope: by the end of these pages, you'll see your child's struggles in a new light — and have a clearer sense of where to go next.

You haven't *failed*. Your child *isn't broken*.
You're not out of *options*.

— *Dr. Amy*
FUNCTIONAL MEDICINE FOR KIDS

WHAT'S INSIDE

Part 1 The 5 Foundations — pp. 3–5

Part 2 The Deeper Missing Pieces — pp. 6–8

Part 3 The Missing Piece Method™ — p. 9

Next Your next step & resources — p. 10

01

PART ONE

The 5 Foundations

These five foundations are the soil your child's nervous system, brain, and behavior grow from. When even one is depleted, everything downstream — focus, mood, sleep, regulation — gets harder. Restore these, and you restore your child's capacity to handle their world. **Think of these five as the soil: we can plant any therapy or strategy, but if the soil is depleted, nothing takes root.**

01

FOOD

Real, whole, *nourishing*.

FOUNDATION

Food is information for your child's body. Ultra-processed foods, food dyes, refined sugar, and inflammatory ingredients can directly drive aggression, poor focus, hyperactivity, and meltdowns. Whole foods stabilize blood sugar, fuel the gut microbiome, and feed the brain.

SIGNS THIS MAY BE OFF

- Big behavior swings 30–60 min after eating
- Extreme picky eating (often a sign, not a phase)
- Frequent stomach aches, constipation, loose stools
- Dark circles, eczema, congestion, or low energy

* WHERE TO START

Remove **artificial dyes** (Red 40, Yellow 5/6, Blue 1) for two weeks and watch what shifts. Add one protein-rich, whole-food breakfast every morning.

02

SLEEP

The *real* foundation.

FOUNDATION

Sleep is when your child's brain detoxes, consolidates learning, and resets the nervous system. Dysregulated kids almost always have disrupted sleep — and disrupted sleep almost always worsens dysregulation. It's a loop that has to be broken at the root.

SIGNS THIS MAY BE OFF

- Difficulty falling asleep even when exhausted
- Waking multiple times a night, or early (2–4 a.m.)
- Night terrors, restless legs, or grinding teeth
- Waking up exhausted, cranky, "in fight mode"

* WHERE TO START

Sleep struggles are rarely a sleep problem — they're a **regulation problem**. See Part Two for the deeper pieces (cortisol, blood sugar, nervous system) that almost always need addressing.

03

HYDRATION

Often the most *overlooked*.

FOUNDATION

Even mild dehydration impairs focus, mood, and emotional regulation in kids. Many "behavior problems" improve dramatically once a child is actually drinking enough clean, mineral-rich water.

SIGNS THIS MAY BE OFF

- Drinks mostly juice, milk, or sweetened drinks
- Rarely asks for water or refuses to drink it
- Headaches, constipation, fatigue, or dry skin
- Big afternoon mood crashes

* WHERE TO START

Aim for **half your child's body weight in ounces** of filtered water daily. Add a pinch of mineral salt to their first morning glass to support adrenal and nervous-system function.

04

MOVEMENT

Daily, outside, *unstructured*.

FOUNDATION

Movement isn't just exercise — it's how kids regulate. Heavy work, climbing, swinging, running, and crashing help them organize their nervous system. Without enough, sensory and emotional overload builds up fast.

SIGNS THIS MAY BE OFF

- Constantly bouncing, climbing, seeking pressure
- OR the opposite — lethargic, low tone, avoidant
- Trouble "settling down" at night
- Big behaviors after long stretches of sitting

* WHERE TO START

Aim for **60+ minutes of outdoor, unstructured movement** daily — ideally before screens, school, or hard transitions. Bonus points for barefoot grass, hills, and climbing.

05

STRESS REGULATION · THE VAGUS NERVE

Connection regulates better than *correction*.

FOUNDATION

Your child's vagus nerve is the bridge between body and brain. When it's not toning well, they live in fight / flight / freeze — and no strategy, consequence, or talk therapy can reach a brain in survival mode. **Vagus nerve work is foundational, not optional.**

SIGNS THIS MAY BE OFF

- Goes from 0 to 100 with no warning
- Struggles to calm down once upset, or shuts down
- Hypersensitive to noise, touch, transitions, newness
- Frequent stomach aches with no clear cause

* WHERE TO START

Daily **co-regulation** matters more than any technique. Try humming, gargling, cold water on the face, belly breathing, slow rocking — *together*.

THE SOIL, AT A GLANCE

01 Food — real, whole, nourishing

02 Sleep — the real foundation

03 Hydration — the most overlooked

04 Movement — daily, outside, unstructured

05 Stress regulation — the vagus nerve

Still struggling after tending the soil? *The missing piece is usually hiding in the deeper layers most professionals aren't trained to assess. That's where Part Two begins.* →

02

PART TWO

The Deeper *Missing Pieces*.

If you've already worked on the 5 foundations and your child is still struggling, this is where the missing piece is usually hiding. These are the layers most pediatricians, therapists, and behavior specialists aren't trained to assess — but they are often the answer. They are also what I look for inside **The Missing Piece Method™**.

06 Gut-brain connection — ~90% of serotonin

07 Nervous system dysregulation — The big one

08 Retained primitive reflexes — Most-missed piece

09 Mineral & nutrient imbalances — Fastest, most visible

10 Genetics & detox pathways — MTHFR & methylation

11 Environmental toxin load — Powerful & free

12 Stored trauma & sensory input — What the body holds

These pieces aren't extra. *For many of the families I work with, this is exactly where the answer has been hiding — sometimes for years.*

06

PIECE

GUT-BRAIN CONNECTION

Heal the gut, and the *brain follows*.

Roughly **90% of your child's serotonin is made in the gut**. An inflamed, dysbiotic, or leaky gut directly drives anxiety, aggression, brain fog, and emotional dysregulation.

SIGNS THIS MAY BE OFF

- Constipation, diarrhea, or alternating patterns
- Strong food cravings (carbs, dairy, sugar)
- Bloating, reflux, or unexplained tummy pain
- Mood swings tied to eating or hunger

* WHERE TO START

Gut healing isn't a 30-day fix — it's **foundational repair**. Functional testing (stool, organic acids) often reveals exactly what's driving symptoms.

07

PIECE

NERVOUS SYSTEM DYSREGULATION · THE BIG ONE

A body stuck in *survival mode*.

A dysregulated nervous system means your child's body is hypervigilant, reactive, or shut down. **This is different from anxiety**. Until the nervous system is rewired toward safety, no strategy will fully work.

SIGNS THIS MAY BE OFF

- Big reactions to small triggers
- Trouble feeling safe even in safe environments
- Difficulty transitioning between activities
- Sleep, digestion, behavior all dysregulated

* WHERE TO START

Nervous system work is slow, gentle, and **bottom-up** — through the body, not the brain. This is the heart of what I do with families.

08

RETAINED PRIMITIVE REFLEXES

One of the *most missed* pieces.

PIECE

Babies are born with primitive reflexes that should integrate by age 1. When they don't, they can drive lifelong issues with focus, regulation, coordination, and behavior — often in kids labeled with ADHD, anxiety, or behavior issues.

SIGNS THIS MAY BE OFF

- W-sitting, toe-walking, or unusual posture
- Big startle response to sound or movement
- Trouble with handwriting or crossing midline
- Bedwetting past the typical age

* WHERE TO START

A simple **at-home reflex screening** can reveal a lot. Reflex integration is often the missing puzzle piece for kids who haven't responded to traditional therapies.

09

MINERAL & NUTRIENT IMBALANCES

Supplement with *precision*, not hope.

PIECE

Magnesium, zinc, iron, B vitamins, vitamin D, and omega-3s are non-negotiable for a regulated brain. Modern food doesn't contain enough — and dysregulated kids burn through these faster. Correcting them often produces the fastest, most noticeable shifts.

SIGNS THIS MAY BE OFF

- Restless sleep, frequent waking, muscle cramps
- White spots on nails or unusual cravings
- Easy bruising or slow wound healing
- Mood swings, irritability, low frustration

* WHERE TO START

Don't guess and check supplements. **Functional lab testing** reveals exactly what's depleted — so you supplement with precision, not hope.

10

PIECE

GENETICS & DETOX PATHWAYS · MTHFR

Genetics aren't destiny — they're a *roadmap*.

Some kids are born with genetic variations (like MTHFR) that affect how they process folate, B vitamins, and toxins. When detox pathways are sluggish, kids accumulate what their body can't clear — driving behavior, mood, and sleep issues.

SIGNS THIS MAY BE OFF

- Strong reactions to meds, anesthesia, supplements
- Family history of anxiety, depression, autism
- Big behavior shifts after illness or exposure

* WHERE TO START

Knowing your child's **genetic blueprint** changes how we support their body. We don't fight genetics — we work *with* them.

11

PIECE

ENVIRONMENTAL TOXIN LOAD

One of the most powerful *free* shifts.

Today's kids carry a heavier toxic burden than any generation before — through food, water, personal care, cleaning supplies, and air. That burden hits dysregulated kids hardest.

SIGNS THIS MAY BE OFF

- Sensitivity to fragrances, smells, or new spaces
- Eczema, recurrent illness, congestion, infections
- Behavior changes after chemical or scent exposure

* WHERE TO START

Start small: **swap one product per week**. Our free *Calm Start to Non-Toxic Living* guide walks you through it.

12

PIECE

STORED TRAUMA & SENSORY INPUT

Bodies hold what minds *can't process*.

Birth trauma, medical procedures, sensory overload, big emotional events — even when a child seems "fine," stored trauma can drive chronic dysregulation, sleep disruption, and aggression long after the event.

SIGNS THIS MAY BE OFF

- Big reactions to medical visits or new sensations
- Aggression "out of nowhere" with no clear trigger
- A nervous system that never fully relaxes

* WHERE TO START

Trauma stored in the body responds to **body-based healing** — not just talk therapy. This is woven through my work with families.

03

PART THREE

The Missing Piece *Method*™

Inside The Missing Piece Method™, we don't guess — we connect the dots. The framework is built around three steps. Each one builds on the last, and together they replace the cobbled-together advice from twelve different sources with a single, clear path.

01

DECODE

Find the hidden stressors.

We identify what's actually impacting your child's system — across food, sleep, gut, nervous system, genetics, toxins, and more — using functional testing, history, and full-body assessment.

02

CONNECT

Map why behavior shows up.

We map why those stressors are showing up as the behaviors you're seeing. Aggression, sleep struggles, picky eating, meltdowns — they all become readable when you know what's underneath.

03

REBUILD

Targeted, personalized steps.

We use targeted, personalized steps that help your child feel calmer, more regulated, and more comfortable in their own body. No more guesswork. No more cobbling together advice from 12 different sources.

If something here made you say "*that's my kid*" — you're not alone, and you're not out of options.

In our consult, we'll talk about what you've already tried, what's still not working, and whether the Missing Piece Method™ is the right fit for your family. **No pressure. No selling.** Just a real conversation about your child.



BOOK YOUR FREE CONSULT

A real conversation about your child.

app.malla.co/join/happykidfm

Roughly 20 minutes · Serving AZ · CO · IA · NE · TN · VA

OTHER FREE RESOURCES

e

The *Calm Start* to Non-Toxic Living

A free ebook with simple swaps for a healthier home — start with one room.

happykidfunctionalmedicine.com

b

Beyond the *Behavior* Blog

Root-cause articles on aggression, sleep, gut health, and more — no fluff.

happykidfunctionalmedicine.com/blog

i

@happykidfm on Instagram

Daily reframes, practical tools, and parent support — short and steady.

instagram.com/happykidfm

Your child deserves to be *understood*, not managed.

You deserve real answers, and a calmer home.



Happy Kid Functional Medicine

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