

Understanding Behaviour

Children of all ages develop ways of letting us know they are happy/unhappy, well/unwell, hungry, sleepy, uncomfortable, anxious/excited, frustrated or wanting/needing attention. However the ways they show these things differ with their age, developmental stage, environmental situation and interactions and responses experienced from others.

Unwanted behaviour can be a way of expressing need. Think about this when a child is acting in what you see as an unacceptable way and ask yourself – what might the reason be; is the child experiencing any of the feelings mentioned above? Look for triggers; is there a pattern to the behaviour? Did you miss something that happened prior to the incident that might have influenced the behaviour?

It is important to understand the meaning of behaviour – what the child is trying to communicate or achieve.

Gathering Information

Knowing a child through close observation, having a good relationship with them, talking/playing together, working together with their parents and talking with colleagues helps pave the way to getting in tune with the child and to setting strategies and interventions in a way that works for everyone. This will help you in the longer term to be able to pre-empt and prevent potential challenging behaviours happening.

Consider a child's Emotional Literacy - what they may be experiencing in their home life; neglect, parental separation or problems with their health. Think about how a situation in your own life may have affected/be affecting your behaviour and consider how a young child, particularly a child with learning difficulties who is unable to use words to communicate, would manage to let you know the sadness, anxiety or distress they were experiencing.

Your understanding should influence your response.

Causes of Behaviour

Within the child; check hearing, sight, are they hungry, do they have a diagnosed disability such as Autism. Do they seek out sensory stimulation to help them to regulate emotion or pleasure; this may be a behaviour that is not acceptable or could be unsafe, but something a child needs.

Within education settings; is it noisy, are expectations clear, are rules being used, is the language accessible to all children so they understand or is additional support needed in this area.

Within home; change in the family set up, do they feel safe.

Within community; do they have friends, do they feel like they belong.

Behaviour example	Possible meaning
Pushing	'Get out of my way'
Turn taking	'I want to keep the game going'
Withdrawn	'I want to be at home'
Biting	'Get off'
Tantrums	'I want your attention'

Think about the Schemas (patterns of behaviour) that children go through as they explore the world and try to find out how things work; in some children these behaviours can be overly exaggerated and mistaken for negative/challenging behaviours when in fact the child is only trying to recreate the pleasure they get from these movements and sensations.

Examples of Schema's and how a child's behaviour could be miss-interpreted

Vertical/Trajectory – may jump and climb on/off unsuitable and unsafe surfaces; hold things high and let them fall, throw objects into the air, scatter objects off tables.

Enclosing/Enveloping – may put themselves or objects into things; they may like to hide under/inside confined, sometimes unsafe spaces.

Rotation - may swing objects round and round such as laces/sticks; may rush around the room and encourage others to chase; turn taps on/off.

Positioning – may climb, crawl; could use furniture for this purpose. Get upset with order changes.

Connecting (links) - may drag things along that they have connected together; may repeatedly turn switches on/off.

Transforming - may over exaggerate applying substances such as paint/glue; may smear, scatter or drip the substances.

Transporting – may move things around from table to table, area to area, but not necessarily play with them; may take toys off other children to add to their own play.

In a situation where a child repeatedly makes a particular motor movement such as over/under arm casting - you should ask yourself, before you assume he is deliberately throwing to hurt; might this be part of the child's normal development path in which he is just practicing his trajectory skills? It could be that he has no actual awareness of the danger he could impose. You could offer structured activities where he can work through this play behaviour pattern safely by encouraging him to throw acceptable objects into containers or throw suitable items to a partner such as soft balls/bean bags.

All behaviours need to be looked at with a view to investigating their true purpose; what is it the child is seeking, what is the intention of the behaviour - is it a learning phase, or are they trying to communicate something?

Children are learning. They may not know the appropriate way to respond.

Children with SEND

Do not show more negative behaviours than any other children. In some cases their behaviour may have to do with their inability to let us know what they want, or it could be that we are not responding to them quickly enough; perhaps they are experiencing sensory overload such as a too noisy/busy environment or perhaps they are in pain or just want you close by. All these can be barriers that influence how a child behaves and with fore-thought and the right approach; teaching them how to ask, how to wait, how to communicate with each other and how to let you know how they feel, will help to reduce incidences of negative behaviours and help shape the way you want them to act. Using visual clues, gesture and supporting their play with peers will also help. You may need further advice from other professionals about different ways to help a non-verbal child communicate; seek this out.

Managing Unwanted Behaviour

Approach the managing of repeated difficult behaviour in a consistent way, agreed amongst staff and parents. Provide distraction, offer choices (two at one time) to help prevent a situation arising or to defuse a situation and most importantly give lots of praise for every effort a child makes towards acting in the manner you want, such as; appropriate sitting, gentle touching, good sharing and so on. Do not expect children to be able to magically turn around their behaviour, particularly children who have SEND, they will need lots of supported opportunities to practice positive behaviour skills throughout the day every day which is why it is important to praise a child for 'trying' during their learning period and to continue with the praise to maintain the positive behaviour.

Escalating Behaviour

If a child becomes upset during an incident and their behaviour escalates, you need to ask yourself, does he need help to calm down and regulate his feelings? Some children find it very difficult to get over an upset quickly. You might find asking the child's parents how they help their child to calm will help you to plan for supporting the child at these times. Some children like comfort, others need you to stay a distance from them, but still need a safe area where they know they can go to self-calm. A staff member should be close by at these times for when they are needed. Introducing a quiet area to children at a calm period will work better than trying to direct them to it when they are upset. If handled right, providing a quiet haven will help reduce the stress a child is experiencing at that time and make it easier to move them into a more positive mind frame. Remember the child will need support to re-join the activities.

Adult's Behaviour

Think about how you react to an unwanted behaviour - do you need to adapt the way you approach a situation, are your responses inconsistent, are they sometimes misjudged and over the top. Do you shout and say 'no', but then not show them what they can do as an alternative?

Proactive Strategies

- We do not take it personally.
- We remain calm and do not over-react when provoked.
- Expectations are stated clearly and are reasonable.
- Our response is planned.
- We use praise.

Reactive Strategies

- Will take it personally.
- Will over react and may become aggressive.
- Will give in and become passive.
- Dealing with behaviour is not planned.
- No preparation regarding what to say and how to say it.
- Will tend to be negative.

Promoting Positive Behaviour

What are the positive behaviours you want to encourage? Have clear rules, as children, parents and staff need to know exactly what is expected of them. Adults need to be consistent in their approach.

Think, how do you plan to meet the child's need so the unwanted behaviour diminishes?

Guide the child

You can guide the child through teaching functionally equivalent skills;

- Modelling.
- Role play.
- Visual cues.
- Praise with feedback on the positive things they are doing.
- Drawing attention to positive role models.

Praise and Rewards

This is the most effective way of reinforcing positive behaviour;

- Rewards should be immediate and always include feedback.
- Rewards can include: a smile, thumbs up, stickers, stamps, favourite activity, time with an adult.

- Rewarding appropriate behaviours - try to use praise on a ratio of five to one. You need to catch the child being good.
- Rewards for 'naughty behaviours' happening less often. An example could be: give the child a number of chances (use marbles, tokens etc.) Each time the child exhibits the inappropriate target behaviour a chance is removed. If one or more chances remain at the end of the session they get their reward. Over time, the number of chances is reduced so you are encouraging a decrease in the inappropriate behaviour.

Use consequences appropriately

- Sanctions by themselves are not an effective way of changing behaviour.
- Consequences need to be logical and should be used as an opportunity to teach the child what they should have done.
- Ask the child to pick up something they have thrown, tidy up toys they have scattered, help to rebuild a knocked over tower. If they snatch toys then they do not get to play with them, but model an appropriate way of asking for the toy, teach them how to wait for a turn.
- Do not make it a battle.
- Time out – can be useful for when a child is not able to cope or manage. It needs to be time limited, 1-2 minutes and no more than 4 minutes and consideration needs to be taken as to how to ensure the child's reintroduction is successful. Avoid using negative terms for time out such as 'naughty step'.

Young children and particularly children with SEND may have little or no understanding of consequences and not fully understand why they are being chastised for grabbing out or biting another child when all they intended to do was to say 'hello', but have not the skills to communicate this verbally or in the way we would like. It is up to us as professionals to teach them appropriate ways of communicating, such as modelling how to gently touch a child on the hand to say 'hello', or helping them to make a 'hello' hand gesture.

Are **your** expectations of how a child should behave in line with **their** level of development, understanding and SEND?

Teaching functionally equivalent skills

Behaviour and meaning

Biting to get a turn on the scooter.

Tantrums to get attention.

Functionally equivalent skill

To learn to wait her turn.

To learn to get attention in positive Ways.

Strategies for teaching functionally equivalent skills

Phrase expectations positively, for example; 'I need you to sit down,' not 'do not stand up'.

'My turn, together, your turn' – this involves modelling to and leading the child through what it is that you want to teach them.

Give alternatives - 'you can choose this or this' (use objects, pictures or simple language when offering choices depending on the child's level of understanding). Tell them the toy is 'not today' or 'not now' or 'finished' if it is unavailable to them. It may help to remove the unavailable item from view or place a red cross on the item to emphasis it is unavailable. Praise the child 'good choosing'

Minimising attention to inappropriate behaviours using distraction, planned ignoring, praise with feedback

Praise with feedback (relate this back to the rules) – this can be directed to the target child or to a positive role model. You must have the child's attention and be very clear about what the child did right, such as 'well done Charlie, you waited for your turn'. Simplified verbal praise would be 'good waiting'.

Planned ignoring – decide which behaviours you can ignore. This works well for low level attention seeking behaviours.

Visual strategies – learning to wait (count down spots), teaching routine or extending range of activities (visual strip and 'first... then... The idea is that the child has to do what you want before they can do what they want.').

Good Practice Principles

Have a positive relationship - this is the most crucial element of your work. The children who are the most difficult to attach to, are most often the children who need our help. It is also important to have a positive relationship with parents and colleagues.

- Take the time to gather information.
- Be consistent and stay calm.
- Have an appropriate environment.
- Guide the child.
- Use praise and rewards.
- Use consequences appropriately.

Have an appropriate environment

- The physical environment needs to be well set out and thought through.
- The activities provided need to be stimulating and interesting.
- If a favourite toy is the cause of repeated sharing difficulties amongst children then have several to share out more equally to reduce frustration of waiting too long.
- Routines need to make the setting a more manageable place for both children and staff.

Environmental Checklist

Think honestly about your setting.

- Are your activities interesting, stimulating and plentiful to suit the number of children?
- Are your activities appropriate to the age/developmental level of the children?
- Do children sit for long periods of time?
- Do the children queue frequently?
- Do they have to wait for activities to be ready?
- Do children wait a long time for snack/lunch?
- Do the children have enough space to play in?
- Are all staff consistent in their approach to behaviour? Praising and responding to unwanted behaviour?
- Do you talk about behaviour management in your setting?
- Do you use these discussions to inform your behaviour policy?
- Do staff talk about feelings with the children?
- Is lots of praise used for good behaviour?
- Is the language you use accessible to all children?

Documents and Procedures

Make sure your SEND and behaviour policies reflect how you promote positive behaviour, manage difficult behaviours and how you work together with parents.

References and Websites

Behaviour in the Early Years – Author – Angela Glenn, Jacquie Cousins, Alicia Helps ISBN reference number – 13:978-0-415-58435-7 (pbk). This was a Reference Book given out to your setting 2014

Information on developmental Schemas can be found in various reference books and web sites

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/cbeebies/grownups/schemas>

<http://www.teachearlyyears.com/enabling-environments/view/supporting-schemas>

Again! Again! Understanding schemas in young children. Edited by Sally Featherstone. ISBN 978-1-905019-95-3)

Some excerpts taken from Promoting Positive Behaviour training course 2008 presented by Jane Cockcroft, Carole Jones and Stella Lawlor STePS