

Challenging behaviours

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Behaviour guidance

The term 'behaviour guidance' is used throughout these practice notes to reflect current thinking about the most positive and effective ways to help children gain understandings and learn skills that will help them to manage their own behaviour.

Challenging behaviour

Behaviour can be described as challenging when it:

- interferes with the rights of others
- causes harm or risk to the child, other children, adults or living things
- damages the physical environment, equipment or materials
- interferes with the child's learning and relationships with others
- includes a child presenting as shy, withdrawn or excessively passive
- is inappropriate to the child's age or developmental stage or background.

Challenging behaviour may include, but is not limited to:

- hitting, kicking, spitting, punching others
- tantrums
- refusal to share, wait, or take turns
- excluding other children
- breaking or misusing toys and equipment
- refusal to co-operate or go along with instructions
- swearing
- shouting
- running away
- teasing or bullying.

Children's behaviour, including challenging behaviour, may be an attempt to satisfy a valid need or express a want. Many behaviours regarded as challenging are simply age appropriate behaviour. For instance; a two

year old not being able to sit still, or an eight year old unable to contain their excitement and wait for their turn. Learning to communicate needs and wants in appropriate ways is one of the many challenges children face.

Assisting children who display challenging behaviours

A positive environment for learning and development will reduce challenging behaviours. The following principles will minimise challenging behaviours at the children's service.

It is important to ensure that:

- Children's behaviour is observed and documented carefully and sensitively by staff members
- the educational or recreational program is developmentally appropriate and based on children's needs and interests
- children know that they are valued, respected, and that they can get help from adults when they need it
- adults' interactions with children are based on respect, understanding and knowledge of child development and of each child
- children are known in the context of their cultures, communities and families
- adults communicate to ensure consistency in guiding behaviour and responding to challenging behaviour
- children's behaviour is guided in a sensitive and caring manner
- behaviour guidance practices are based on the service's statement of principles and are proactive and positive.

When observing and responding to a child's behaviour it is important to consider whether the behaviour is a developmentally appropriate response to a particular situation or behaviour that is challenging. For example, a two-year-old child who bites other children, a five year old who has an occasional tantrum, or a ten year old who

teases younger children are all displaying behaviour that is not outside the range of behaviours that are typical.

However, these behaviours, although normal, still require adults to address them in ways that help children learn more constructive ways of behaving.

Challenging behaviours may not be resolved quickly, and many will lessen or disappear as the child grows older. If challenging behaviours persist or increase, then staff members may need to develop individual strategies in collaboration with parents. In some situations other professionals may need to be consulted. Parental consent is required where referral to other professionals is requested.

Role of the parent/guardian

It is important to discuss challenging behaviour with the child's parent/guardian. When staff members and families have mutually respectful relationships and communicate openly they are able to work together to plan a supportive and appropriate experience for each child. Families vary considerably in child rearing practices, in part because of cultural background. The ways the family manages challenging behaviour and the kinds of behaviour they accept may differ from those of the children's service. This can cause confusion for the child and may not be helpful in assisting the child to change their behaviour. When there are differences in ways of responding and differences of opinion it is crucial for the parents and children's services to work together to come to an agreement that is in the best interests of the child.

When the child's behaviour does not fit what is appropriate for the child's developmental level, and is frequent or extreme, it is important to try to discover the reasons for the behaviour.

This requires:

- an understanding of the child in the context of the family, culture, community
- knowledge of the child's developmental stage
- understanding of the family dynamics
- anything unusual that may be occurring within the family or influencing the child's behaviour.

This knowledge will assist the service in understanding the child's behaviour and help to develop effective individual strategies for that child. It is important for staff members to look critically at the child's experience within the service to determine the extent to which it may be causing or contributing to the challenging behaviour.

Observing the child, discussing the behaviour with the child where appropriate and thinking critically about the meaning of this information can help arrive at developing strategies to positively guide the child's behaviour.

Strategies to guide children's behaviour.

When specific strategies are developed to address challenging behaviour, it is important that they are:

- developed in partnership with parents or guardians
- used in a consistent way by all staff members in the children's service
- consistent with the behaviour guidance policy of the children's service
- carried out consistently in the educational or recreational program
- developed from observations and a holistic view of the child and on the understanding of the purpose of the behaviour.

Collecting information

Analysis of a variety of observations of the child in a range of situations can be an effective way of gaining a more thorough picture of the child. These can not only help staff members provide an educational or recreational program that is suited to the individual needs of the child, but also can assist in identifying cues or triggers that may provoke challenging behaviours.

Related Practice Notes:

- Behaviour guidance
- Understanding children's behaviour
- Strategies to guide children's behaviour
- Developing a behaviour guidance policy
- Unacceptable practices -- discipline and punishment