

Promoting positive behaviour in early years settings

Contents

Promoting positive behaviour in early years settings.....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
All behaviour has a reason.....	2
Observations.....	2
Coping with change.....	3
Strategies to support children demonstrating aggressive behaviour – biting/hitting/kicking etc.....	3
When aggression occurs.....	4
Examples of individual rewards.....	4
Contributing to a group reward.....	4
Strategies to avoid conflict.....	5
Consequences.....	5
Tidy up time.....	5
Lining up in pre-school.....	6
Time Out.....	6
Your settings philosophy.....	7
How you manage behaviour.....	7
How staff are supported?.....	7
How parents are included?.....	7
Outside play.....	7
Strategies to help children with language and communication needs.....	8
Encouraging good behaviour.....	8
Expectation, boundaries and rules.....	8
How can you make sure the child understands what is expected?.....	9
Rewards.....	9
Sharing and turn taking.....	10
Group time - e.g. circle time, story time, snack time.....	10
Destructive behaviour.....	10
Attention seeking behaviour.....	11
Attachment difficulties.....	11
Early years inclusion: contact details.....	12

All behaviour has a reason

The first thing to do is to try to determine why the child is behaving in the way that is causing you concern.

- Is the issue personal to the child?
- Has the child a poor self-image?
- Behaviour difficulties are often the result of a language problem
- Is there a social or emotional reason?
- Is the reason environmental? Can you change something within your setting e.g. the layout, structure of the setting or adapt the activities

If a child is behaving inappropriately, the adults need to change something they do to effect a change in the child.

Bear in mind the feeling the child might be experiencing:

*Anger *Anxiety *Confusion *Fear *Panic *Loneliness *Isolation *Jealousy

*Inadequacy *Depression *Frightened *Worried *Scared *Embarrassed *Hurtful

*Nervous *Rejected *Unloved *Lonely *envious *Aimless *Lost *Tearful

If you can understand the cause, then it is easier to solve the problem. However, sometimes there may be complex difficulties which are not always apparent, and there is often no 'quick fix'.

Be patient. The tiniest step will lead to long term improvements and remember that young children are apprentices in life skills, and some will need additional help along the way to master the social niceties.

Observations

Observations are vital in determining when and why certain behaviour is happening.

Behaviour can cause concern because:

- It is serious, i.e. violent, aggressive or abusive
- It is frequent, persistent and annoying

It is important to discover the following about the behaviour:

- What triggers the behaviour?
- When is it most likely or least likely to happen?
- What are the consequences to the behaviour?
- What happens at the end of the outburst?
- Is the child in control of their behaviour?

It is important to record all that the child does and says, not just the 'inappropriate' bits.

Record several observations over different activities and times of day.

It may help to use an 'ABC' chart available within the [early years inclusion resources \(opens in new window\)](#)

For some behaviour you might consider using a frequency record to use as a baseline so you can note improvements.

Observations will help to determine your strategies and will lead into targets for a support plan.

These are also 'evidence' for referral to other professionals if this should be needed.

Coping with change

Children with language difficulties find it difficult to predict what is going to happen next. Keep routines as much as possible. Use visual clues to introduce new activities e.g. show cup if you are going to have a drink. Teach them to understand an activity is 'finished' – use finished sign

Be consistent. It is very important that everybody responds in the same way. It may be useful for staff to work to a behaviour management policy to remind everyone of agreed procedures.

An individual support plan can be put in place to support an individual child, and this may also be known as a behaviour management plan

Strategies to support children demonstrating aggressive behaviour – biting/hitting/kicking etc

Try to eliminate aggression by:

- Observing the child. Use the ABC chart previously described
- Intervening quickly. Be aware of possible difficult times and relationships and distract before the aggression arises. Re-direct to a positive activity
- Being prepared. A child with frequent aggressive behaviour needs close monitoring. Discuss with other staff how this can be achieved
- Keeping the child busy and interested by providing relevant and exciting activities. Keep unstructured times like waiting times to a minimum
- Ensuring the child has enough personal space
- Frequently praising and rewarding acceptable behaviour
- Consider groupings. Do some children wind the child up?
- Teaching the "gentle". Stroke the back of the child's hand "gently". Get the children to stroke each other's backs "gently". Be on the lookout to praise and reward "gentle" behaviour all the time
- Making a "kindness tree". Have cut outs of leaves and when a child has done something "kind" write the child's name on the leaf and let them hang it on the tree
- Reading stories and nurturing, friends, feelings, being sorry
- Talking about feelings using photographs and pictures. Let them know it is OK to feel sad, angry etc. Everybody does!
- Acknowledge their feelings; "I can see you are angry / upset, but...."
- Making sure the child knows there is an adult he can go to when upset or cross. If anger is coming from frustration because they can't do something, then teach them how to ask for help from an adult using very simple language e.g. "Kim help"

- Separating the behaviour from the child. You don't like the behaviour but you still like him/her. Always greet the parent by saying something nice in front of the child. It is important that the child knows you like them. You can keep parents informed of behaviour later or keep a home Nursery diary. There is no advantage in repeatedly upsetting a parent who is already upset and anxious
- Teaching the child how to play and share with others.

When aggression occurs

- Put up your hand and say "Stop. Hands down"/ "Stop. Feet on the floor." You may need to hold the child's hands gently by his/her sides. Then say; "hitting/biting etc. hurts."
- Stay calm and brief. Only one adult at a time should intervene
- For continuous aggression, put yourself between the child and their victim with your back to the aggressor and make a big fuss of the hurt child (perhaps rewarding them). Give **no attention whatsoever** to the child who has done the hurting – not even eye contact or a frown.
- Don't make the child say sorry unless they are. They can make it up to the hurt child by doing something nice for them later. By making them say sorry you are giving them the attention they may be looking for

Examples of individual rewards

- Stickers
- Badges
- Pictures/photographs on display
- Achievement chart with end reward
- Additional time on a favourite activity
- Verbal praise
- Tokens of favourite characters
- Certificates of praise
- Special job as a special helper
- Choosing activities

Contributing to a group reward

Examples of group rewards:

Stars in the sky, petals on a flower, bricks in a wall, pebbles on a beach, leaves on a tree, carriages on a train, flags on a castle, legs on a spider, spots on a ladybird, rays on the sun, eggs in a nest.

The chart can fit in with the weekly topics and learning themes.

Set a limit as to when the chart will be finished e.g. when you have ten stars – so the children are clear when the reward will happen. Change the chart frequently to keep the children's interest.

You can use models or toys – e.g. trucks on a train, people on a bus., dinosaurs in a row, bricks in a tower, and elephants on a spider’s web.

Build up charts like jigsaws – you could design different parts of a rocket, a favourite character or animal. Group rewards also make a child feel part of a group, help the children to see how their actions affect others, increase self- esteem and are useful when individual rewards get no response from the home.

Strategies to avoid conflict

We try to divert inappropriate behaviour by:

- Distracting
- Giving adult support
- Providing appropriate and enjoyable activities
- Giving the child a choice – e.g. “you can share the cars with jay or move to another activity.”
- By giving the child time to react to our requests
- By giving the child space
- By thinking about the language, we use
- By telling them how we expect them to behave instead

The “when” and “then” sequence can be very powerful in persuading children to do the right thing – e.g. “When you have put the doll in the box, then you can go out and play

Consequences

Consequences will only work within a reward system. If a consequence is used, it, must be something a child does not wish to do.

Afterwards always make it up with the child. Do not dwell on the “bad” behaviour.

Be on the lookout to praise the child as soon as they display wanted behaviour and show the child that you like them.

Greet the parents with a positive, rather than a negative remark.

Remember that the consequence must be appropriate and relevant to the individual child’s needs.

Tidy up time

- Warn the children two minutes beforehand so that they can finish their activity and get used to the idea
- Some children will respond better to a visual reminder
- Play a piece of music. Play the same tune every day so that the children associate it with the tidying up (the quieter the music, the calmer the children will be.)
- Alternatively, seat all the children quietly on the carpet first. Then the adults choose children to help tidy a specific activity. Involve all the children. This is a good way to tell them that play has finished and that they can be helpful

- Some children may not know how to tidy, and you will need to show them. Tell them exactly what to do rather than just “tidy up” e.g. “put the bricks in this box.”
- Make tidy up time as short and efficient as possible. Two or three minutes should be long enough
- Make ‘tidying’ a focus for the week and be on the lookout for ‘tidy helpers’ Praise and reward frequently
- Make it clear that you expect all children to help
- Use a group reward chart
- Make it easy for them by having boxes labelled and accessible
- Use “I” statements e.g. “I need you to....” “I like it when you....” Thank them for helping you
- If this is a particularly noisy and disruptive time, make observation to find out what is going wrong, and share with all staff

Lining up in pre-school

- Have realistic expectations
- Lining up is not a natural thing for a very young child to do, so consider first whether or not you need to do it
- Keep waiting time to a minimum

While waiting:

- Have an adult to ‘entertain’ the children
- Choose a ‘king’ and ‘queen’ to lead
- Do on the spot exercises such as stretching, climbing, hand dances, stamping, swaying etc.
- Pretend to pass various animals down the line – slimy, prickly, furry, jumpy ones!
- Pass a balloon or a ball over heads, between legs. Pass a tambourine without making a sound
- Paint a line, ladder, and footprints or have picture mats for the children to stand on
- Be a train
- Teach gentle touching by drawing patterns or pitter-patter raindrops on each other’s backs
- Praise good role models to encourage children who find it difficult e.g. “Sam’s standing beautifully..... Oh, and now John’s standing beautifully. Well done John.”
- Explain why they need to line up. Where are they going next?”

Time Out

Some professionals and television ‘experts’ have promoted the use of ‘time out’ and or the ‘naughty step’ as an intervention for managing inappropriate behaviour.

The early years inclusion team do not recommend this as a strategy for managing behaviour.

This is because:

- You are punishing the child for their behaviour, as opposed to dealing with the behaviour itself.
- For early years children, the understanding of the consequences of behaviour can be limited, especially if they have additional needs.

- We believe praising the behaviour you want to see has a greater impact than criticising the behaviour you don't want to see

Your settings philosophy

- A safe and secure environment for all the children
- Respect for others and property
- Listening to and respecting the views of the children and parents
- Building positive relationships
- Providing appropriate and motivating experiences
- Encouraging co-operation and tolerance and promote a sense of well-being
- Teaching and encouraging expected behaviour

How you manage behaviour

- All children are treated fairly and equally
- Positive attitude
- Understand and support
- Use of praise and rewards / and sanctions or consequences
- Parents are kept informed and all adults are consistent in their approach
- Children included in formulating boundaries

How staff are supported?

- All staff share the responsibility for the behaviour of children in the setting
- Increase confidence and professionalism of staff through training
- With parents liaise with support services e.g. Early Help, Health visitor, Inclusion team, Speech and language therapists and other health professionals

How parents are included?

- Open door policy for concerns and ensure parents are listened to/their views taken on board
- Parents are kept informed and are included in meetings with outside professionals
- Staff and parents work together

Outside play

- Remember that some children do not like outside play because it is mostly unstructured. They may feel insecure and need a lot of support. Try to engage them in play
- Have clear expectations of what the children are allowed to do and remind them each time before you go out
- Have specific areas for wheelie toys, so that all children are safe
- Have a quiet area
- Use outside play as a focus for 'good sharing'. Have a strategy for sharing the bikes, going in the sand pit etc. use a timer or sound maker that the children can see when their time is up

- Be aware that some children may not understand sharing and will need distracting. **“When...then”** is often effective e.g. **When** Jo has finished with the bike **then** you can have it.”
- Have a ‘friendship stop’ – this is a special place (e.g. bench, a hoop, a painted shape) where a child can wait if they have nobody to play with. Hopefully other children will ask them to join in their game

Strategies to help children with language and communication needs

If children cannot tell us what they want or how they feel they become frustrated, upset and angry. If they do not understand what we say to them they will not be able to do as we ask. If we are careful about the way we talk to children we can help them to understand what we want, learn the right way to behave and to improve their own language and communication.

Children with language issues often do not do what we ask them to do because:

- They are not listening
- They do not know they are supposed to be listening
- They do not understand.

Encouraging good behaviour

- If talking to the whole group, you will need to give instructions to the child who is struggling on a 1-2-1 basis in short simple sentence
- Start by getting their attention. Say their name first
- Make sure they are looking at you. Get down to their level. Encourage good looking and listening by using sign and word
- Keep instructions short and simple – do not overload the child with information
- Use gestures, signs, objects, photographs or pictures (depending on the child’s difficulty) to back up what they say. Visual clues help to reinforce the meaning of words for children who have receptive language issues
- Teach appropriate behaviours e.g. “good sitting” “hands down, feet down” (Stops hitting and kicking)
- Demonstrate or prompt (gently) so that the child knows what to do

Praise and notice when the child is behaving well as often as possible, make sure you say what they are doing is good e.g. “Kate, that’s good walking.”

Expectation, boundaries and rules

- Children need to learn what is acceptable from an early age
- Children as well as adults need to be involved in determining the ‘rules’
- Be clear about what is acceptable in you setting

How can you make sure the child understands what is expected?

- By using visual reminders. Have the 'rules' displayed in picture form where you can refer to them frequently e.g. in the sitting area
- Use very specific vocabulary for each 'rule'. The language should be positive rather than negative e.g. "We walk" (rather than "Don't run")
- Expectations and 'rules' need to be appropriate and relevant
- Do not negotiate the 'rules'. Point to the visual display and state "This is what we do"
- Know your children. Although 'rules' are not negotiable, some children need additional strategies to enable them to follow the 'rules' (see suggested strategies at the end)
- Some children might need individual visual reminders
- Keep rules to a minimum (no more than 3-5) just those that are necessary
- Use very simple wording
- Remind the children of the 'rules' at the start of each session every day
- Target a specific rule (for a day or week) and tell the children you are going to be 'on the lookout for it!' Go over the top with your praise for children following a specific rule. Record on a group chart
- Make sure ALL staff are consistent in encouraging and enforcing 'rules'
- Does the child understand what happens when they keep breaking the 'rules'?
- All staff should be consistent in giving rewards and sanctions
- Be firm in your expectations

Rewards

Rewards encourage good behaviour. The more you show a child you like something, the more they will want to do it. Rewarding is a way of getting the child to repeat the behaviour you like by:

- Showing the child, you like them
- Raising the child's self-esteem

Reward for 'being' as well as for 'doing'.

Do not forget to reward those children who always show appropriate behaviour.

The greatest reward is praise!

- You must mean it!
- Be quick with it.
- Praise and reward all other children for appropriate behaviour
- Use it to distract. "Jamie is sitting beautifully."
- Use the child's name to personalise it
- Use eye contact, appropriate facial expressions and body language.
- Make it very specific by using specific prompts; e.g.: "Well done Jane for passing the glue nicely."
- "John - thank you for picking up the books." "I liked the way you shared the chalks Suzy."
- "Peter, you coloured that so carefully, well done."
- "Mary – you are a star. You finished the puzzle all by yourself."
- Some children prefer 'silent' praise (a nod, a wink, a smile, thumbs up.)
- Remember to praise the parents too

- The reward **must** be meaningful to the child

Rewards can be for the individual and/or the group. It depends on the wishes and maturity of the child as to which will work best.

Sharing and turn taking

- Check the environment. Are there enough appropriate toys available?
- Look out for good sharing and praise and reward
- Start by playing short, simple games that will ensure a positive outcome
- Provide plenty of opportunities for small group work
- Always highlight good sharing and turn taking rather than negative behaviour. Ignore unwanted behaviour whenever possible

Group time - e.g. circle time, story time, snack time

- Is the group size appropriate for the child?
- Have appropriate expectations of the children and be consistent with rules and routines
- Check seating. Has everyone got enough space? Is it better if the child sits near the adult/in the middle of good role models/at the side? Can everyone see and take part?
- Sometimes sitting on a favourite carpet square will help a child who is unclear about his personal space
- Refer to the good sitting and good listening rules at the beginning of each group session
- Ensure the children are facing away from distractions
- Use a variety of strategies to take into account different learning e.g. visual aids, props and actions
- Avoid a long wait before you are ready to start
- Keep group times short
- Highlight and praise good role models frequently
- Praise and reward desired behaviour. Make the praise specific. Tell the child exactly what it is they have done well

Destructive behaviour

- Have clear rules and boundaries, which are visually displayed and verbally discussed
- Catch the child being good and praise them at every opportunity. After praising the child reward, them instantly. The reward should be appropriate and relevant to the child
- If child (A) destroys or breaks the toys of another child (B) the attention should be given the child (B)
- Child (A) should be reminded of the rules and if they continue an appropriate choice and consequence should be given. For example, "When you have mended the toy you can go out and play." If child (A) still does not comply a further warning should be given (i.e. what the chosen consequence is)
- Distract the child before it results in destructive behaviour
- Raise self-esteem at every opportunity
- Observe and monitor antecedents, frequency, type and timing of behaviour
- All staff must adhere to the same behaviour strategies

- Have a home/nursery diary in which to share both the positive and any real concerns

Attention seeking behaviour

- Ignore attention-seeking behaviour as long as the child and those around him are safe. Try to avoid negative comments, shouting or arguing with the child as they are still accessing attention, and this can result in escalating the unwanted behaviour
- Simply state in a relaxed voice “You know the rules, it’s your choice” then remove your attention. It is difficult to do but effective
- Make sure that the rest of the children know you like the child
- Avoid confrontation by giving the child choices e.g. “Do you want to draw with felt pens or crayons?”
- Praise the child when they are on a task and conforming to rules and boundaries
- After praising the child reward, them instantly. The rewards should be appropriate and relevant to the child
- Praise the children nearby who are displaying appropriate behaviour.
- Raise self-esteem at every opportunity
- Observe and monitor antecedents, frequency and timing of behaviour
- All staff must adhere to the same behaviour strategies
- Have a home/nursery diary in which to share positive progress and any real concerns.

Attachment difficulties

If you identify that a child might have attachment difficulties, please contact the inclusion team for more information and advice on next steps.

The strategies used to support children with attachment difficulties are different from the ones you would put in place to support a child with standard behaviour management difficulties.

Attachment difficulties can result if a child experiences loss, trauma or separation in their early lives. It is very important to understand the emotional needs of the child, and to build safe and secure relationships with all the adults in their lives.

The early years inclusion team recommends the following resources for supporting children with attachment difficulties;

“Observing Children with Attachment Difficulties in Preschool Settings. A Tool for Identifying and Supporting Emotional and Social Difficulties.”

By Kim S Golding, Jane Fain, Ann Frost, Sian Templeton and Eleanor Durrant.

Copies of the resource are available from the inclusion team and can be accessed when a child in your setting is identified as potentially having attachment difficulties.

The resource includes:

- Observation checklist
- Guidance on strategies to employ
- Explanation on attachment theory

- Explanation on different attachment styles

Early years inclusion: contact details

- Email: EYInclusion@worcschildrenfirst.org.uk
- Telephone: 01905 843099
- [Early years inclusion website \(opens in new window\)](#)