

WHAT TO DO IF

My child has challenging behaviour?



IDENTIFY THE FUNCTION OF THE BEHAVIOUR

All behaviours have a function. Conduct problems/challenging behaviour can include unsafe behaviours, aggression, and non-compliance. The functions vary depending on the situation and the child. Quite often children act out to get the attention of someone, to get access to something they want or to avoid something they do not like. It is important to recognise that children engage in these behaviours as a way to get their needs met.

TEACHING YOUR CHILD MORE APPROPRIATE WAYS TO GET THEIR NEEDS MET

When a child presents with challenging behaviours it is our job to teach them how they can get their needs met in a more functional and appropriate way. There are two components to this:

1. Reinforcing the functional and appropriate behaviours
2. NOT reinforcing the inappropriate and undesirable behaviours

WHAT IS REINFORCEMENT?

A reinforcer is something that occurs after a behaviour which results in the behaviour being more likely to occur again. A classic example is the child screaming/flopping to the floor at the supermarket because they want a lolly. If the child is given the lolly after this behaviour, and next time they're at the supermarket they scream and flop again to get a lolly, it is clear that the screaming/flopping to the floor behaviour has been reinforced by giving them the lolly.

FOUR SIMPLE RULES:

CATCH THEM
BEING GOOD!

DESCRIPTIVE
PRAISE

CALMLY REPEAT
THE INSTRUCTION

TIME OUT TO
REGULATE



SOLUTION.

PART 1: Reinforcing the functional and appropriate behaviours

Catch them being good

It's as simple as this – at various times when your child is behaving ways that are functional and appropriate, you shower them with lots of positive attention and provide them with things they like. This will work best if you give them lots of cuddles, praise, and quality time with you. It is common for parents to focus more on their child when they are acting out, and to let them be when they are not being disruptive, and this does not lead to desired outcomes. It will be extremely beneficial to spend much more time giving positive attention to your child when they are engaging in the types of behaviours you want to see more of.

Use descriptive praise

Label what your child is doing well when they are doing it so they know what they need to do next time.

For example:

“Wow, you just listened to what I just asked and followed that instruction perfectly. Well done!” “That was so kind of you to share your toy with your sister, I’m very proud of you for making that choice.”



PART 2: NOT reinforcing the inappropriate behaviours

Calmly repeat the instruction

It's extremely important that you remain calm, especially when your child is not calm. By not engaging in a back and forth and keeping your cool, you are modelling emotion and behaviour regulation to your child. By repeating the instruction, you are letting them know what the appropriate behaviour is. For example:

- “You need to finish your homework, then you can watch TV”
- “You need to use words and ask for what you would like”

Time out to regulate

When an escalation occurs and your child is having difficulty regulating their emotions and behaviour, it is often best to remove your attention and give your child time out to regulate. Set up a cool down corner in the house where your child can take time to themselves to regulate. Once they are calm and settled, they can leave the cool down corner.



EXTINCTION BURSTS

When a child has been engaging in challenging behaviours for a long time, expect that it will take some time for them to un-learn these behaviour patterns and learn new, functional, appropriate behaviours. Often when we stop reinforcing the challenging behaviours, we see an extinction burst. This is when we see an increase in the challenging behaviours, and then a massive decrease in the challenging behaviour. This occurs because the child is used to getting what they want by engaging in the challenging behaviours, so they keep trying their old behaviour patterns until they learn they don't work anymore.

CONSULT YOUR PSYCHOLOGIST

These behaviour management strategies are evidence-based. When used consistently, these strategies work. However, it is important to recognise that each child and each child's needs are different. Behaviours can be complex, so it is important to consult your psychologist if your child continues to engage in concerning behaviours, despite the implementation of these strategies. Your psychologist can help you to fine-tune the strategies and support you to ensure your child's needs are met.

