

Bolton Educational Psychology Service

Newsletter - 08.07.2020

Managing behaviour

Behaviour is communication

This week's newsletter aims to provide advice on how to understand your child's behaviour and to manage it. By better understanding how your child is feeling and what they are trying to tell you through their behaviour it is easier to manage it.

Positive strategies and keeping calm 'in fair weather' – child is calm



Positive attention, play and praise

Spending quality time with your child, even just 10 minutes a day of a child led play, activity, chat, can help to alleviate behaviour issues. **Praise** can go a long way to raise a child's self-esteem but only if they know what the praise is for and that you mean it. For example, "You're so helpful when you put your things away". Avoid adding "I wish you could do that all the time" as this takes the praise away. Keep rewards achievable and simple.

Keep expectations simple

If going through a tricky time (e.g. Covid-19) it is OK to have very few expectations, if needed just focus on the ones that keep everyone safe. It is normal for children to regress during a difficult time and to need more adult support or attention than usual for even simple tasks such as getting dressed. Accept that this may be the case and try and do things together or use picture cards of tasks to set a routine. Use clear and simple language.

Keeping things calm (and teach calming activities)

Try to find as many ways as you can to maintain calm through the day e.g. regular routines, time for rest, child's choice time, lots of warning before ending/changing activities, deep breathing, a 'private/personal' safe space for the child to go when they need quiet. Try modelling self-regulation (e.g. "that driver annoyed me, I am going to take 10 deep breaths" or "I'm feeling a bit sad today, I am going to do some colouring because it makes me feel better").

Strategies to use 'when there could be a storm' – you can see your child is becoming upset / angry



Divert and distract

Suggest a change of scenery or activity, e.g. calmly suggest "Shall we go outside and kick a ball" or start talking to them about something nice you have done together or that you are planning to do together. E.g. "I enjoyed watching Avengers with you the other day, Tony Starks suit was so clever..." However, using only distraction can sometimes make the child feel you are not listening to their frustrations.

Name feelings, empathise and problem solve

When you notice your child is frustrated, try naming their emotions, for example "I wonder if you are feeling frustrated because you can't find your toy? I feel frustrated too when I can't find something. Shall we look for it together?" Try to name and empathise before trying to solve the problem for them.

Sensory activities

Use repetitive sensory activities to calm children who are at the very early stages of becoming angry or upset, for example blowing bubbles or threading. Sometimes calling it a 'job' to help you is a strategy that can work to give children a sense of purpose and a 'get out' from an emotional state. Examples of such activities include: human shredder (ripping up your unwanted letters/ documents); helping with cooking (ripping up mushrooms, bread, kneading dough, sifting flour); sharpening pencils; cleaning toys (with a cloth and bowl of water/ water spray bottle); pouring or filling containers with pasta, rice, water; tidying and lining up items (toys, DVD, cups... anything).

Top up

At this stage try 'topping up' on the positive strategies described above. The more the better.



What to do 'in the storm' – the child is upset / angry



Be there for your child

How you do this depends on your child. Some children will want you to hug them. Others may try and hit out if you get close, but still benefit from you watching them from afar. Some children may want to hear your soothing voice, so try reading aloud from a book in the same room as them. Others may scream "go away" and you may need to say "OK, I'm in the kitchen, I'm here for you when you need me" [then check-in every 5-10 minutes].

Are we safe?

Is the environment they are in safe? Do you need to move them away from a busy road? Do you need to remove objects from the room, or do you need to ask your other children to leave the room?

Remain calm yourself?

This is sometimes easier said than done. If you are getting angry yourself - if it is safe to do so - remove yourself from the situation and calm yourself. You could say "I need to go and take five minutes (or do a job) and will be back".

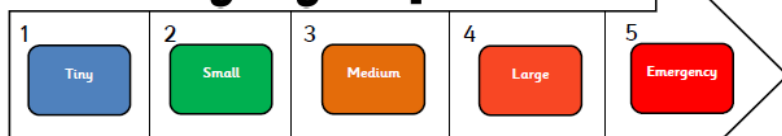


What to do 'after the storm' – the child is calming down

Make sure it really is over

The 'meltdown' may appear over, but your child may still be feeling horrible inside. The smallest thing could lead to another meltdown. Therefore, keep expectations low, keep everything calm, give your child a choice of what to do. e.g. "when you are ready, we could read or do some more deep breathing".

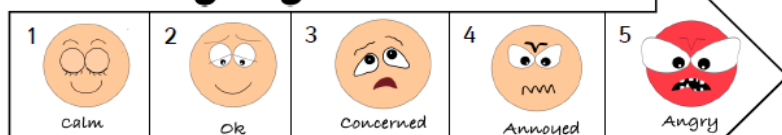
How big is your problem?



Do they
match?



How big is your reaction?



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Help your child reflect, repair and reconnect

Once your child is calm, encourage them to tell you:
a) "what happened?" (don't ask "why did you do that" as the child may answer and believe "because I am naughty/bad/etc.")
b) "what were you thinking?"
c) "what were you feeling?" (in their body)
d) "how can we make this right?" or "how can we stop it happening again?". Establishing a language that you and your child can use to talk about problem solving and reactions can be helpful. Compare the size of the problem to the size of a reaction – do they match? Use the diagram to help them reflect.

If other siblings were involved listen to each them individually (using the same questions). Then help everyone listen to each other (only if they are all calm and able to do so).

Rather than a 'punishment', help your child to do something that repairs any damaged relationships. For example, if they broke their sibling's toy, you could agree to go with them to buy a replacement toy with their pocket money (everyone needs to agree this is a good idea and that this would be the end of the situation).

Can you identify any triggers, and can you do anything about them?

After listening to your child, try to identify what the behaviour was trying to communicate.

Do things go wrong when your child is tired? Perhaps, schedule in one-to-one time with them at night. *Does your child get angry when it is too loud?* Can you get them to listen to calming music with earphones. *Does your child get stressed if you go shopping with them?* Could you do online shopping instead. *Does your child find it hard to share?* You could role play this with them.

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Need support?

Our COVID 19 community response line is now open offering vital help to people who need food or essential items

01204 337221

8.30am – 5.30pm Mon – Fri and Sat 9am – 1.30pm