

Responding to Behaviour

Behaviours that challenge us are always a way for a child to communicate a functional need. This resource can act as a guide to support educators in better understanding why particular behaviors may be occurring and how best to support children through this.

Adult Responses

Educators in ECEC settings may experience high levels of stress in response to challenging behaviours. Some reasons for this response may be:

- Behaviours may provoke feelings of being unsafe
- Behaviours could trigger an uncomfortable response from the educator
- Concern about how families and caregivers may react
- Unsure of the best ways to respond to the behaviour

Adult Responses Matters...

We know that behavioural change involves physical changes in the brain; therefore, it can take time for a child to learn the new skills needed to develop alternative strategies to communicate their needs.

The child has potentially been using their current behaviours as a strategy to have their needs met for months (or even years); therefore, we cannot expect that they will abandon this strategy quickly.

Remember that it takes time and repetition to support the child to develop a new skill.

What to Consider

1 Identify Potential Reasons for the Behaviour

Let's consider the behaviour using the Iceberg Model (image right). The behaviour that we see sits 'above the surface'.

Now, consider what is happening 'below the surface'. What are the underlying reasons driving the behaviours (i.e. need to communicate, connection, sensory responses, need to feel belonging, etc.)? This is what we don't see.

Where does this behaviour stem from? (Consider factors such as emerging skill development, developing self-regulation strategies, environmental factors that may be impacting senses, room transitions, relationships with key educators, peer interactions, etc.)





2

Meeting the Child's Underlying Needs

- Ensure educators are available and connected to the children to ensure that the child has strong connections and to build on their sense of belonging (RESOURCE: Educator Engagement Model)
- Ensure that the child is engaging in activities and has access to equipment that is both stimulating and provides an opportunity for the child to succeed.
- Consider the routines within the care environment; if a clear pattern has emerged as a result of the observations, we might consider flexibility within the routines.
- Provide additional support during 'high-risk' times so educators can co-regulate, teach, and model regulation strategies.
- Remember that these behavioural changes won't happen immediately; therefore it is unlikely that you will prevent all behaviours from occurring using these strategies alone. Repetition, repetition, repetition.

3

Teach the Child a New Skill

In order to support the child to learn new ways to communicate their needs, we need to support them to develop more positive ways of having their needs met. For children who are non-speaking, we should consider a variety of strategies such as teaching simple keyword signs to all children within the care environment to ensure that they can effectively communicate their needs with Educators and their peers.

4

Provide Positive Reinforcement

Provide positive reinforcement when the children are practicing these skills throughout social interactions. Remember that it is important to be as specific as possible when providing reinforcement so the children are aware of which behaviours you are reinforcing. Focus your positive feedback on the skill that the child has learned, not the child as an individual.

5

Manage Adult Responses

Communicate with parents/caregivers about behaviours and the approach you are taking to manage them (teaching the children alternative skills).

Ensure that Educators are engaging in frequent reflective discussions regarding the challenging behaviours and trends within the care environment; sharing their experiences and reflecting on their current practice.

It is important to ensure that all educators are responding consistently.

6

Seek Support

If you are still concerned about these behaviours, you can contact your Inclusion Professional for support, work with the child's allied health professionals (if they are accessing these services), or support the child's family/caregivers to access community supports such as Child and Family Health Service (CAFHS).