

Promoting positive behaviour

From time to time children and young people in foster or kinship care may display behaviour that is difficult to manage. Often this behaviour will be quite normal for their age and stage in life. However, in some cases a child or young person may display a pattern of challenging behaviour that is disturbing or unusual. There is usually a reason for challenging behaviour, and understanding its causes is the first step towards promoting positive behaviour.

Reasons for challenging behaviour

There may be a range of reasons why children and young people display behaviour that is difficult to manage. They may have been exposed to traumatic and distressing situations. Children and young people respond to situations in different ways, but trauma and distress are often shown through their behaviour. It is important to consider what feelings, such as fear or anger, may be the underlying reason for their behaviour.

It is also important to consider your own feelings about a child or young person's challenging behaviour, as this can help you manage both your feelings and the behaviour of the child or young person in your care.

There are three questions you can ask yourself as you manage challenging behaviour and move toward promoting positive behaviour:

- How am I feeling about the child or young person's behaviour? Are my feelings helping or hindering this situation?



- How is the child or young person feeling? What are the reasons for the challenging behaviour?
- What strategies can I use to manage the child or young person's challenging behaviour and promote positive behaviour?

Short-term strategies to promote positive behaviour

- **Provide a role model** – this is one of the best ways to show children and young people what your expectations are.
- **Listen and ask questions** – this will help you understand the reasons for the child's challenging behaviour.
- **Use positive reinforcement** – tell the child or young person when you are pleased with something they have done, for example, "it is great that you picked up all the toys today after you finished the game".
- **Focus on the child or young person's strengths, not behaviour** – focus on the child or young person's personality and talents.
- **Reward good behaviour** – offer an incentive for them to behave positively and let them know when there are improvements. Make sure this is done consistently and with particular goals in mind.
- **Establish family routines** – think about how you might explain the routines you have at home that help the household run smoothly. How will you let the child or young person know what the routines are and what they might need to do? Do these routines need to change depending on the child or young person's age?
- **Encourage shared learning** – demonstrate a skill to a child or young person and let them take responsibility for the task so the skill is reinforced.
- **Promote privileges** – this is similar to using rewards and usually involves asking them to do something that they would rather avoid in order to do something they like, for example, "let's eat all of your dinner so we can watch your favourite program", rather than "if you don't eat your dinner then you can't watch TV".

- **Prepare for difficult situations** – avoid a battle. You do not need to prove who is in charge.
- **Allow time to listen and acknowledge anger** – ask the child or young person what would make them feel better.
- **Set limits** – calmly and firmly explain your rules and boundaries with the expectation that it is normal for children and young people to respect them.
- **Create a calm, safe environment** – this will reduce anxiety and stress for you and the child or young person.

Long-term strategies to promote positive behaviour

- **Building a positive relationship** – build a positive relationship with the child or young person and help them to develop other positive relationships. A relationship built on trust and respect provides a basis for a child or young person to feel safe, secure and cared about. This will often help to alleviate the feelings of insecurity and fear that may be contributing to challenging behaviour.
- **Consistency** – how you relate to a child or young person, and consistency between different children and young people you are caring for. Consistency helps a child or young person see your boundaries as fair, and may make them more likely to listen to you.
- **Communication** – this is an essential part of understanding and managing challenging behaviour. Listening to and communicating with the child or young person will enable them to express their needs, and help you to talk about your expectations. It is also important to communicate with other significant people in the child or young person's life, such as school teachers, coaches, Child Safety Officers and staff from other non-government services. This will help you understand the reasons or extent of the challenging behaviour and work together to resolve it.

Unacceptable methods of managing behaviour

As a foster carer or kinship carer, it is your responsibility to ensure that behaviour management strategies are consistent with the Standards of Care. The fact sheet *Legislative requirements to ensure quality care* provides more information.

The Statement of Standards in Section 122 of the *Child Protection Act 1999* states that 'techniques for managing the child's behaviour must not include corporal punishment or punishment that humiliates, frightens or threatens the child in a way that is likely to cause emotional harm'.

Support for carers in promoting positive behaviour

You are part of a team providing care for the child or young person and there is support available to help you in your role of promoting positive behaviour. These supports should be discussed with your Child Safety Officer and included in the Placement Agreement if you are a kinship carer and Foster Carer Agreement if you are a foster carer. The fact sheets *Support for carers* and *Case planning* provide more information.

There are times when a child or young person's behaviour may become extremely disturbing or difficult to manage. In these situations the child or young person may need special support. You can discuss this with your Child Safety Officer.

Other programs

Triple P Parenting Program

The 'Triple P Parenting Program' is a course to help parents and carers manage challenging behaviour. To find out more about Triple P locations, visit www.health.qld.gov.au

Parent Help Line

Parent Help Line provides telephone counselling for parents and carers. Hours of operation are 8am - 10pm, seven days a week. Contact **1300 30 1300** or visit www.parentline.com.au

Raising Children Network

The Raising Children Network provides a range of information for parents and carers of children up to eight years of age. Visit www.parentline.com.au

For more information visit www.childsafety.qld.gov.au

Or contact the Department of Child Safety on **1800 811 810** or **3224 8045**.

