



Chapter Two

Exploring challenging behaviour

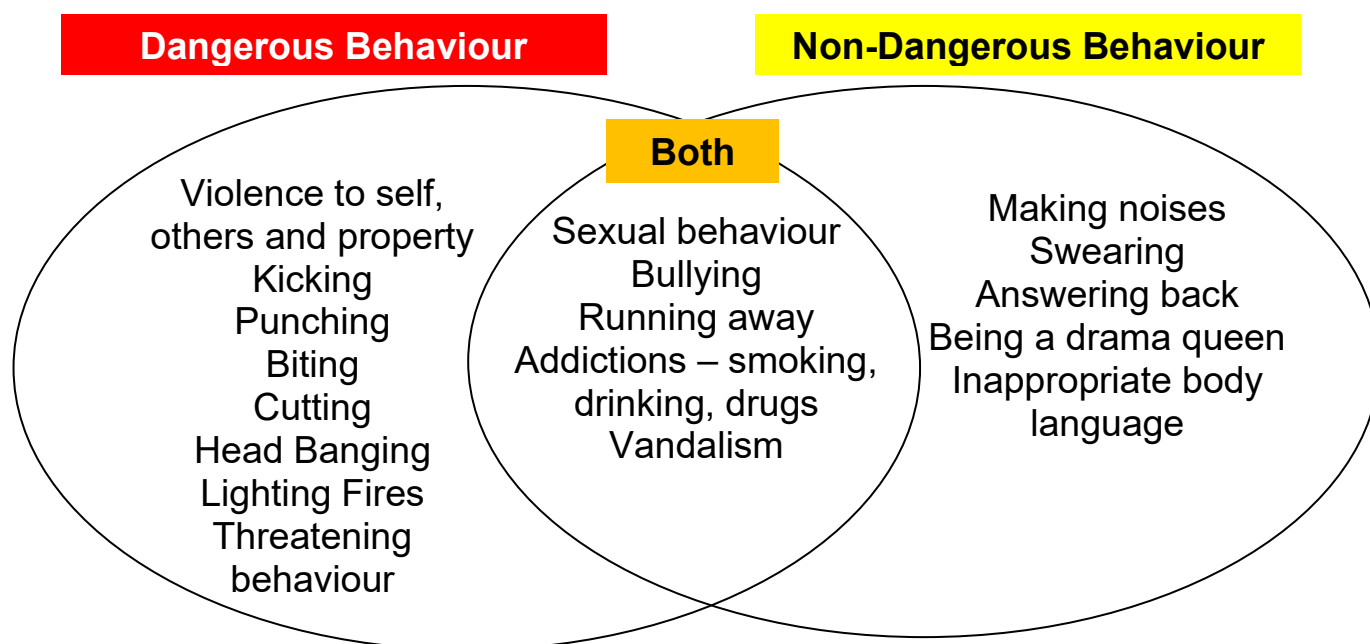
All children and young people exhibit some behaviour that can be seen as challenging. How we address that behaviour depends on how damaging it may be. Is the behaviour damaging to the child, other children, yourself or property?

Let's look at two areas

Dangerous and Non-Dangerous

Consider the reasons why you are reading this book. The behaviours you are dealing with may clearly fall into one area or both.

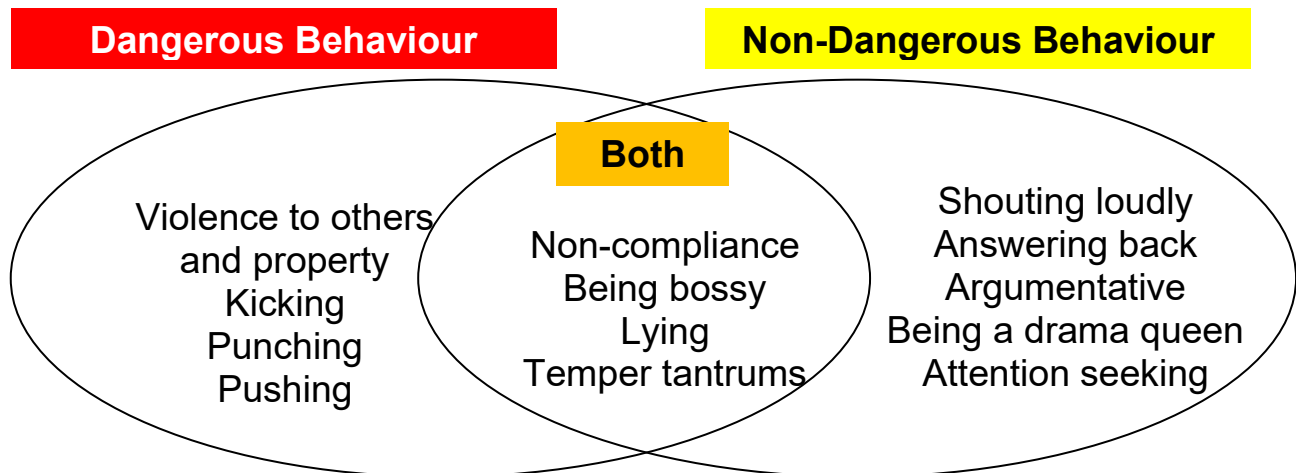
The examples below illustrate the concept in relation to the behaviour being exhibited by Jack:



Think about this list. What would your priority be in managing Jack's behaviour? Would you want to stop or reduce the violence and sexual behaviours first? Obviously it depends on the circumstance, but generally the choice will be affected by trying to keep others safe. It is impossible to deal with all behaviour at once. It is also important to recognise who may be at risk. By intervening are you compromising your own safety?

We also need to consider intervention styles and approaches. How you intervene will affect how the individual responds, therefore affecting the outcome of the intervention.

The next graph takes a look at Leanne's behaviour



When we look at the range of challenging behaviour, we need to decide which behaviours we want to concentrate on. Try choosing 2 or 3 key areas and focusing on these first. Other improvements may happen after the key areas of behaviour have been changed. If we try to address all the behaviour issues at once, the child may feel that can never do anything right. So why try? By succeeding with small steps the child's confidence and self esteem levels are raised allowing progression in managing behaviour effectively. Other areas of the child's behaviour may improve without the need for further intervention.

Some socially unacceptable behaviour may escalate into dangerous behaviour. It is unusual for a child or young person to exhibit single behaviour type. It is more usual to see a range of behaviours for instance swearing and poor body language, or swearing and violence.

Having suggested that we deal with the dangerous behaviour first, are we tolerating the non-dangerous or even giving approval via silence? The child still needs to behave within the rules or boundaries set. However your focus and priority must be on changing dangerous behaviour. We often hear the phrase 'nipping it in the bud' meaning that we stop or resolve an issue before it escalates. This requires us to be vigilant, know our children and recognise potential triggers. Managing behaviour needs a whole setting or whole family approach, ensuring that our responses to behaviour are consistent and agreement has been reached on which behaviours to concentrate on first.

Henry seems to be a very angry boy often lashing out at other children especially if they get in his way. He cannot understand the concept of waiting or taking turns.



When he is frustrated he will shout and swear. Sometimes he will walk around repeating the same swear word over and over.

When he gets angry he will head butt the nearest object causing significant harm to himself and potentially others.

Both sets of behaviour need supporting. Staff are more concerned about the self harm. However when this takes place in a childcare setting, parents are far more concerned about their own children hearing swear words. If the swearing is not dealt with other children may feel the behaviour is acceptable and copy. We need to balance and prioritise responses.

Henry's behaviour is taking place in a child care setting. It is essential that the rules applied are there for all children and that 'special rules' are not given just for Henry.



Rules need to be owned by all children. If they are clearly involved in deciding what is acceptable and not acceptable there will be a level of self policing.

The adult needs to ensure the rules are written in a positive manner. They may also suggest alternative ways of behaving to the children. For example, instead of 'no hitting' the rule may say 'we are all friends here' or 'If you are angry you can draw on the angry board'.



Carole is 15, she has autism. She is generally very happy, co-operative and has never harmed another child. Carole hates shopping and is uncomfortable with people she does not know. She does not like loud speaker systems as she cannot see who is speaking and dislikes change.

Her mother has taken Carole to a large store to purchase new shoes. On entering the store Carole feels anxious and to calm herself starts to hum.

Other shoppers glance over and look away. The shop tannoy system starts to make an announcement. Carole holds her hands over her ears, stands still and starts to hum more loudly. People now stop and stare. The store manager walks over to speak to Mum...

What would you do if you were in Mum's shoes? Is Carole doing anything to harm herself or others or is it just embarrassment that classes this type of behaviour as challenging?

Obviously we don't know how predictable Carole may be or whether this behaviour is likely to escalate into a more dangerous situation. In the story Carole is not causing harm to herself or others. Therefore her behaviour is non-dangerous. However at 15, Carole needs to learn and understand what is acceptable in public places and needs to be supported to modify her behaviour using alternative calming strategies.

Consider the following statements; would you class this behaviour as challenging when exhibited in public places?

1. Swearing and shouting
2. Drinking alcohol in public
3. Kissing and cuddling in public
4. Flapping arms and spinning round in a circle
5. Kicking and biting
6. Throwing a temper tantrum and/or screaming

Your decision will be based against your own personal judgements. Some people will decide certain behaviour is acceptable or can be tolerated. Others would want to change the behaviour being shown.

In Britain we often see young people outside, using the streets as a social environment. Some individuals class this as anti social behaviour. Others tolerate it. They recognise the young people may have nowhere else to go or do not want to challenge behaviour because they feel threatened themselves. In some cultures individuals are imprisoned for kissing in public. It is not accepted, tolerated or lawful.



A disabled child who flaps their hands and spins in a circle is seen as 'different' i.e. behaving in a way that conventional society deems socially unacceptable. Society judges the child to have challenging behaviour, rather than understand the underlying impairment and tolerating the behaviour. Perhaps it is society's thinking that needs challenging! Note here the use of the word 'conventional' rather than 'normal'. We are all different, so what is 'normal'?

If a child is behaving in a dangerous manner, the response "He does not know what he is doing", therefore excusing the behaviour, is no excuse at all. We need to support children by initiating strong and appropriate communication, so that they can understand and respond to instruction and boundaries. This may require us to make adaptations to the ways in which we communicate. Make it appropriate to the individual child or young person, using augmented communication systems if necessary.

When an individual is stressed, communication skills are reduced. Children may hear an instruction but not realise it is directed at them. If we as adults are stressed when trying to support a challenging child, our own pitch and tone of voice change. This can add to the confusion. Remember to use the child's name so that they know the communication is directed towards them. Use short sentences and keep them to the point. If repeating sentences, use the same words. Get down to the child's level otherwise you may seem threatening.



All children and young people want to explore boundaries from a very early age. Nyasha, aged 1, knows that it is wrong to touch the television remote control. However, after giving you a knowing look, she does it anyway.

Why is this? Would you class it as a natural part of development and exploration of her environment, or a direct defiance of a parent's command?

This particular example is about Nyasha showing her independence. She knows she is not allowed to do it and if there is no response from parents, she will do it again. If her parents give her boundaries and say "No" then she will learn that touching the television is 'out of bounds'.

Everyone uses a range of behaviour to express themselves or communicate with others. Sometimes these behaviours are out of character, especially when we are angry, frustrated, cross, anxious, upset or fearful. We may feel like throwing something, or hitting out, but remain in control of our behaviour. We are able to regulate and have 'self control'. This is what we need to teach children to use, by encouraging alternative ways to demonstrate our feelings. We also express behaviours differently when we are happy or excited. Can you remember the last time you actually jumped up and down with excitement?

Supporting children who are exhibiting challenging behaviour is not easy. Sometimes we cannot determine what the message is behind the behaviour, or understand what the child needs or wants. However we need to take time out to observe and reflect on what went on. Then we can begin to establish an understanding of the behaviour being exhibited.

It is worth repeating the importance that the child or young person is NOT 'always in trouble'. If they feel that they can never do anything right, the young person may start believing that they cannot change the way they behave. Always criticise the behaviour and do not criticise the child or young person.

Behaviour is seen as far more challenging when the child or young person knows and understands what they are doing. Then the behaviour becomes the source of conflict. It does not always matter what the behaviour is, the resultant argument and response is, on occasion, the purpose behind the behaviour.

This is illustrated by Jack, who wants to have arguments. It is an opportunity for him to feel in control. At home Jack lacks the ability to have choice and control over his actions. His Grandfather 'rules the roost', responding with violence. Jack tends to keep his head down.



Jack looks elsewhere to exert authority and feel big. He tends to pick on weaker people (not necessarily children) to win arguments. Jack does not necessarily think ahead to consider 'what will happen if'. He lives in the here and now moment.

On an estate within a small town, Jack hangs out with a group of young people aged 10-15. They tend to be out until about 11pm. There is a local park which is open to the elements, no shelter from wind or rain and the gates are locked at 9pm.

The young people choose to congregate behind the local shops in a block of garages. This is directly below a number of flats.

During the evening the young people get cold, and to warm up decide to light a fire. They are actually quite careful about this choosing a safe place to light it, on an apron of concrete away from the buildings. They collect a range of flammable materials such as wood and old furniture.

Within 10 minutes a local resident has seen flames and called the fire brigade and police. The young people run away. However they are very angry that their activities have been curtailed. A number of other small fires are lit over the next few weeks and a residents meeting takes place.



Some residents' understand the boredom the kids face and have suggested building a youth shelter in the park. Additionally they thought the park should stay open later and a permanent safe fire pit or barbeque area be built within the park. Others said how dangerous this would be and disagreed. They think the young people will set fire to the park, drink and take drugs, although there has been no evidence of this elsewhere.

The young people themselves have not been invited to attend this meeting.

There are some questions that arise from this short story. We assume that the young people knew what they were doing. Knew it would be seen as challenging behaviour and yet did it anyway. Or, instead of planning to misbehave, were they identifying a solution to a problem. They were cold and wanted to get warm? How much blame do you put on the young people?

In this situation an argument ensued. Not with the young people, but the local residents. Obviously it was not appropriate to light a fire and the residents were angry. However, again we look behind the behaviour to see what the communication tells us. Here we recognise that the young people are bored. There is nothing to do and no-where to go.

When we are dealing with behaviour that is seen as challenging, we need to ensure that our approach is agreed. If we set a range of differing boundaries, the child or young person will get confused and not know what he is or is not allowed to do.

In this example the local Police Community Support Officer (PSCO) was called in to liaise between the young people and the community. The first step was to listen to both sides, without judgement. This can be hard for us to do. We judge far too easily without necessarily knowing all the facts. We certainly do not always know how young people are feeling or what they actually want to happen.

There is an end to this story. The PSCO arranged several meetings between the residents and young people. Once the residents actually began to speak to the teenagers and have a 2-way conversation they realised that they were just young people with time on their hands and lots of energy. Negotiations were opened with the local council. It was agreed to open the park for longer hours. The PSCO supported the young people to write a proposal to the council to build 2 large family brick barbeques on waste land in the park.

The young people, alongside 2 residents and the PSCO, were involved in the planning and design. They met with the council to write a risk assessment and got involved in sourcing materials. A local builder's merchant donated bricks and mortar and the project began. The Fire Brigade advised and also supported with building the structures.

Through this interaction the young people and residents got to know each other. The young people showed that they were capable of hard work and willing to undertake something that was of benefit to them.

After the structures were built they were never vandalised. The young people were proud of their achievement and two even attended a food hygiene course so that they could cook a barbeque at a fun day in the park.

Of course it was not as simple as it sounds. The project took a year to complete. There were various hurdles to cross including the response of the residents and the persuasion of the local Parish Council. Even after the project was completed several residents still felt it was the wrong thing to have done. Through the project Jack's self esteem and confidence levels were raised.

Put yourself into the position of Jack's grandparents at the beginning of this story. A PCSO comes knocking on the door to say Jack had been lighting fires. Jack's grandmother felt powerless and did not know what to do or how to control Jack's behaviour.

His grandfather was very angry. Neither grandparent had time or inclination to listen to Jack's side of the story. As far as they were concerned he had yet again displayed challenging behaviour. Jack's grandfather's initial reaction was to hit Jack. At some point Jack is likely to retaliate against his grandfather and hit him back.

Jack always felt that he was in trouble. Even when he tried to do the right thing people got the wrong end of the stick. His Grandfather criticised him for working alongside the PCSO. He saw it as Jack being a traitor, working with the police.

Some residents constantly made comments and were forthcoming in their views of 'today's youth'. It took a lot of effort on the part of Jack and his mates to stick it out to the end. It would have been easier to forget the project. They needed praise and recognition each step of the way to succeed.

We also need to look for opportunities to praise and not criticise. Through this project Jack's behaviour improved. He was not perfect by any means. However the project taught him valuable skills such as: better communication; negotiation skills; planning and conflict resolution. This will help him in the future.

We too can help children to develop these skills. Behaviour management is not all about stopping poor behaviour. It is about helping the child to develop strategies so they can choose alternative behaviours. Through our intervention and support children learn skills that are valuable throughout their lives.



Chapter Three

Looking behind the behaviour

In the previous chapter we recognised that there is no clear definition of challenging behaviour. Behaviours that we perceive as challenging depend on the tolerance and understanding of the individual assessing them.

‘Is this a phase they are going through?’ - A question asked regularly by parents and guardians of disruptive children.

Is the behaviour part of growing up and becoming independent or is it part of life changes happening at the time?

Is it a reflection of how others around them behave or

Is it part of an underlying condition/impairment or does the child have a behavioural disorder?

These are difficult questions and cannot be answered easily. Sometimes it is necessary to request a formal assessment via the school or health service. Assessment can take many weeks. It will involve a range of people observing and recording the behaviour of the individual in different settings, at different times and when the child is with different people.



The teacher at Leanne’s school writes a diary each day. Sometimes Mum is afraid to read it. There are always issues recorded relating to Leanne’s behaviour and Mum receives phone calls asking her to come into school to meet with the Head Teacher. This has caused her mother depression and anxiety.

The school have suggested Leanne undertakes a formal behavioural assessment. This will help the school to write an Individual Educational Plan known as an IEP. The IEP will also include a Behavioural Intervention Plan. Mum is actually quite glad that this is happening and it is relief to share her anxieties with someone else.

An educational psychologist will be called in to begin the assessment. Generally the assessment is known as a FBA – Functional Behavioural Assessment and will follow a strict formula.

Observations will be undertaken by a number of staff including the teacher, teaching assistant, lunchtime supervisors and education psychologist (and other staff as appropriate). In addition the student and parents will be asked for their thoughts. The key elements involved in this assessment are:

- A description of the behaviour being exhibited
- The setting in which the behaviour occurs, frequency, intensity and duration
- The frequency of time-outs or direct intervention
- The impact on the child's education
- The amount of work undertaken & grades of work
- A record of discipline referrals
- Structured Observation

The assessment would then begin to dig a little deeper and ask further questions about the type of intervention used and responses. It will also look closely at the individual child, including any communication requirements. It will also look at the wider context, including any family issues that may be affecting the behaviour of the child. Sometimes the assessment will be part of the findings fed into a Common Assessment Framework (known as CAF). The CAF looks at how support can be offered to a family. It may be instigated by Social Services or another agency such as school or health professional.

After the behaviour assessment has been made, an Intervention Plan will be written and put into place. This will indicate a range of interventions, what the expected outcomes are, who will be responsible and how reviews will take place.

The assessment looks at more than the immediate behaviour. It is essential to take a look at the wider picture to see what is going on behind the behaviour.

We need to be aware that parents will respond to a request for an assessment in different ways. Some parents, such as Leanne's, are pleased that something is being done. Others will not want an assessment to take place. They may feel threatened, that their parenting skills are being put under the spot light and feel that they are being criticised. It is important to keep up a good relationship with parents/guardians and ensure any assessment is a positive and not a negative experience.

Of course observations are not limited to just specialist services. We are all able to observe and try to make sense of what is happening. If a child you are working or living with already has a behavioural intervention plan in place, it is important to ensure there is continuity of approach. The way you are responding to incidents should reflect the recommendations within the plan.

However, if a plan is not in place, there is no reason to stop you creating one of your own!

The plan still needs to involve a range of people, including the child or young person. Their involvement will obviously depend on their age. However, if we are trying to modify their behaviour, they will need to understand what, how and why.

On the next page we have provided a series of 8 questions relating to the child's behaviour and background to the behaviour. They are designed to help you think about how to support the child or young person in your care. In this instance we have concentrated on play rather than education.



These are suggestions only and can be adapted according to your own situation and environment. Think 'out of the box' and put yourself into the child's mind. How do they see the same situation and what type of involvement should, and can, the child have in this observation?

Observation does not have to be obvious. Sitting with a clip board can be very distracting for the child and will often cause them to modify their normal behaviour or 'act up' because they are being watched.

Consider how you can undertake unobtrusive observation and who might be involved. If you are working in a setting, much of the information will already be recorded in your normal records.

It will be necessary to carry out more than one observation. Children will behave in different ways all the time. We need to have an overview, rather than a one off observation. Initial records will help to generate an action plan with further observations taking place to evaluate progress.

Suggested questions to include in an observational record

The notes below each question are to get you thinking and consider the broader picture.

1. Obvious questions such as date, day, time of day

When reviewing the observations you may find particular patterns, such as poor behaviour happening regularly on a Monday. What happens on Mondays? Has the child had a poor weekend experience? Is the child facing a fear about returning to the setting? Has the child been at home or spent the weekend on an access visit? What do we know about the child's weekend and how this may have affected their behaviour?

Consider the time of day. Is the behaviour happening before lunch when the child is hungry? Or after lunch when the child has had something to eat? Is the behaviour affected by hunger or food intolerance such as sugar or colourant?

2. Description of behaviour(s)

It is unlikely that the child is only exhibiting one particular behaviour type. There are probably several key areas of concern. Record the types of behaviour the child is displaying. If these are numbered on your records it may be easier to record specific intervention styles for specific behaviours.

3. The setting in which the behaviour occurs

Consider the setting. Is the behaviour exhibited inside or outside, in a particular room or corridor or in the bathroom or toilets? Where does it tend to happen? Is there a pattern?

Also have a think 'out of the box'. Is the behaviour being influenced by sensory stimulation? Is the setting particularly hot or cold? What kind of lighting is in the environment?

Jazel is very light sensitive. If the light is too dim he cannot see well and he gets bad headaches when lights flicker. Jazel has difficulty in expressing how he is feeling and if the light is annoying him he tends to take it out on others. His behaviour includes pushing in, taking toys from others and arguing.

He prefers natural light and chooses to play with other children in front of the large patio windows. He will move toys into the light, rather than move himself over to the toys. Recently he was caught trying to pull the large sand tray and contents to the patio windows.



What could you do to help Jazel and reduce poor behaviour?

4. When does the behaviour occur?

This question looks at both the frequency of the behaviour and links to the record of the timing of the behaviour. Again are there any patterns emerging? Does the behaviour happen just before home time? If so, what is happening when the child is collected? Does the behaviour happen after the child has visited the toilet? Are they constipated and uncomfortable? Do they need the toilet when the behaviour occurs?

5. Who is involved?

Does the behaviour only occur with certain individuals?



Christopher is on the autism spectrum, he enjoys being in his play setting and likes his personal play worker. However, on occasion he would try to attack her, tearing at her clothes.

During observation it was noted that this behaviour only took place on the days the play worker wore a specific red fleece. Christopher could not abide the colour red as it created a sensory overload.

Through observation and records the reason behind this behaviour was discovered. The play worker stopped wearing a red fleece and Christopher no longer attacked her. Staff in the setting were aware of the need to reduce colour stimulation, particularly in relation to the colour red.



We have all been in situations where we need to separate groups of children. We may also need to engineer opportunities for children to play together working towards a joint aim to increase social interaction and tolerance of each other.

Is the challenging behaviour being modelled by other children and young people? Who are they copying the behaviour from and why?

Have a think about how the adult dealing with the incident is behaving. Are they displaying anger, frustration, fear, anxiety or are they calm, using clear simple language and using the child's name? Be honest in your assessment. How an adult responds will affect the child's response. For example if the adult raises their voice, the child may feel they have been given permission to shout.



Emma is a 2 year old, attending a local pre-school. When she first started at the setting she did not want her mum to leave. She recognised that whenever she went to anyone wearing a blue tee shirt, her mum would leave. Consequently she learned not to go near anyone wearing the setting uniform and would scream if anyone wearing a blue tee shirt approached.

Staff observed this behaviour and made sure that when they met her and welcomed her into the setting they wore cardigans or jumpers over their uniform. Emma was then quite happy to be with them.

Once she had got used to the staff and setting, she was very happy for her mum to leave. The behaviour was supported through observation and adaptation to address Emma's fears.

By asking someone else to observe a child's behaviour it is possible to record not only who is dealing with the situation but also how they are reacting. What else is going on in the room verbally and non-verbally?

Ensure that the person who is undertaking the observation does not get involved. As soon as you are involved it is impossible to record objectively.

6. What are the consequences of the behaviour?

Describe previous interventions and what sanctions are being imposed. What has happened as the result of the behaviour? How has the child responded? Think back and check any notes you have made.

Have threats been made and not carried out?

Has the sanction been too great for the behaviour?

Was the sanction relevant to the child?

Has the consequence happened immediately or is there a delay in responding to behaviour?

These questions require a level of honest self reflection. It is easy to concentrate on the child's behaviour and not so easy to assess our own!

Henry hates maths; he finds it difficult to concentrate and gets distracted very easily. He uses avoidance tactics to get out of uncomfortable situations. During maths he will constantly move around the classroom, make noises, pick up other children's work and generally behave in an unacceptable way.

For the sake of the rest of the children, the class teacher asks the teaching assistant to take Henry out of class into the play room. The theory is that the lesson will continue on a one to one basis between Henry and teaching assistant. However the play room is far too exciting and Henry is happy getting toys out of cupboards. He will not listen to his teaching assistant. He has achieved his goal which is:

- To move out of the classroom
- To avoid the work he is being asked to do
- To have one to one attention
- To be in the playroom

What is the pay-back from the behaviour? Does the child get what they want by behaving in that way? When considering sanctions, think about what the child wants to achieve. If the benefits are taken away or reduced the child may wonder if the behaviour is worth it. Consequences and sanctions are discussed in more detail later in the book.

7. Is there an underlying condition, impairment or external issues affecting the behaviour?

Two of the short case studies used in this section so far have illustrated behaviour being exhibited which relates to an underlying impairment. We need to adapt our work to support specific requirements, but we must also ensure all children still abide by the setting or house rules. Our adaptations may be in the way we communicate those house rules effectively to ensure all children understand what is acceptable.

Is there anything happening in the child or young person's life that may affect their behaviour? Family issues, changes of circumstance or bereavement may mean that you are seeing temporary changes in behaviour patterns. It may not be possible to address those issues, but understanding them may influence how the behaviour is managed. The knowledge will require you to consider how specific support is provided to the child or young person, and if appropriate, their family.

If a behavioural disorder has been formally diagnosed a number of people may require support. Consider the impact on the immediate family, including siblings. Think about what your role is in relation to support. If you are the one working with the child, how are you receiving support yourself? If you are the parent/guardian or a lone worker, you may wish to research support networks in your own area. Talking to other parents and professionals experiencing similar situations can be helpful.

8. Are you aware of any messages being given through the behaviour?

Have you already considered the messages behind the behaviour? If so, what have you picked up? In the examples given we have learnt:

- Jazel finds working or playing in dim light difficult. Some lights may be too bright and flickering lights cause him headaches. When he gets headaches he will display challenging behaviour towards others.
- Christopher has sensory sensitivities, particularly in relation to the colour red. He feels more secure in a low arousal atmosphere. High arousal environments may trigger a violent outburst.
- Henry has decided to use a behaviour strategy to get what he wants. The communication is 'I hate maths and want out of here'.
- Emma has learnt to avoid blue uniforms so that Mum does not leave.

Once you have begun to assess the observations, the reasons behind the behaviour may become clearer. This may influence your response. All strategies and interventions need to ensure messages are clear and that children understand the boundaries and rules. They should know what their choices are and that if sanctions are given they will be carried out.

It is likely that you already have boundaries in place for the children in your care. It is important to ensure these are consistent across all settings. Children and young people will become confused if they are allowed to behave in certain ways at one setting but not at another.

Some children find transition very difficult. If an after school club is happening in the school that the children attend, they may become confused if there are two sets of rules. This could be as simple as the child having to ask permission to use the toilet at school. The after school club may encourage the child to go on their own, supporting independence.

A youth group had a rule that there would be no teasing or bullying.



Sharmain was sitting to one side during a discussion group at the youth club. The group were trying to decide where they wanted to go for a trip out. The group were all interested and paying attention. However Sharmain was tapping a pencil on the side of the chair, yawning and looking at her watch.

Previously during the session she had picked on one of the younger kids. Sharmain had teased her about having plaits and offered to cut her hair short which had upset the girl.

The youth worker who was talking looked down at his notes. During that split second Sharmain threw a rubber over the room towards the girl who she had been teasing. The rubber hit her in the eye. It was unexpected; the girl was surprised and fell off her seat.

At which point Sharmain laughed loudly. The youth worker subsequently banned her from going on the trip.

The sanction imposed sounds effective. However the reality is that Sharmain was in a bad mood because she knew she would not be able to go on the trip. She would not ask her Foster Parents for money and she had very little money of her own. The youth worker knew of her situation and that it was unlikely she would attend. Do you think this was an effective sanction?

What would you have done in this situation? Perhaps the youth worker was displaying understanding by eliminating Sharmain's embarrassment that she would not be attending the trip, but at the same time being seen to address the bullying that was going on? Do you feel that the sanction was fair and will have any effect on Sharmain?

If the youth worker knew Sharmain would have difficulty paying for the trip, perhaps he should have quietly addressed this with her before the group discussion. This may have eliminated her bad temper or changed the way he gave the details about the trip to the group.

Let's put this observational learning into context

To put this learning into context we have completed a short observation of Henry. As you read through this, consider the comments. Decide what you would put into place and how?



Henry's story - background:

Cherry Trees is an after school club offering childcare to children aged between 4-15 years. The club is based in the local primary school, although children from other schools also attend. The club has a regular attendance of 25 children and 5 staff members. Out of the children attending, 8 are aged between 4-6 years, 13 are aged between 7-11 years and the remaining 4 are aged between 12-15 years.

The club offer a range of activities such as arts/crafts, games and a quiet area where children are encouraged to complete their homework. The outdoor play area is available to use, so long as the weather is good. A number of outdoor activities are provided such as balls, bats, skipping ropes and the static play equipment used by the school.

At the local after school club Henry has been displaying challenging behaviour. The Manager of the setting and the play workers are concerned. This is affecting their relationship with him and his relationship with other children. They are on the verge of excluding him.

The club is based in the school Henry attends. The manager has had an informal conversation with Henry's teacher. Henry is known in school to have ADHD. He will disrupt lessons and occasionally get violent. He finds it difficult to concentrate. Henry's teacher has shared some behavioural strategies with the after school club. These are based around short key tasks, structure and sequence. They are not necessarily appropriate to the informality of the play setting.

The staff team decide that they need to make an informal observation. They want to find out what is happening, and try to work out what they can put into place to support Henry who is obviously unhappy and angry.

The setting manager decided that she would like to do this observation herself.

Cherry Trees Behavioural Observation Record

1. Observation Record

Record taken by: Jacky – Manager
Date of observation: 16th May
Day of the week: Tuesday
Time of day: 3.30-6.00pm

2. Description of behaviour observed

- a. Lack of engagement in play
- b. Flitting from one activity to another
- c. Throwing activities on the floor
- d. Taking toys away from younger children
- e. Laughing when younger children cry
- f. Running away from play workers when they ask him to stop.
(Favourite place to run is behind the shed in the playground)
- g. Answering adults back
- h. Constant loud repetition of the same swear word
- i. Hitting play worker with plastic bat

3. The setting in which the behaviour occurs

Behaviour observed in most areas of the room used. Behaviour did not occur in the quiet area or where the older children were using the computer. The majority of behaviour occurred at the crafts table and outside in the play area. Argument between staff member and Henry occurred in the playground, out of sight, behind the shed.

4. When does the behaviour occur?

Henry came into the club at 3.30pm. The first behaviour recorded was at 3.35pm. Henry moved between 3 activity tables and at each table swept something from the table onto the floor, refusing to pick it up when asked. Becky a play worker told him that if his behaviour had not improved he would not get a snack.

Behaviour improved at 4pm, prior to snack time. Henry was compliant and offered to help. Henry is aware that he will not get a snack if he does not line up nicely with the other children. He is always first in line, waiting 5 minutes before the snack bar opens.

The incident of running outside occurred at 4.30pm after Henry had eaten a chocolate bar and a banana. Henry was standing by the older children and started to repeat a particular swear word over and over. Becky, a play worker tried to address this behaviour and asked him to stop swearing. Henry ran outside and hid behind the shed.

Becky tried to get him back inside. This was done through encouragement, bribery and eventually threats. Henry would not comply, swore, picked up a plastic bat, swung it and hit Becky in the face. This situation ended up with Becky in tears. At this point, I intervened, sent Becky to the staff room and told Henry that he had to come inside.

Henry complied and played for while with the sand tray. Other children who were playing with the sand moved onto other activities, leaving Henry to play on his own.

5.15pm Henry was asked if he needed the toilet. He said no, but at 5.20pm went to the toilet and remained there for 10 minutes. At 5.30pm a play worker went to check if he was OK. Henry was fine and came back into the room.

At this point, I told Henry he had to apologise to Becky. He did so grudgingly. From 5.30pm until 5.50pm, his behaviour improved. He went to Becky, the play worker he had hit and asked if she would play with him. They took a football outside and had a kick around for 10 minutes, followed by Becky reading him a book.

At 5.50pm Henry fetched his coat and bag and stood next to the door waiting for his Mum to collect him at 6pm. As Mum arrived Henry immediately ran out to the car, leaving no time for Mum to speak to staff members.

5. Who is involved?

- Other children, particularly younger children who are easy to upset
- Older children were not the focus of Henry's attention
- All staff members, particularly Becky
- Myself as Manager

6. What are the consequences of the behaviour?

- Henry was told he needed to improve his behaviour or he would not get a snack
- Henry knew that if I said he had to go back inside, I meant it

7. Is there an underlying condition, impairment or external issue affecting behaviour?

- Yes, we know that Henry has ADHD. He cannot help some of his behaviour.
- We have difficulty in talking to Mum as she needs to leave immediately with Henry when she collects him
- His behaviour is poor at school, but worse at after school club

8. Are you aware of any messages being given through the behaviour?

- Henry is bored?
- He does not like the staff members?
- Henry will behave when he wants something (snack time)
- Henry does not want to be at after school club, he wants to be at home
- Henry's behaviour improved after he went to the toilet



After the observation took place, Jacky and her staff sat down to consider what had been learnt. They discussed how they could use this information to create an action plan to support Henry's behaviour. During this meeting several interesting things emerged.

The discussion followed the themes of the observation:

Description of behaviour

All staff agreed with the description of behaviour that was recorded. Staff also gave the following thoughts:

- There are too many choices for Henry to cope with all at once
- No activity planning had taken place to specifically consider Henry's personal likes and dislikes
- He tends to focus any bullying on younger children where he gets a response. This initiates attention of play workers.
- He seems to find the response of his behaviour funny, laughing when a younger child cries
- He seems to enjoy 'the chase' when he runs away

- By answering an adult back, he initiates an argument or reaction
- He enjoys the attention given by swearing
- Sometimes the swearing seems to be a habit, rather than a designed behaviour
- He uses violence as a strategy to get out of a situation. He does not seem to know or understand that other strategies are available

The setting in which the behaviour occurs

- Henry enjoys secret places, out of sight of others. Staff suggested this may be because he can cut down sensory stimulation. He can be in a place where he does not have to respond to other children and enjoys his own company
- Much of the poor behaviour was based around the craft table. Henry does not enjoy crafts. He lacks imagination and finds creative play difficult and pointless
- Henry enjoys being outside where he is not confined and able to move freely

When does the behaviour occur?

- Immediately. Staff felt that he was overwhelmed as soon entering the room
- Behaviour improved before snack time. Proof that he can control his behaviour when he gets something he wants
- Physically challenging behaviour starts after snack time. Staff observed that he had eaten chocolate and wondered whether behaviour related to a sugar rush
- The swearing started after he had been near the older children. One staff member reported that earlier in the session she had spoken to these children about swearing. Staff wondered if Henry's swearing was related to copied behaviour that was being modelled by the older children
- Henry needed the toilet but had either not recognised the feeling or had forgotten to go. Staff felt that he was actually quite uncomfortable which may have affected his behaviour. Henry eventually apologised to Becky after going to the toilet and at this point his behaviour improved
- Henry was obviously clock watching, being ready and waiting for his Mum to collect him. Staff were unsure if this was because Henry did not want Mum speaking to staff, or if he just 'wanted out of there'
- **Who is involved?**
- Staff discussed how Becky had tried to persuade Henry to come back into the building.

Becky reported that she had initially tried to encourage Henry back in by offering to play with him. As Henry continued to swear and answer back Becky's response was to tell Henry he was being silly, and it was not surprising that he had no friends. She also said that if he did not come back in he would have no snack the following day. Becky felt that she had no or little support from other staff members in this instance.

- It was noted that Henry did not display challenging behaviour to provoke older children, but focused attention on younger children
- Henry seemed to respond better on a one to one basis, where he had the attention of one play worker. Henry was happy to forget his poor behaviour, relating to Becky when he played with her later in the session
- Jacky was seen by Henry to be a voice of authority, going inside when she told him to. It was noted that this may have been because Becky cried and Henry realised that he had overstepped the mark.

What are the consequences of the behaviour?

- After discussion staff realised that actually there was very little in the form of consequences that would have been meaningful to Henry. The threat of not having a snack was given twice. In the session Henry then behaved for a short period to 'get what he wanted' and the second threat related to not having a snack the following day. This was too far ahead for Henry to worry about.
- Henry realised that if he behaved badly, he would get the attention of play workers and may have a play worker all to himself for a while

Is there an underlying condition, impairment or external issue affecting behaviour?

- Staff decided that they were making too many allowances for Henry's impairment. There seemed to be two rules, one for Henry and one for the rest of the children
- Staff also realised that they knew very little about his background, family situation, how his mother coped with his behaviour and what types of strategies were used at home. Staff also wanted to know if any changes had taken place to affect Henry's behaviour e.g. bereavement, illness in the family, changes to circumstance.

Are you aware of any messages being given through the behaviour?

This question provoked a debate and staff began to consider potential actions to put into an action plan.

Staff agreed that:

- Henry seemed bored and frustrated with the activities on offer
- He is not interested in the after school club; it did not provide anything to hold his attention or interest
- Henry's behaviour was linked to feeling uncomfortable when he needed to go to the toilet

Other discussion helped begin to define some tangible actions

Staff felt Henry was exposed to too much activity and stimuli. They decided that a dedicated staff member would meet him at the door. By spending some time with him on a one to one basis they would show him 2 or 3 activities and help him choose which activity he would like to do first. This time could help 'settle' him into the session and make the transition between the school day and play session easier. Depending on Henry's response the staff member might suggest spending a little time in the quiet area doing something that Henry enjoyed.

It was decided that different staff members would take a turn; otherwise Henry may become obsessed with the staff member who showed him the most attention. The staff member would then support Henry to choose his own activity and encourage play with other children.

This initiated a conversation around the registration forms and 'all about me' notes. Henry is a pupil at the school and known to staff members. The club had asked Mum to complete an 'all about me' form when Henry joined the after school club. But they had not really paid it much attention. On reflection staff felt they needed to know more about what Henry enjoys doing, his likes and dislikes. They also needed to check up on any calming methods that he responds to and what type of communication is most appropriate. Audio, visual or kinetic (showing him how to do something). Jacky took on the role of contacting Mum by phone and to speak to his teacher again.



Becky recognised Henry's need to be in secret places and suggested that they ran an activity to build dens and have a special place for all children when they wanted to be alone or quiet.

This helped a further discussion about how the setting asked the children what they wanted to do. It was decided to set up a 'to do' graffiti board where the children could record their ideas and decide as a group the activities for the following week. That way Henry had as much chance as others to input his ideas.

The question was raised about staff members and whether Henry liked the adults he was with. Becky took on the role of chatting to Henry and spending time in listening to him. She realised that much of her time had been spent in telling him off, finding fault, criticising and very rarely praising. She had been looking at the negative rather than positive. All staff agreed to 'catch Henry being good' and give praise, using positive reinforcement. They wished to raise his self esteem and confidence.

Staff also agreed on a schedule to remind Henry to go to the toilet.

As Henry enjoyed being outside and doing physical activity it was decided that each session Becky would offer to go for a run with Henry around the school field. This would become something enjoyable and something that could be taken away as a sanction if his behaviour necessitated it.

Staff also agreed that the outside area could be used to better effect. They agreed to set up some physical games such as obstacle courses for all the children. This would encourage Henry to participate with others.

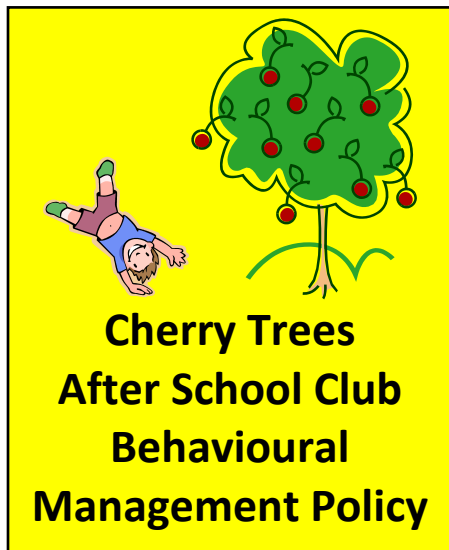


The setting rules were discussed. It was discovered that even some staff members were not aware of the poster on the wall. Staff went and fetched the poster and realised that the rules were very negative. It was decided to review the rules with the children and do a couple of activity sessions re-writing the club rules based on the children's views. The children could make their own posters to display.

So Henry would not build too much of a reliance upon Becky, the staff decided another staff member was needed to support this activity.

No-one at the club knew if Henry had school dinners or packed lunch. They discussed the fact that when he came into the club he may be hungry. There was no reason that snack time could not be bought forward and the range of snacks changed so that chocolate bars were not available. One of the staff members volunteered to run a food based activity at the snack bar making fruit kebabs. The older children would be asked if they wanted to set up a toast bar for the club.

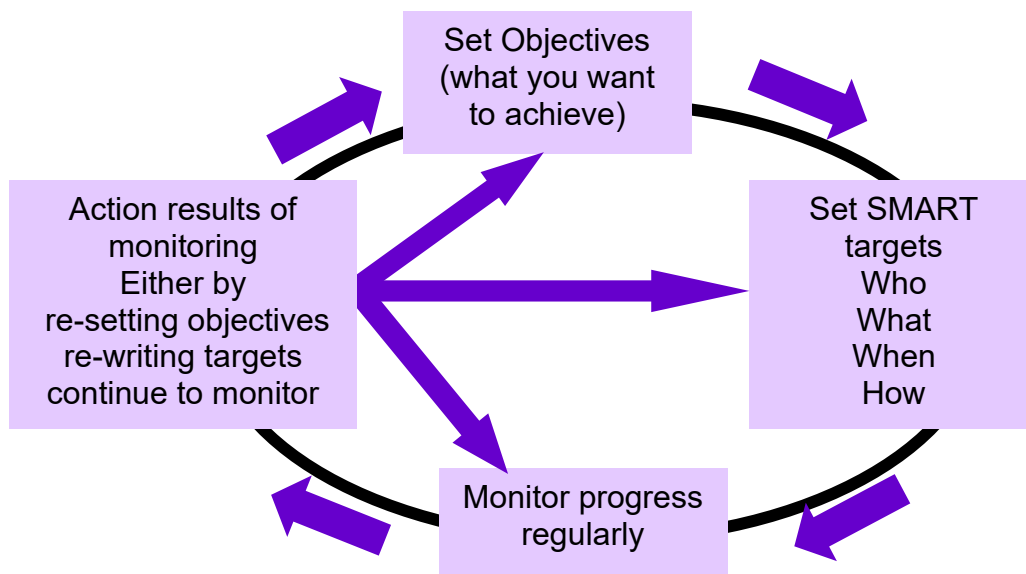
Lastly the team discussed consequences of behaviour. There were many differing views about time out; sanctions; punishments; children being told off and children's ability to re-earn privileges if behaviour improved.



Jacky decided that this was a bigger subject and they needed to consider a setting behavioural management policy for the whole after school club. A meeting was set to discuss it further.

The team agreed that the way forward for Henry was to create a SMART action plan. Actions and targets always need to be Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic and Timely. This needed to involve everybody, including Henry himself, a conversation with Mum and a further chat to his teacher.

How an action plan is drawn up is up to you and the setting in which you work. It needs to be clear and provide actions that can be measured to see if the plan is making a difference. Identify who, what, when and how. The plan needs to have regular review dates to check on progress and make any changes as necessary.



Considering Henry's Action Plan

Who

- **Henry** needs to understand appropriate behaviour and be given alternative acceptable behaviour to release his aggression
- **All children** in the setting need to re-establish agreed rules

- **All staff** in the setting need to know who is taking the lead on what area and ensure that there is a consistency of approach from all staff
- **Henry's teacher** needs to be 'in the loop'
- **The family** need to be engaged. Some strategies may be planned to work both at home, school and setting

What

- The plan will identify specific actions.
 - Some actions will relate to the type of response given to Henry's behaviour
 - Some will be preventative measures (including the clear setting of boundaries and rules). Some will reduce over stimulation and empower play by restricting choice (offering 2 or 3 alternatives for Henry to choose from)
 - Some will be offering Henry acceptable alternative behaviour

When

- In addition to identifying short, medium and long term goals, it is important to identify when strategies and techniques will be put into place: before, during and after an incident. This includes when sanctions (if used) will be actioned

How

- The strategies need to be agreed and remain consistent
- Regular monitoring to take place through observations, records and discussion. Don't forget to involve Henry. As his behaviour improves, praise is given, his self-esteem and confidence will rise and he should begin to feel better about himself.
- Consideration needs to be given as to how the strategies are to be implemented. For instance some children will respond far better to visual stimuli and visual cues. Too much language is overwhelming.



This chapter so far has primarily focussed on one particular case study. However, the learning is appropriate to all situations.

If you are working with younger children remember they may have not yet learned how to react to feelings and needs in an acceptable way. Our role is to support them to understand appropriate ways to behave and teach them skills for life.

In younger children we need to remember that:

- Behaviour is learnt by copying others
- Behaviour can change as acceptable ways of behaving are taught
- Practice makes perfect – we don't get it right all the time (both children and the way we respond to the challenges)
- Rewards work better than punishments (children will work towards receiving something they want and may display more challenging behaviour as a result of a sanction)
- Consistency is the key (ensure we are always responding in the same way)

We cannot assume that a child always misbehaves intentionally. We need to look at what happens after the child has misbehaved to establish the consequences. If a young child has a paddy because they cannot have something they want, and the adult gives in due to embarrassment or frustration, of course the child will misbehave in the same way again. They have learnt that this is how they need to behave to get something they want.

If the child has not been given acceptable alternatives, or does not know how else to behave they will continue the same behaviour. Very young children have not yet learnt what appropriate behaviour is. We need to tell them clearly and kindly, focusing on what we want them to do rather than what we don't want them to do.

We, as adults, have a responsibility to model behaviour and show respect to the children in our care. We expect the children to abide by sets of rules. We need to set ourselves some clear guidelines.

Ask yourself (and be honest)

- How do we actively listen to children?
- What type of language are we using? Including facial expressions, body posture, the way we talk and the way we touch.
- What is the quality of the attention we give to the child?
- What messages are we giving and receiving?

It is easy to observe and judge the child. It is harder to take a step back and observe ourselves. Reflective practice is important to understand our own role in influencing how a situation escalates or diminishes.

The local primary school was experiencing difficulties during lunchtime periods. The supervisors were regularly sending between 6 and 8 children to the Head's Office each day for poor behaviour.

The children were shouting, fighting, swearing and arguing. When asked what training would help, one supervisor said "Crowd control!"

During observation the following was identified:

- Children were bored. School equipment was not allowed to be used at lunch times. Some children brought in their own activities.
- There were no playground rules.
- The supervisors were not respected as they were known to the children out of school.
- The playground itself had very poor marking which caused confusion. Children wanting to play football did not have any defined area. This meant that other children were constantly wandering into their game.
- There were lots of hidden areas where children felt unsafe from bullies.

The school decided to put a 'play at playtime' project into place. After consultation with the children they purchased some play equipment. Children were supported to set up and manage a lunchtime equipment library. The playground was re-marked by volunteers defining areas designed by the children. A friendship bench was purchased and friendship mentors recruited. Playground rules were written and agreed with the children.

Logs were placed around the outside of the hard standing allowing children to sit and watch football. The supervisors were provided with bright yellow fleeces, giving them a sense of belonging and allowing children to recognise who was in authority during lunch times. Finally the supervisor's job descriptions were changed to 'Lunchtime Play workers'.



After the changes were made and implemented there was a significant reduction in poor behaviour. Supervisors sent very few children to the Head's Office and children reported increased enjoyment and a reduction in the fear of bullying.