

A SIMPLE GUIDE FOR RESPONDING TO PROBLEMATIC BEHAVIOUR – THE CHANGE MODEL

As parents it's helpful if we can address problematic behaviours by:

- » **Containing** the immediate situation and minimising harm – getting them to stop yelling, or let go of the cat's tail.
- » **Hearing** what's happening for them – ASK THEM – “Why are you hurting the cat? How are you feeling?” This helps you understand their motivation so you can decide if consequences are necessary.
- » **Acknowledging** their position – “I hear you are upset, it's annoying when Tinkerbell jumps on your toys.”
- » **Notice** your feelings: If you are becoming tense take action to calm down so you can manage the situation well. Do not ignore the build up of stress and then lose your temper.
- » **Giving** choices, or consequences if needed – “Remember we are kind to our animals, please let her outside now.” Your message may be about consequences too, if needed – “You will need to wash her cat food bowl now because you were unkind to her.”
- » **Encouraging** positive behaviours (Thank them when they do the right thing, “Good, that's better – well done”, and then talk about something positive – don't hold a grudge).

You can remember these steps by recalling the word **CHANGE**:

- » **Contain**
- » **Hear**
- » **Acknowledge**
- » **Notice** your feelings
- » **Give** choices or consequences
- » **Encourage**

This approach not only sets up a consistent way of dealing with misbehaviour, it's also a way of building resilience and positive mental health in families. It's associated with better outcomes for kids than the old authoritarian ways of parenting – where kids were told what to do and punished.

APPLYING THE MODEL:

Use the example of a 7 year old who is fighting with her 4 year old sister, she's being quite mean because she feels the younger one is always favoured. She is insisting that all the textas in the house belong to her and stopping her little sister from doing her art.

There's yelling screaming, snatching – how do we **CONTAIN** this? e.g. step in – get down their level – say **STOP** firmly, separate them, take the textas away while it gets sorted.

How can we **HEAR** what the older one is feeling? E.g. Ask her – what's causing this behaviour? What are you feeling right now? You seem frustrated, talk to me about what's wrong? Are you feeling like she always gets what she wants and you don't? Take time to listen.

How can we **ACKNOWLEDGE?** e.g. Sounds like you have noticed she gets some different things from you and sometimes we treat her differently because she is younger. I can understand you feeling maybe that's not fair. It can be annoying sometimes can't it?



RESPONDING TO PROBLEMATIC BEHAVIOUR



Parenting

How can we **NOTICE our feelings**? When kids really push our buttons we can get very angry over small things. Calm yourself by using breathing and muscle relaxing techniques, and reframe your thinking from “This is unbearable” to “All parents have tough times – if I stay calm it will be over soon.”

Later have a think about **WHY** you got so stressed and make a plan for next time.

How do we **GIVE CHOICES OR APPLY CONSEQUENCES**?

If they can fix things by making better choices offer that up. You can choose to be patient and share with your sister or you can come into the kitchen with me for a while. If it's repeated behaviour and you think a consequence will help – “You need to come and help me for 10 minutes now because you won't share your textas.” Time out can be a consequence if a child is raging and needs to be removed from the situation, or you are about to lose your temper. 1 minute for each year of their age is usually

suggested. Have a think about how its impacting them to be alone in the room, does it improve behaviour? Do they learn anything? The talk you have afterwards is important.

How can we **ENCOURAGE** positive behaviour when we see it and help this 7 year old feel like alls well again? “You were a great help in the kitchen – thank you, now have a go at sharing with your sister I know you can do it.” Afterwards you could say “You should be proud of how you handled that – well done. We can tell Grandma how well you are teaching your sister and how patient you have been.”

LASTLY... Please don't be too hard on yourself.

When a child exhibits some tricky behaviours it can feel like it's all our fault. Try to move away from that perspective and take on the ups and downs as they come knowing this is all part of parenting. Take time to look after yourself – read a book or go for a walk or meet up with a friend. If you look after yourself you will be in a much better position to help your child.

