

Guiding Children's Behaviour

Everything we say and do impacts on the behaviour of our children – What you do can make a difference!

What does guiding children's behaviour mean?

There are times as early childhood educators when we may doubt our knowledge or skill to guide the different behaviours that some children display; **but** you can make a difference. It is not uncommon to feel so much time is spent guiding the challenging behaviour of a few individual children, that there is not enough time left to support the learning and development of the remainder of the group.

An increasing body of evidence-based research suggests the most effective approach to dealing with challenging behaviour is to adopt a program-wide model. This model focuses on promoting the social and emotional development of young children, by supporting children's **appropriate** behaviour and preventing **inappropriate** behaviour. The Teaching Pyramid provides a systematic framework that addresses the needs of all children.



There is no quick fix; this is a philosophy that embodies your practice to support all children. The techniques and strategies need to be implemented consistently to achieve positive outcomes.

What can I do to make a difference?

1. **At the base of the pyramid**, first and foremost is the importance of building positive relationships with all children and families. The benefits being:
 - The educator's influence on the children grows significantly – children notice responsive and caring educators and seek out ways to seek ongoing positive interactions with these educators.

- A positive relationship builds children’s self-confidence and self-esteem.
 - Building a positive relationship results in educators getting to know individual children personally; thereby making it easier to plan a program based on their individual interests. This leads to engaged children, resulting in less opportunities to behave inappropriately.
2. **Implementing preventative practices within your group** will reduce the likelihood of challenging behaviour. Challenging behaviours decrease when:
 - Children are given positive attention for appropriate behaviour.
 - Educators specifically teach children about transitions and expectations.
 - A visual schedule is provided for the daily routine, **and the educator refers to it often.**
 - Children are provided with appropriate choice frequently throughout each day.
 - The physical environment is adapted e.g. provide a calm area, set up one person activities **free from distractions**, eliminate wide open spaces inside.
 3. **Using social and emotional teaching strategies** – many children naturally acquire social and emotional skills; however a large number of children need to be explicitly taught these skills.
 - Teaching feelings and emotions – children can be taught feeling words directly through pairing pictures of emotional expressions with the name of the emotion, reading books related to feelings, and educators labelling their own emotions and the emotions of the children throughout the day.
 - Problem solving can be explicitly taught – that is learning to recognise when there’s a problem, generating a variety of solutions, thinking about the consequences of each solution, choosing a solution and reflecting on how it worked.
 - Friendship skills can be taught by reading stories about friendship, learning children’s names, introducing timers for turn taking and sharing, role playing various friendship skills, modelling with puppets and providing positive reinforcement for efforts.
 4. **Planning intensive individualised interventions** – research shows that despite all of the above levels of support being provided consistently; approximately 4% of children will require more intensive individualised supports. Positive Behaviour Support (PBS) has proved an effective approach to providing more individualised intensive support. PBS recognises all behaviour has meaning; it focuses on understanding the behaviour and helping the child and adult together discover a more effective means of communicating their needs. (For details see ‘*Behaviour - Individualised Interventions*’ Tip Sheet)

How can I support a child who displays challenging behaviour? Why not start with the Bum-Bag strategy...

An effective strategy to start with is to pack a bum-bag with sensory supports and breathing tools (eg: fidget items to squish and pull, bubbles to blow). All educators then take turns wearing the bum-bag for set periods of time (eg: 60 minutes at a time). The person wearing the bum bag takes on the role of watching out for the behaviour triggers and implementing strategies that support children to behave positively. The bum-bag not only reminds the team which Educator is tuned in to which child at that time, it also means that useful tools are at hand to grab if behaviour begins to show signs of escalation. Remember – many children need visual tools to assist them to calm down.

