

Behaviour Management Tips and Suggestions

Tactical ignoring:

Not ignoring the child, but choosing to ignore some of the behaviour. Children can be experts in avoidance strategies & distraction and if it is possible to ignore low-level behaviour and therefore continue on the intended activity this is the least disruptive approach.

Ignoring of bad behaviour, and therefore not highlighting it or bringing attention to it, is a preferred means of behaviour management. Generally this approach can work very well with lots of minor behaviours.

There are some things though which have to be addressed head-on; although these can still be addressed in a positive way. These are things such as biting, spitting, hitting and kicking – things which a child needs to learn they cannot do so that they learn to self-regulate. These are behaviours which could get them into serious trouble as an adult.

Positive language:

Telling the child what you **do** want or what they **need** to do, rather than saying “Don’t...”

e.g. saying “*kind hands, Fred*” rather than “*don’t slap/hit*”.

saying “*Fred, you need to put your book on the table*” rather than “*don’t throw the book on the floor*”

saying “*Fred, it’s time to join the line and go indoors*” rather than “*now, let’s not be silly and run onto the other playground today*”

This has a two-fold benefit: it reminds of what the behaviour we **do** want is
it avoids the power of suggestion

Many children who have learning difficulties, especially when there are social communication and other speech & language issues, do not understand the negative instruction “*don’t*” or “*let’s not*”. So what they will hear is “____, slap me”.

Also, for any person, in order to follow the “don’t” instruction, you first have to imagine doing whatever it is; this can then lead to issues with suggestion.

It **is** appropriate however to use a clear “No!” or “Stop!” when necessary

Use of visuals:

Remember that children who have learning difficulties such as Autism, Fragile X, Down Syndrome etc are usually strongly visual learners and communicators. If they have done something which they know is wrong or if they are having a silly moment, their language centres will be the first to stop working properly. Therefore remember to use visual prompts to get your point across. This may be through Makaton, or through symbols, or even through objects of reference on occasions.

Teach rules explicitly. Use social stories to tackle specific issues, use CiP to create a visual prompt card that is reinforced regularly at times when the child is calm, so that it is effective when needed in a “crisis”.



Language of expectation:

This is a tricky one with children who have significant learning needs. What it means is giving an instruction in a tone and with the body language that gives the message that you are expecting compliance.

For example: you might say to a typically developing child *"I think you are being distracted by that toy, you need to put it in your tray now, thank you"* and then move away. This conveys an air of expectation that they are going to follow the instruction and also allows some **"take-up time"** for them to comply without losing face or being embarrassed and thus reducing the likelihood of having a face-to-face confrontation and non-compliance.

Since children with significant learning difficulties often don't pick up on subtleties of body language, they may think that you have forgotten as you move away. So you may need to develop other ways of allowing the "take-up time" which enables them to comply with an instruction without it becoming a battle of wills.

Stalemate – staying in control:

Sometimes you will find that you have asked the child to do something, have given them time to comply, have tried chivvying, distraction, incentives and everything in your arsenal but they won't budge. This is the point to consider *"do they actually have to do this thing I'm trying to get them to do?"* or *"is there another way to do this?"*

So – it's more important to win the war than every battle – i.e. it's ok to back down sometimes and to decide to pick your "battles" carefully. The important thing is to stay in control – you will spot the impasse coming before the child, so you could try changing the request/expectation by giving the child a couple of other alternatives. These are ones which you have chosen so you have maintained the control of the situation. Remember that strategies may work one day and not the next.

Big picture:

There are ways of analysing behaviour by looking at the ABC (antecedents, behaviour and consequence) in a detailed analysis of events. This can be a very time-consuming exercise however and when staff are already very pushed to keep records etc it can be difficult to do effectively. However, it can be useful to discuss with a colleague to try to analyse why a child may have behaved in a particular way by considering factors beyond the child and the immediate area. Consider the bigger picture. When an unusual behaviour is observed, or you find yourself thinking *"he's not done that before"*, think about what is going on generally in the class – *is there something different going on today? Have things been done in a different order to usual/routine been disrupted? Is the child feeling unwell/tired? Have they seen or heard something that has excited/upset them?*

Also consider what is being asked of the child: *Is it too hard to be achievable? Is it too long to be completed? Is it too easy to sustain interest? Do they understand what is being asked?*

Consistency & teamwork:

Staff who are dealing with a child that can sometimes display challenging or unpredictable behaviour need to ensure that they are all, as far as is possible, having the same expectations and using the same language and agreed systems. Support each other by listening to each other rather than trying competing strategies which will confuse the child and/or give them the upper hand. Realise that none of us know all the answers – when we are working with children we have to accept that they are unpredictable and a large proportion of the time it seems to be luck that the strategies work and we can turn behaviour around.

Avoiding silliness:

- by the child!! Once things have reached the point where he is being silly and can't be distracted, it can be very difficult to pull the situation back. If possible pre-empt this and distract before you get to it, even if that means not completing what you were trying to do.

Inner monologue (fantasy):

People with Down Syndrome and Autism often create elaborate fantasies about their favourite characters – in children this may be Peppa Pig, Thomas the Tank Engine, Fireman Sam, Toy Story characters etc. The line between reality and fantasy can be blurred which can result in them being quite convinced that these are real people. This can be a great benefit in terms of developing reward systems, incentives and distractions to help with behaviour management; as well as helping to fuel the creative side of the child's development.

However, it can also create some difficulties. Children sometimes become "obsessed" with the fantasy and don't want to talk about anything else and can't focus on anything else. Also the child might not realise that whilst characters in cartoons bounce back from ridiculous accidents and events, that they won't and that they or someone else could be hurt by them copying what they have seen. Bear this in mind if you have a child who often becomes involved in fantasy – ensure that you consider the literature and stories that you are sharing with the class as a whole and whether it is appropriate for the child with Learning Difficulties (remember Icarus!).

Sometimes, if it is difficult to understand the speech of the child, it can be tricky to understand some of their behaviour in relation to their fantasies. It can be really useful to share information between school and home when the child has been observed to take a particular interest in a new story or character.

Debs Gunby – BSc (Hons), PGCE, MEd (SEN), PGCert
IDS T&L – Complex Need