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NEURODEVELOPMENTAL TEAM

Positive Behaviour Strategies

Supporting and preventing challenging behaviour can be tricky. Every child is different so there is no 'one size fits all' solution. However, YOU are the expert on your child and there is a good chance that you will already be aware of the things that can make your child/young person feel overwhelmed.

Identifying the function of behaviour.

All behaviour is communication. Our behaviour is used to perform one of four main functions:

1. Access to something physical (e.g. a toy or biscuit)
2. Escape
3. Seeking attention
4. Seeking sensory stimulation.

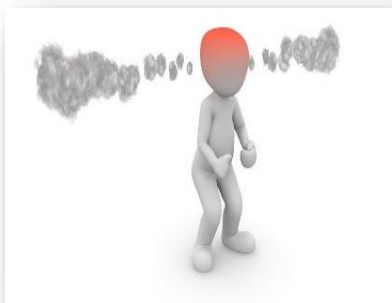
Parents/carers are the experts on their child's behaviour and are therefore, the best people to identify which function is likely to be the reason for the child's behaviour. Once this is identified, interventions can then be put in place to support the behaviour. This means being Proactive before behaviour escalates and reaches crisis point.

Being aware of your child's signs and triggers will also be beneficial in supporting behaviour that challenges.

Signs

These are the early warning signs – physical signs or behaviours that change, signalling challenging behaviour could be on its way.

For example: your child might become red in the face or start pacing up and down. They may change their tone of voice or become more agitated. Repeating things (words or behaviours) and gesturing are common too.



- It might be worth noting what signs your child shows so that you can be aware that you may need to use calming techniques (see next section) to reduce their anxiety before they 'explode'.

Triggers

These are the 'causes' of the challenging behaviour. The way we feel and the things that happen to us, and around us, can change the way we behave. We separate these events into slow triggers and fast triggers.

Slow triggers - These are the things that are going on in the background and they often start a long time before the challenging behaviour. Slow triggers make challenging behaviour **more likely** to happen because they cause people not to feel at their best. Being aware of slow triggers can help us to understand that our young person may find things more tricky today, and may be more likely to communicate that to us through behaviours we find challenging.

Slow triggers include:

- Feeling unwell
- Feeling tired or not sleeping well.
- Having nothing to do for a long time
- Being hungry
- Not having any attention

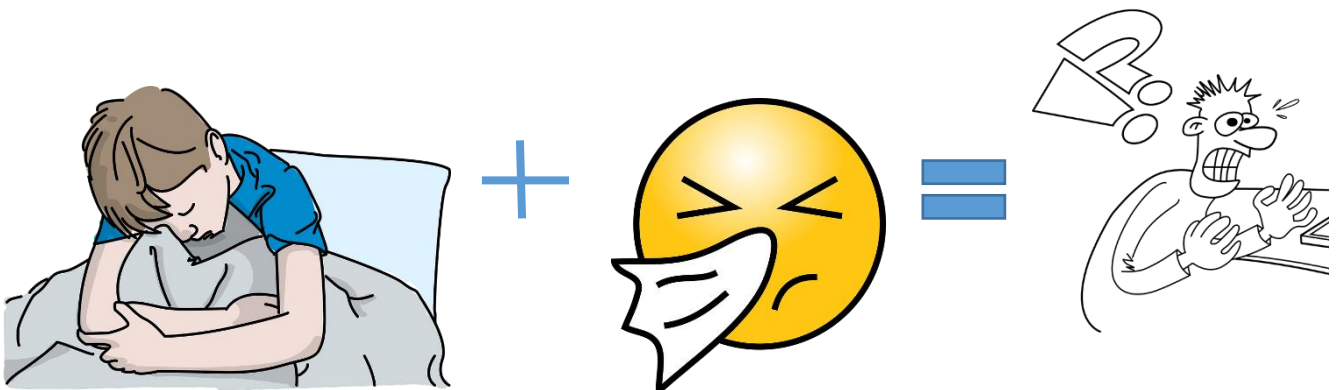
Fast triggers - as you might imagine these are the triggers that have an immediate effect and occur much closer to the behaviour.

Fast triggers include:

- Being ignored
- Being told to do something they don't know how to do
- An event being cancelled
- Something unexpected happening
- Being told 'No'

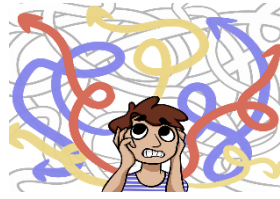
Slow and fast triggers combine to cause challenging behaviour.

For example if your child is feeling ill, hasn't slept well and is hungry they are more likely to react to a fast trigger such as being told their dinner isn't ready than if they are happy and have slept well.



Dealing with the situation after the storm

It is important to think about when is the best time to help your child back to their calm stage.



All too often when the moment has passed and things appear to be returning to normal we can be guilty (not intentionally) of escalating the situation again by trying to talk about what happened or asking questions such as:

- *Have you calmed down now?*
- *What was all that about?*
- *Why did you do that?*

Although it is important to address the behaviour, this is best done once your child is calm.

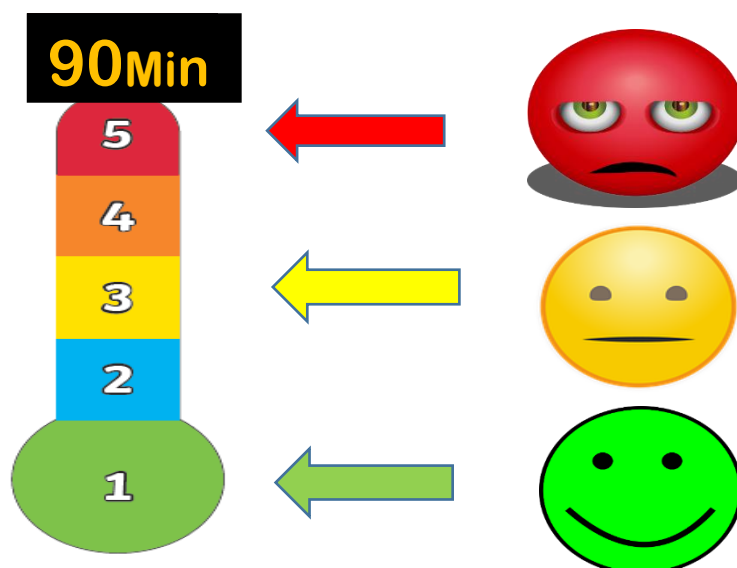


90 minutes is the approximate amount of time it takes your child's body and their senses to return to "normal" after an incident. Some children/young people may need longer before they are feeling fully calm.

Trying to discuss / make sense of the situation with your child before they have calmed fully can often lead to another escalation in behaviour.

Calm first-Consequences later

Think of a thermometer. When your child is at the top of the thermometer, it can take 90 minutes to return to the bottom and during this time seemingly small things can take your child right back up to the top.



Things to try

Some simple strategies to try at home are listed below. Different things work best for different people. Not all strategies will work for your family. It can take time to adjust to new strategies so try them out for a little while before moving on to another approach.

- **Distract and redirect:** This is a strategy, which is used before the child/young person reaches boiling point. Used at the appropriate time, distraction techniques can help the child/young person to forget about things they find upsetting and can help to avoid some of those fast triggers such as being told no. This is a great strategy for de-escalating situations before they begin.



- **Praise the behaviour you want to see more off:** Many children/young people feel that any attention is better than no attention. The best way to encourage your child to behave in the way we would like, is by praising the positive behaviour and ignoring the challenging behaviour. This can be extremely difficult, especially with behaviours you feel you cannot ignore. If the child/young person is putting themselves or others at risk then calmly support them away from that situation whilst giving them as little attention as possible. It may take some time but repeated patterns of praising the positives and ignoring the negatives can be very successful for reinforcing the behaviours we wish to see more of.



- **Calm zone:** Encouraging your child/young person to use a calm space and the activities they find relaxing when they are already calm, will help them feel able to use these strategies when they are feeling big emotions. This is not to be confused with a punishment (naughty step) and is to be used in a positive way. Calm zones can be a bean bag, a tent, a specific part of a room with some blankets, books, bubbles or whatever techniques your child may use to calm. Helping your child to utilise these techniques during calm times is beneficial for implementing this strategy for the more difficult times.

- **Simplify language and be aware of your tone of voice:**
When someone is feeling overwhelmed, their brain struggles to process their thoughts and emotions (more so than usual!). It is important to try to use simple language and a gentle tone to help them understand what you mean. Give short and simple messages instead of asking lots of questions which, require the person to explain how they are feeling and why. Using language and explaining yourself is much trickier when you are feeling a big emotion. Acknowledging the child/young person's feelings is important and can help them feel calmer e.g. instead of saying "What's wrong?, What did you do that for? Why are you shouting?" it may be more helpful to say "I'm listening, I can see you are feeling cross..."



I'm listening

I understand

For more detailed information regarding the above strategies please explore the other sections on this webpage for further ideas, links and resources that you can download.