

# Managing challenging behaviours with children who have additional needs

by Megan Shaw

All children will display challenging behaviour from time to time and this can prove difficult to manage. Behaviour management is, therefore, a common issue in child care.

Children with additional needs may display challenging behaviour on a more frequent basis for various reasons. Sometimes a characteristic of a particular condition means that the child cannot always control their behaviour or communicate their needs and emotions in an appropriate way.

As with many issues relating to children's development, behaviour management needs to be individualised. Yet there are several common strategies that can assist educators to manage challenging behaviours with children who have additional needs.

## Which additional needs can lead a child to display challenging behaviours?

Conditions such as Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD), Sensory Processing Disorder (SPD) and Oppositional Defiance Disorder (ODD) can lead to challenging behaviours. When a child with one or more of these conditions is in a group care environment the behaviour can be particularly challenging for educators to manage.



### This article relates to:

FDCQA Principles: 1.2-1.3, 3.1, 3.3-3.4 and 6.2

OSHCQA Principles: 1.1-1.3, 2.2-2.3 and 6.4

QIAS Principles: 1.2-1.5, 2.1, 3.2 and 3.3

Behaviours associated with ADHD and ODD can include:

- Inattention (when a child is easily distracted and is unable to focus on one thing)
- Impulsive behaviour, fidgeting and squirming
- Interrupting or having difficulty waiting
- Frustration or temper tantrums
- Distracting other children during activities
- Violent behaviour toward others.

ASD is a term used to describe autistic disorder, Asperger's disorder and pervasive developmental disorder – not otherwise specified (PDD-NOS) also known as atypical autism. Behaviours associated with ASD can include:

- Becoming upset during transition times
- Appearing to ignore you
- Difficulty paying attention in group activities
- Refusal to participate in some activities, for example, handwashing, painting, meal times
- Difficulty following instructions
- Having temper tantrums
- Engaging in repetitive behaviours
- Sensitivity to sound, touch or large groups.

## Identifying 'triggers'

The reasons why a child may display a certain behaviour will vary, and the strategies used to manage these behaviours should also vary. It is important to remember that all children are individuals and what works with one child may not work with another. During your observations of children you may notice a pattern emerging in some children. This pattern may occur at a certain time of the day or during a certain activity that appears consistent with the challenging behaviour.



These consistencies are 'triggers' or 'warning signs' of inappropriate behaviour. Once this pattern is identified, it will assist you to develop an individualised behaviour management plan. This should be done in conjunction with the child's family and any other professionals who may be working with the child. To ensure records are accurate and easy to follow, record the following aspects of the child's behaviour:

**Frequency** – How many times did the child display the behaviour and when did it occur?

**Duration** – How long did the behaviour last?

**Intensity** – How severe was the behaviour? Also note if any children were hurt as a result of the child's behaviour, including the child displaying the behaviour.

To help identify triggers, it is useful to record what was happening before and after the behaviour took place. What activity was the child engaged in? Was there a change in the routine or transition time taking place? What were the educators doing? Were there any unfamiliar educators or children present at the time the behaviour occurred?

### Various strategies for managing challenging behaviours

Many of the strategies used to manage the challenging behaviour of children with additional needs will be similar to those used with all children. Children like to please adults, and most will respond when you focus on their positive attributes and positive behaviour. It is important to remember that some of the behaviours displayed by children with additional needs simply cannot be helped by the child.

Some strategies to assist with behaviour management include:

- Keep the daily routine and physical environment consistent
- Use visual cues to communicate the daily routine and instructions to children
- Keep instructions short, or break them down into parts.

### Keeping families involved

Once you have recorded observations of the child's behaviour and identified possible triggers, you should organise a time to share the information with the child's family. This is very important as the family may have further insight for you and may be able to describe strategies that they use at home.

Discuss the behaviour you have observed and explain what strategies you have tried, what works and what does not. It may be difficult for a family to hear 'negative' information about their child, so ensure you provide positive feedback as well.

You will need to have several meetings with the child's family throughout the year to keep them informed of their child's progress. However you may find it difficult to schedule face to face meetings that suit you and the child's family, so other communication methods may need to be considered. Written records are very useful as they show a chronological record of a child's development and behaviours. Consider emailing general information to parents, sending copies of the child's records home for their family to view, or use a communication book, which may be useful to record information about the child's day at the service and at home.

Sometimes intent can be misinterpreted through written records, so face to face communication will still be helpful and useful. Remember that the child's family knows the child better than anyone, so if you are having difficulty managing a certain behaviour, they can be your most helpful resource.

### Working with professionals

When a child has a diagnosis of an additional need, you can apply for funding for an Inclusion Support person. Funding is often limited so there may be times when the child is in attendance and the support worker is not present. Because of this, it is important that all educators in the service are aware of the child's specific needs and the strategies used to support the child.



Children with a diagnosed additional need will often have other professionals who work with them. These can include early intervention workers, speech pathologists, occupational therapists or child psychologists. These professionals play an important role in the care of the child and can assist with developing strategies to manage behaviours.

It may be useful for the educators in your service to receive professional development from the professionals working with the child. You may consider inviting them to a staff meeting so they can share some information about the additional need and what behaviours to expect. They could also refer you to useful journals, textbooks or other information sources.

## Conclusion

Understanding the reasons a child may be displaying challenging behaviour is useful to educators when developing strategies that are specific to each child. Working with the families and other professionals will ensure consistency of practice and help a child to become a successful learner ■

This article relates to EYLF Learning:

Outcome 1: Children have a strong sense of identity

Outcome 2: Children are connected with and contribute to their world

## Specific strategies for:

### Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder and Oppositional Defiance Disorder

The following strategies can assist educators with managing challenging behaviour displayed by a child with these disorders:

- Keep time spent doing one activity short. If you notice the child becoming distracted, remind them of the other activities available before the behaviour escalates
- Set up a 'calm down' area for when the child becomes upset where educators can continue to fully supervise the child
- Wait until the child has calmed down before trying to talk to them. A child may be unable to listen when they are upset or angry
- Label children's feelings so they understand that their feelings are valid. Explain ways to deal with these feelings in an appropriate way in the future
- Provide experiences to allow the child to release their energy in an acceptable way.

### Autism Spectrum Disorders

Children with ASD can display many different behaviours. The following strategies can assist with managing these behaviours:

- Allow the child to look down or away while you are talking to them. Making the child look at your eyes is extremely distressing for the child and may make it difficult for them to hear what you are saying
- Allow the child to sit at the front of the group during group activities to minimise distractions from other children
- If a child is hypersensitive allow them to avoid activities which may distress them. For example, if a child is sensitive to sound, give them an alternative activity away from the rest of the group during music experiences.

## References and further reading

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