AUGUST

The Resource Consultant's Tip Sheet

Understanding Challenging Behaviour

The Path to Positive Behaviour Support

All children communicate through their behaviour. When children cry, scream, hit, throw, or refuse, they may be communicating a need, feeling, or message that they do not yet know how to express in another way.
Instead of asking only: "How do I stop this behaviour?"
Try asking: "What is my child trying to communicate?"

Understanding the reason behind a behaviour helps us teach children more appropriate ways to communicate and cope.



1 Look at What Happens Before

Think about what happened right before the behaviour. **Ask yourself:**
Was there a transition?
Was a preferred activity ending?
Was my child asked to do something difficult?
Was the environment noisy or busy?
Was my child tired or hungry?
Did someone take a toy?
Did my child want something but not know how to ask?
These clues can help identify what may have triggered the behaviour.



2 Look at What Happens After

Consider what happens immediately after the behaviour. **Ask:**
Does the child get what they wanted?
Does the child avoid something difficult?
Does the child receive adult attention?
Does the child get access to a preferred activity?
Does the situation change?
This can help us understand what the child may be learning from the behaviour.

Behaviour is communication.

3 What Is the Child Trying to Communicate?

Challenging behaviour may communicate:
"I want something." "I need help." "I don't want to do this." "This is too hard." "I need a break." "I want your attention." "I am overwhelmed." "I don't know how to tell you what I need."

Behaviour may serve different purposes, such as:

- Getting something they want
- Getting attention
- Avoiding or escaping something
- Meeting a sensory need

Understand the reason → Prevent → Teach a new skill → Practice → Celebrate

4 Teach the Missing Skills and a New Way to Communicate

Once we understand what the child is trying to communicate, we can teach a more appropriate way to express that need.

Instead of...	Teach...
Hitting to get a toy	"My turn" or "Can I have it?"
Crying to request a break	"Break, please" or use a break card
Throwing when finished	"All done"
Screaming for attention	"Play with me"
Grabbing for help	"Help, please"

Children learn best when they are calm.

Practice new skills before challenging behaviour occurs.

Teach and practice:

- Asking for help
- Requesting a break
- Waiting
- Taking turns
- Expressing feelings
- Asking for a preferred item
- Transitioning between activities



Prevent

- Give warnings before transitions.
- Use visual schedules or pictures.
- Offer simple choices.
- Keep routines predictable.
- Break difficult tasks into smaller steps.
- Prepare children for changes.
- Offer breaks when appropriate.
- Use short, clear language.
- Provide calming or sensory activities when needed.

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REFERENCES
www.challengingbehaviours.org