

## Managing Difficult Behaviour

### Feelings and needs drive behaviour

The key to managing behaviour is to understand what's driving it so that we can respond appropriately. Parents may want to know how to cope with biting or hitting for example, but the most effective way of dealing with these behaviours will depend on the context. Encourage parents to notice and think about what leads up to a particular incident or behaviour and what the child's feelings and underlying needs may be.

### Behaviour is a means of communication

Particularly in the pre/early verbal stages, behaviour is the most available means for children to express their feelings and needs. Children (and adults too) may continue to express strong feelings by 'acting out', which may include hitting, tantrums, swearing, or 'acting in' which may include sulking, withdrawing, refusing to speak. Behaviour that parents may see as deliberate naughtiness or awkwardness is likely to be driven by strong feelings. Encourage them to notice and respond empathically to the underlying feelings. Encourage them to help children to recognise and identify their feelings and to express them in appropriate ways.

### Helping Children to learn the skills they need

Encourage parents to realise how important they are as their children's first teachers of social, emotional and life skills as well as of information. They do this by:

- **Modelling** - children will copy what parents model far more readily than they will do when parents ask or tell them
- **Noticing and encouraging** - when children are trying hard or doing well or making small steps forward
- **Coaching** - children can be guided to solve problems, mainly through play

Emphasise the importance of fathers' role in supporting their child's learning, and the different ways in which children learn about themselves, including outdoor play, negotiating risks, dealing with fears and anxieties.

**Good practice points for HVs** to consider which may influence behavioural problems are: hearing issues, Autistic Spectrum Disorders, Domestic and Sexual Abuse. Remember that behaviour is not always acting out and there may be underlying causes.

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### Parenting that is positive, authoritative and consistent leads to better behaviour and is linked with pro-social behaviour

A negative parenting style characterised by harsh, inconsistent discipline has been clearly associated with more severe child antisocial behaviour (Scott et al, 2011). You may have opportunities to discuss setting consistent boundaries with parents and to reinforce positive strategies for managing children's behaviour 'in the moment', as you see parents and children interacting at home. Another useful tip for HVs to discuss is the positive importance of play. Some parents do not know or understand how to talk with or how to play with their children e.g. encourage parents not to get distracted with using their mobile phone: checking Facebook or letting their child play on an iPad.

### Helping with ignoring behaviour

As well as supporting parents to notice and encourage behaviour they want to see more of, you can help them to decide what behaviour they can safely ignore. Parents need to ignore the behaviour, not the child and remain calm and consistent. HVs can support parents with additional support from the HV team or signpost parents to Children Centres for additional support.

### Helping to implement Time Out to Calm Down

Steps for managing Time Out can be found on the Family Links website at ([bit.ly/1nhijJu](http://bit.ly/1nhijJu)). The parents' section includes clear steps for using 'time out' to

calm down and other strategies. A key factor for making this strategy work well is for parents to explain it clearly to their children. You could talk through with parents how they will explain it to their children, where their calm place will be and what kind of situations and behaviour they will use it for. Having a calm place or time out to calm down rather than a naughty step will reinforce the message that we all need to develop self-regulation-parents as well as children.

### Choices and Consequences

We all want to feel that we are in charge of our own lives. There are many things that young children cannot be in control of, but if they are given appropriate choices during the day then they are less likely to feel frustrated and try to take control in inappropriate ways such as refusing to share or to do as they are asked, or by shouting or hitting out. They are also more likely to learn decision making skills.

#### Useful websites

NSPCC:

[bit.ly/1nhmq8t](http://bit.ly/1nhmq8t)

The Fatherhood Institute:

[bit.ly/1oxtrsr](http://bit.ly/1oxtrsr)

The Family and Childcare Trust:

[bit.ly/1yk2ome](http://bit.ly/1yk2ome)

The Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University:

[bit.ly/1oHm2qh](http://bit.ly/1oHm2qh)

Foundation Years:

[bit.ly/1nPZ7FW](http://bit.ly/1nPZ7FW)

## References

Gerhardt, Sue (2004) *Why Love Matters: How affection shapes a baby's brain*. Brunner-Routledge

Murray, Lynne and Andrew, Liz (2005) *The Social Baby*. CP Publishing

Scott, S et al. (2011). *How is parenting style related to child antisocial behaviour?* Department of Education

Sunderland, Margot (2007) *What Every Parent Needs to Know*. Dorling Kindersley Ltd

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