

Module 5: Promoting positive behaviours

Handouts for participants

Understanding trauma and attachment

1. To be securely attached is to be safe.
2. A lack of physical and emotional safety is the defining experience of children who have experienced relational trauma.
3. Traumatized children reset their normal level of arousal. Even when no external threat exists, they are in a persistent state of alarm.
4. Trauma impacts upon all aspects of a child or young person's development.
5. Trauma can undermine their ability to learn, form relationships, and function appropriately, and to take another person's perspective.

Understanding children's feelings and behaviours

Children and young people may be feeling:

1. Grief and abandonment

There can be a grief reaction when a child or young person cannot live with their parents for whatever reason, they may have suffered abuse or neglect at home or may have been abandoned. When the child or young person is removed from home, there is an additional loss of a familiar environment. The child may harbour a hope of returning home, and each time the parent comes in and out of his life, the losses are experienced again.

2. Guilt

Children and young people often blame themselves when something goes wrong at home – this is because they have a narrow definition of cause and effect. Children may have been interviewed about the abuse at home and may feel that they have caused the parents to get into trouble.

3. Anger

Anger at parents for not being there, or for breaking promises, anger at foster carers because they are not their parents and have different rules, anger about what has happened to them, and the disruptions to their friends, school etc.

4. Fear anxiety and insecurity

Experience may have taught children and young people in placement that adults can cause harm. There may be very real fears of punishment, safety, and uncertainty about who will look after them, where will they get their next meal.

5. Embarrassment

Children and young people hate to feel different from their peers. They will be very conscious of being "in foster care". Reasons why some behaviours may be upsetting:

- Behaviours may clash with your own beliefs. eg taking care of property, "borrowing" things without asking.
- Behaviours may mean more work for you, be costly, or may disrupt your plans.
- You may be alarmed that the young person may be out of control.
- You may feel inadequate or embarrassed, especially if the behaviour is observed by others.
- It may trigger something that happened in the past for you.

Consider two questions:

- 1) "Why could a child be feeling this way?"
- 2) "What impact might this have on behaviour when they come to live with you?"

Developmental Stages (Erik Erikson, 1959)

1. Infancy: Birth to 18 Months

- Ego Development: Trust vs. Mistrust
- Basic strength: Drive and Hope

2. Early Childhood: 18 Months to 3 Years

- Ego Development: Autonomy vs. Shame
- Basic strength: Self-control, Courage, and Will

3. Play Age: 3 to 5 Years

- Ego Development: Initiative vs. Guilt
- Basic Strength: Purpose

4. School Age: 6 to 12 Years

- Ego Development: Industry vs. Inferiority
- Basic Strengths: Method and Competence

5. Adolescence: 12 to 18 Years

- Ego Development: Identity vs. Role Confusion
- Basic Strengths: Devotion and Fidelity

6. Young adulthood: 18 to 35

- Ego Development: Intimacy and Solidarity vs. Isolation
- Basic Strengths: Affiliation and Love

7. Middle Adulthood: 35 to 55 or 65

- Ego Development: Generativity vs. Self absorption or Stagnation
- Basic Strengths: Production and Care

8. Late Adulthood: 55 or 65 to Death

- Ego Development: Integrity vs. Despair
- Basic Strengths: Wisdom

Positive strategies to promote positive behaviour

Children may behave the way they do because they have learned that behaviour, or because they have not learned alternative, more positive ways to act. Children rarely learn from one cycle of doing and receiving consequences. Repetition over time is a necessary part of learning. The more consistent and immediate the parent is in giving consequences, the faster the child learns.

The primary goal of Positive Behaviour Support (PBS) is to improve the quality of life for children and young people by increasing:

1. their appropriate behaviour, and
2. reducing the impact of challenging behaviour

There are three primary ways of learning: explaining, rewarding, and providing negative consequences. Acknowledging positive behaviour is as important as correcting negative behaviour.

Assumptions

1. Behaviour is learned and serves a specific purpose.
2. Behaviour is related to the context within which it occurs.
3. For every year that a behaviour has been in place, we should expect to spend one month of consistent appropriate intervention for us to see a behaviour change.
4. We can improve behaviour by 80%, just by pointing out what someone is doing correctly.

Possible functions of behaviour:

Positive Reinforcement	Negative Reinforcement
TO GET MORE OF	TO GET OUT OF OR ESCAPE FROM
Social attention	Activities
Access to materials	People
Sensory stimulation	Sensory pain

Target behaviours and the Triggers:

- Under what circumstances (or triggers) is the target behaviour most/least likely?
 - WHEN?
 - WHERE?
 - WHAT?
 - WHO?
 - WHY?
- What consequences or results predictably follow the target behaviour?
 - WHAT DO THEY GET?
 - WHAT DO THEY AVOID?
- What broader issues are important influences on their behaviour?

Summary Statement:

The summary statement is the foundation for a positive support plan. The summary statement describes when the behaviour occurs, what the young person does (the target behaviour), and what they get/avoid with the target behaviour.

E.g. When one of David's housemates or support staff change the channel/turn the television off while he is watching his favourite show, he is likely to yell and hit or kick the person to get his program back on.

Gathering data around the target behaviour:

When we start gathering data about a behaviour (whether good or challenging behaviour), we need to be clear about what we are gathering.

- What is the A (antecedents/triggers) for the target behaviour?
- What is the B (behaviours – describe them clearly e.g. screaming and swearing)?
- What is the C (consequential reaction – what is the young person getting or avoiding with the behaviour)?

Methods of gathering data:

- **Contextual Assessment Inventory (CAI)** – used in more clinical contexts
- **ABC Note cards** – direct observation and interview notes (See ABC Note Cards (Photocopy) Appendix Tool 5)
- **Scatter Plot** – helps identify patterns or responding in natural settings. The need for a scatter plot arises when the target behaviour is frequent, and informal observations do not suggest reliable correspondence with anything in particular (See Scatter Plot Template (Photocopy) Appendix Tool 4)

The four components to promoting positive behaviour

1. Safe and interesting learning experiences and environments
2. Fair and consistent rules
3. Clear, calm instructions
4. Logical consequences (strategies*)

Responses to promote positive behaviours

This approach helps a child or young person develop self esteem and self control. The following strategies could be used.

- Provide a role model - children and young people learn by watching others. If you want to encourage certain behaviours make sure you are behaving like that yourself.
- Listen to children and young people and ask questions - good communication skills will encourage a child to feel they are being “heard”, their views are important, and their needs are understood.
- Positive reinforcement - Always give verbal reinforcement for positive behaviours. This should happen routinely whenever the child or young person is managing well. This can also be done by non-verbal means eg smiles, sharing feelings. Another form of positive reinforcement is providing encouragement for effort or improvement. The value of this is that it can be used even if the child or young person has not totally achieved their goal. When you use encouragement consider the following
 - Focus on the child or young person’s responsibility for what has happened eg “ you must be very proud of yourself” not “ I’m very proud of you”.
 - Focus on appreciation for what they have done – not value judgements about it. eg “I appreciate the help you gave me” not “you are a good boy”.
 - Focus on improvement – not the achievement. eg “you have made lots of progress” not “You won!”
- Rewarding good behaviour - reward systems should only deal with one behaviour at a time and once that behaviour has improved, the reward system should be stopped.

Simple rules to follow when giving rewards:

- Keep the reward system simple and make sure it is strictly observed - always give the reward for the behaviour that has been identified
- Don’t offer a bigger reward than is necessary
- Give the reward as soon after the behaviour as possible so that the behaviour can be related to the reward and
- Only introduce a reward system if you can definitely follow through with it.

Planned ignoring – ignoring behaviour is simply pretending that the behaviour is not occurring. It means that you don’t look at, talk to, or respond to a child or young person until the inappropriate behaviour ends. Ignoring the behaviour allows the child or young person some time to think and avoids a confrontation. It places the responsibility for dealing with the situation on the child or young person. Disadvantages of using planned ignoring are that some behaviours are not appropriate to be ignored. If the behaviour escalates (this is probable as behaviour may be happening to get attention) will you be able to continue to ignore it? If you are inconsistent it teaches a child that escalation of behaviour achieves the desired result. The key to ignoring is consistency. If you ignore certain behaviour once and next time pay attention to it – it is likely that behaviour will increase. You should immediately support positive behaviour when it replaces the inappropriate behaviour that you have been ignoring.

Responses to promote self control

Specific preparation strategies to avoid negative behaviours include:

Family routines - Understand your own family routines and make sure these are clear to new children and young people who enter the household. Every family has certain rules, expectations, and patterns of behaviour, and these give some consistency in daily life. This is particularly important to children who may have only experienced chaos and uncertainty.

Setting rules - These should provide a clear statement about what is expected in a situation i.e. don't have too many rules – prioritise the key ones that are most important.

- Make sure the reason for making the rule is understood.
- Make rules positive and action oriented. eg “Hang your clothes in the cupboard and put rubbish in the bin in your room” rather than “Don't make a mess in your room.”
- Make sure the rule is appropriate to the child or young person's developmental level– eg an older teenager may not be required to come straight home after school. Also remember that a child or young person may be functioning at a developmental level that is not consistent with their age. You should take into account the child's capacity to meet expectations according to their current developmental level.
- Only make rules that you know you can enforce.

Developing schedules for getting things done - This is like contracting. It is usually drawn up and signed by the child or young person and linked to a reward system, such as, a list of tasks put on the refrigerator with a reward prominently displayed eg stars. This can have an element of fun.

Reframing - This involves turning a situation around in a positive way. eg A child who is over active may be engaged in an activity which requires lots of energy such as washing the car or running a message.

Shared learning - Demonstrate a skill and then let the child or young person take responsibility for that task so that the skill can be reinforced.

Earning privileges - This is similar to rewards. It usually involves doing something that you would rather avoid, in order to do something you would like. eg “Let's eat this all up so we can watch the Simpsons”. Best framed in a positive, fun way, rather than “If you don't eat this you cant watch the Simpsons”.

Managing challenging behaviour - How do you manage difficult situations when they occur? Possible strategies:

Taking a calm and reasoned approach.

Using natural and logical consequences - Natural consequences can be used for some behaviours to allow the child or young person to learn what happens as a result of certain behaviours. An example might be – If a child doesn't put their pushbike away under the house, it may be stolen or if they are slow getting ready to go out, everyone may miss the bus and the outing has to be cancelled. Restitution is an example of a logical consequence. If property is broken they must work to pay for the damage.

Time out -Time out involves a child or young person moving from a situation that is dangerous or where their behaviour is unacceptable to a safe place. Time out is not a punishment. The purpose is to allow the child to re-establish self control and give them time to consider the behaviour and its impact.

- Time out should only be used when you feel the child is truly out of control. You should first give the child an opportunity to change their behaviour. You should also ensure you are composed and acting in a calm and reasoned way.
- Time out should remove the child from the activities of the household - not necessarily isolate them. It is not acceptable to place a child in a situation that might cause fear or anxiety eg isolating a child at night when this may trigger unpleasant associations for them.
- Tell the child or young person how long the time out will be. It is important that time out not be for too long – one guideline about this is that time out should be the same number of minutes as the developmental age of the child. This may be too long for a child or young person who is fearful or who has been emotionally abused.
- Once the time is over, tell the child he is now in control again and can resume activities. Don't reward the child then, even if they have been good during time out.
- Later, talk to the child about what happened – and in particular what was achieved by using time out.

De-escalation skills and strategies during difficult situations –

- Use preventative measures when you know the child or young person may be stressed eg contact visits. Introduce more structure to the child or young person's day, separate them from any chaotic activities happening in the household, be alert to signs of escalation of behaviour and create a safe calm environment (turn the television off, play calming music, lower the lights, speak in a calm voice)
- Avoid a battle. You don't need to prove who is in charge – this is not about your authority – it is about

- a child struggling to understand their current situation or how to meet their own needs.
- Give the appearance of being calm and controlled. Don't yell over the child.
 - Allow time and listen and acknowledge anger.
 - Set limits calmly and firmly with the expectation that it is normal for the child or young person to follow them.

Dealing with dangerous behaviours - extremely serious or dangerous behaviours that may necessitate outside help i.e. suicidal gestures or self mutilation, property damage that involves physical danger, physical assault of others, running away. Foster carers should seek help from the child or young person's CSO and from their support person. They should advocate for professional help for the child, such as counselling.

Reactive responses, Reasonable force, Prohibited practices

Why is it not ok to use physical punishment with children in care?

- 1) Children and young people in care for protective reasons may have experienced physical or emotional abuse, and been hurt in the past. Even mild smacking may trigger reactions based on those past hurtful experiences. It demonstrates to that child that you are no different to the adults who have hurt them in the past. This vulnerability is a significant reason for avoiding physical punishment.
- 2) Physical punishment may reinforce a child or young person's view of themselves as "deserving" cruelty and victimisation. Sometimes it is the only attention they have been able to get – so they feel that is all they are worth.
- 3) Physical punishment models aggressive behaviour and teaches a child that bigger people use physical force to get their own way. Violence is modelled as a way to overcome frustration.
- 4) It does not encourage a child or young person to learn to take responsibility for their own behaviour – it encourages them to devise ways to avoid being found out. It teaches children what not to do- not what to do.
- 5) Children and young people who come into care have the right to a high standard of care and should not be placed in any situation that might potentially place them at further risk.

Reactive responses

Reactive responses are defined as immediate responses where reasonable force is necessary to respond to a child or young person's behaviour to ensure the safety of those involved while avoiding a potential escalation in the child's behaviour:

- Temporary restraint of a child or young person to prevent injury
- Removal of illegal or harmful objects
- Relocation of a child or young person to another area that provides safety

Reasonable force

Reasonable force is defined as the minimum force necessary to protect the child, oneself and others from injury and harm. Where reasonable force is used, this must only be in conjunction with the use of a reactive response, and not a prohibited practice.

Prohibited practices

Prohibited practices are responses to the behaviour of a child or young person which interfere with basic human rights. Unlawful and unethical practices are prohibited practices, as are practices which cause a high level of discomfort and trauma. The following is a non-exhaustive list of prohibited practices that are unlawful and not to be used by carers:

- Confinement
- Aversives (application of painful or noxious conditions)
- Mechanical Restraint
- Chemical Restraint
- Corporal Punishment
- Unethical Practices

How to change behaviour

Activity

Question 1

Think of a serious or fairly serious behaviour problem you have faced recently with a child or young person. Write down the details of the behaviour. If you don't have an experience to draw from, use an example that you might anticipate needing to deal with at some time.

Question 2

Consider what happened in the past that could have caused that behaviour. Write down your thoughts.

Question 3

Write down some of the child or young person's strengths or positive tendencies.

Question 4

Think about how you responded to the child or young person in that situation. Could you have achieved a better outcome if you had handled it differently? If you are using a hypothetical scenario, tell us how you would respond and what some of the difficulties would be in implementing your plan.

Finding and providing support for yourself, your family, and the child or young person

1. Talking things over afterwards

It is important to talk about an incident at some point afterwards. Sometimes this can be done immediately afterwards but sometimes it is better to wait until all concerned have had a chance to settle down. You may need to give the child or young person some time to recover before trying to talk to them.

If you can get into the habit of having “round table” discussions about how things are going, it will be easier to bring out any “hard feelings” or lingering tensions after an incident. This is a valuable way to gain some learnings from the incident in a supportive environment.

2. Ways to overcome tensions

Examples might include talking about things, writing feelings down and giving it to the other person, doing joint activities during which there is some reflection on the relationship, talking jointly to a neutral person.

3. Making sure your family members are ok

Ensure your own family members re-visit the preparation you all went through before you became a foster family. This includes preparation for the fact that the behaviour of a child or young person coming to live with you may be different and sometimes challenging.

Family members will need to be reassured that their own needs will continue to be met, and that their views are important too. Spend some individual time with them.

4. Managing stress

It is important that you also look after yourself, recognising that this work is often difficult and stressful. In order to be able to continue in a positive way it is important to acknowledge your own needs.

Exploring our own beliefs and attitudes about different behaviours

When caring for a child or young person who may have been abused it is important to be aware of your own values and beliefs, as these may influence the way you respond to particular behaviours.

Reasons why some behaviours may be upsetting:

- Behaviours may clash with your own beliefs. eg taking care of property, "borrowing" things without asking.
- Behaviours may mean more work for you, be costly, or may disrupt your plans.
- You may be alarmed that the young person may be out of control.
- You may feel inadequate or embarrassed, especially if the behaviour is observed by others.
- It may trigger something that happened in the past for you.

Managing stress

Some calming strategies

For children and young people:

- Long walks
- Punching bags
- Trampoline
- Bat/ball games – totem tennis,
- Basketball, cricket.
- Playdough for younger children
- Listening to gentle music.

For adults:

- Physical activity eg gardening, household chores, long walks
- Going to the gym
- Talking to someone about it (someone who will maintain confidentiality and will remain impartial.)
- Writing down your thoughts
- Going somewhere quiet where you can be alone
- Lying on the floor and doing breathing exercises
- Listen to soothing music.

Stress management techniques

- **Good diet** - Avoid caffeine because it is a stimulant. Drink plenty of water as headaches are often caused by dehydration. Avoid refined sugar. Eat slow release foods like potatoes, cereals, fresh vegetables.
- **Avoid unhelpful thinking** - The things we say to ourselves will affect the way we feel, eg if we constantly put ourselves down this will have a negative impact on the way we function. Watch out for being negative, eg if something goes wrong – don't dwell on it but think of the times when you have done a good job. Re-frame things in a positive light. Two people may have the same stressful event and it will have a different impact on them because of the things they tell themselves about that event. One may assume blame for what has happened, ask why this is always happening to them, imagine the worst. Another person may tell themselves that this is a difficult thing but they have done the best they can, remember the way they handled something else positively, and move on to make the best of things. Remember that perfection is impossible. Are you expecting too much?
- **Make sure you get enough sleep** - Use relaxation techniques if you have trouble sleeping. You can learn these in a group or purchase a tape. Use visualisation exercises.