

# SETTING BOUNDARIES AND EXPECTATIONS

### Assisting Children Who Display Challenging Behaviours

It is very important children have trusted, supportive and understanding adults who can help them to effectively regulate their emotions and situations that cause them stress.

The strategies that are used to respond to challenging behaviours vary. The best approach to behaviour management is an individualised method that takes into consideration the idea that what works with one child may not work with another. Strategies will differ depending on your child's age, temperament, experiences and ability.

### Identifying Patterns and Triggers

You may notice patterns of challenging behaviour occurring at a certain time of day or during a certain activity. These are the 'warning signs' or 'triggers' of behaviour. You might find it useful to:

- Keep a record of what happens before and after the behaviour took place.
- Consider what activity was your child doing at the time.
- Consider if there was a change in routine or if your child was transitioning between tasks.
- Ask yourself if your child was in an unfamiliar place or there were unfamiliar people present at the time.

This can assist in identifying if there are particular factors causing your child to feel anxious or otherwise unsafe and help them overcome these fears. Keep in mind that these may be linked to past experiences or worries.

### Teaching Children Expectations

When a child comes to spend time with you they might come from a home where there are very different behavioural expectations to your own. They are relying on you to teach them in ways that suit their ability and understanding.

You may need to repeat a lesson several times before your child is able to remember or do it without your help. Help them understand that boundaries and expectations are in place because you care about their safety.

### Building A Positive Environment

Challenging behaviours are often less prominent in environments that encourage positive learning and development.

Tips for building a positive environment:

- Let children know that they are respected and valued; it is important that they understand they can get help from adults when they need it.
- Guide behaviour in a caring and sensitive manner.
- Consider your child's individual development as separate from that of other children in your life.

- Consider your child in the context of their culture, family, and community. Could the different expectations across households and school be causing confusion or frustration?

**Remember: All children develop at different rates. Focus on your child's improvement and effort rather than comparing them to others. If children are made to feel inferior it undermines their sense of worth and can reduce motivation.**

If appropriate, it is important to discuss challenging behaviours with your child's parent or guardian. The family may be able to provide further insight and share strategies that they use at home. Please feel welcome to contact Time for Kids for advice and support if needed.

**If you are having difficulty managing a particular behaviour, your child's family and Time for Kids may be your most helpful resource.**

### Offering Control

Challenging behaviour can sometimes be avoided by assisting children to gain a sense of control. When a child's behaviour is directed too often by adults their natural instinct to be independent can be obstructed, causing feelings of resistance. By offering children fair and legitimate choices we reduce their desire to 'rebel' against direction which often presents in the form of challenging behaviour.

Opportunities for independent decision-making can also support healthy development of your child's feelings of autonomy and self-worth. This means guiding children towards good choices while at the same time ensuring they stay safe. You can also teach them about managing disappointment and frustration by working through mistakes together.

Even young children can be involved in decision making. You may like to ask:

- Would you like to go to the park or playground ?
- Do you want milk or juice to drink?
- Do you want to watch *movie A* or *movie B*?
- Would you like to have sandwiches or fruit for lunch?

### Teaching Children To Recognise And Manage Feelings

Learning to express emotions is a normal part of every child's development and children can often experience many emotions in a short space of time.

For younger children especially it can be difficult to recognise feelings or find the right words to communicate them. When they have big feelings such as anger or frustration it can often be very overwhelming or cause children to feel out of control. Remain calm as you work through this together.

Tips for helping children talk about their feelings:

- Help your child put a name to the feeling: "You seem sad. Can you tell me what's wrong?"
- Offer support: "Tell me if you would like a hug".

### "Stubborn" Children

Some children appear very strong-willed and determined. It can feel difficult to get strong-willed children to do what you expect, but these children like to do things for themselves to feel involved and capable.

Helping children feel in control is the best approach to working with children who come across as stubborn. Here are some things to remember:

- Try to see things from your child's point of view. Children are often strongly attached to their viewpoint but also can often be more flexible when they feel listened to. You might say 'I can hear you don't want to continue with this activity. Can you tell me more about why?'
- You can help them to calm down by telling your child that their feelings are normal and natural. This shows your child they can cope with their feelings without needing to be 'cheered up'.
- When your child is resistant, don't take it personally. They are probably trying to find ways to feel in control of their world.
- Look for ways you can both win. This might include giving children choices about how they want a non-negotiable to happen. "We need to leave in five minutes. Would you like to put your bag in the car yourself, or would you like me to do it?" This is a useful way of turning a 'no-choice' situation into a choice.

### Rewarding Positive Behaviour

Praising children for positive behaviour is wonderful for their self-esteem and development. Often recognising and encouraging the good things they do is 'reward' enough, especially if they are told how proud and happy it has made you feel.

We recommend keeping material rewards to a minimum. This may set an expectation that good behaviour will be always rewarded by a material gain or teach your child to only do things if there is a promise of a treat.

### Setting Rules And Boundaries

As a general guide, when setting rules and boundaries:

- Implement simple and easy to follow rules.
- Clarify what you mean. Directions such as 'be respectful' may not have any meaning to your child yet.
- Know what your child is capable of and set limits around this.
- Don't give mixed messages. Make sure your tone, body language and words are consistent, especially when giving instructions or implementing boundaries.
- Choose your timing. If your child is feeling overwhelmed emotionally it is unlikely they will be able to 'hear' what you are saying.

### Consequences

It is very important for children to learn that all behaviours have consequences. Consequences should suit your child's level of understanding, be safe, and happen immediately after the unacceptable behaviour.

**Positive behaviours also have positive consequences. These can be reinforced for your child by verbal affirmation, such as letting them know you are proud of them or telling them what a good job they have done.**

'Natural consequences' help children learn to take responsibility for their actions as they are able to see the direct outcome of their actions. Examples of natural consequences might include your child being unable to find their toys after not putting them away, or missing out on a treat because they chose to spend their allowance earlier in the day.

'Related consequences' help children see the connection between their actions and how they can make amends for a mistake or poor choice. These consequences follow logically from your child's actions. For example, if your child becomes upset and throws a chair, you could get them to pick up the chair and return it to the correct place or if they throw their food, you could get them to help clean up the mess.

### Losing privileges

Natural and related consequences are generally more effective than taking something important away from your child when it is not directly related to the behaviour. While your child may comply, it does not necessarily help them learn what to do in future. They may also resist if they feel the loss of privilege is unfair.

### 'Time In'

Rather than 'time out', which can teach your child that they will be socially excluded if they display certain behaviour, the use of 'time in' can be a positive and effective alternative. 'Time in' involves taking your child away from the situation if they are not coping well but staying with them until they have calmed. This includes sitting close to your child, telling them that you are there to support them, or holding them gently until they calm down. Once calm, you can then have a conversation about the situation and they can act in the future.

'Time in' sends an important message to your child that you will support them through their strong and difficult feelings, and that you will not let them do anything to harm themselves.

**Reminder: Not all children are comfortable with physical affection. Time for Kids expects that your child be asked if they are comfortable to receive any kind of physical comfort include hugs. Not only does this ensure your child is comfortable, it also roles models to them the idea of 'consent' from a young age.**

### Physical Punishment

There are many different opinions about whether it is okay to smack children. It is never appropriate for a respite carer to use physical consequences such as smacking to discipline your child. Not only do studies tell us that smacking is unlikely to encourage permanent changes in behaviour because it does not address the underlying cause of the behaviour, but children who receive physical punishment also:

- Are more likely to become withdrawn, anxious or depressed.
- Often forget the reasons for the punishment and develop strong feelings such as hurt or anger.
- May become aggressive towards other children, or use violence as an adult. Smacking can also encourage bullying as it teaches children that it is appropriate to hit others.
- Can learn to tell lies or blame others to avoid being hit.
- Often feel shamed and humiliated.

For more information on discipline strategies see the *Parenting Research Centre's Raising Children Network* for helpful and practical advice about disciplining children of all ages:

[http://raisingchildren.net.au/articles/discipline\\_strategies.html](http://raisingchildren.net.au/articles/discipline_strategies.html)

**Remember: Children learn from role modelling. Smacking can teach children that it is alright to hit others.**

For more information please visit:

<http://www.bellybelly.com.au/child/11-reasons-why-smacking-is-ineffective-and-damaging>

Time for Kids is bound by the regulations governing the provision of foster care in South Australia. As such no form of physical punishment is acceptable in your placement with a child. This includes slapping, smacking or shaking.

Please contact Time for Kids if you would like to discuss alternative ways to manage challenging behaviour.

Time for Kids' carer resources are available to download from [www.timeforkids.com.au](http://www.timeforkids.com.au).

To discuss any issues raised in this resource, please call us on 8440 8500.

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