

Behaviour Management

What is behaviour management?



Behaviour management is exactly that, how adults manage a child's behaviour whether it is age appropriate, socially appropriate or not. The adults management of the child's behaviour is essential in maintaining order and structure in the lives of busy families (and classrooms), as well as setting children up for success. Adults being persistent and consistent are the fundamental requirements of a successful behaviour management plan. Importantly adults should only put strategies in place that they can and do follow through on.

[Book an assessment for your child](#)

Why is behaviour management important?

Effective and consistent behaviour management of challenging behaviour by the adult is important because:

- **Health and quality of life:** Challenging behaviour may seriously affect a child's and adult's (parent or carer) health and quality of life.

- **Reduce risk:** Some risks associated with challenging behaviour include self-injurious behaviour (including ingestion or inhalation of foreign bodies, hitting the head on a hard surface or throwing the body on the floor) can result in serious injuries. Accidental injury is also a common issue in children with aggressive behaviour, for the child in question, surrounding children and most commonly for the *involved adults* as they seek to prevent the child harming themselves and others.
- **Dietary deficiencies:** Oppositional behaviour may result in dietary deficiencies, weight loss or gross obesity.
- **Social isolation:** Challenging behaviour can often lead to social isolation of both the adult and child.
- **Reduce mental health issues:** Research also suggests that lack of social skills can lead to loneliness and depression from an early age.
- **Appropriate behaviour is necessary** to support entry to most preschool and school settings, as well as other typical childrens' experiences such as peer parties, swimming lessons, christmas concerts etc.

What are the building blocks necessary to develop the adults behaviour management?

- **Adult Self Regulation:** The ability to obtain, maintain and change one's emotion, behaviour, attention and activity level appropriate for a task or situation in a socially acceptable manner. Most importantly, the adult must be able to "keep their cool" before and during the behaviour challenges. Some authors describe that when adults "lose their cool" by yelling or hitting, this is simply the adult having a tantrum and modelling to the child how to do it better than them!
- **Adult Emotional regulation:** involves the ability to perceive emotion, integrate emotion to facilitate thought, understand emotions and to regulate emotions. This also involves the adult being able to distinguish between the child and their behaviour: love and respect the child but dislike and discourage the negative behaviours.
- **Adult Understanding of age expectations:** is the knowledge of what is appropriate behaviour at the various stages of development so the adults can hold appropriate expectations.
- **Adult Persistence:** Adults must be committed to the cause and be

prepared for the need for *consistent repetition* in behaviour management, all day every day for fastest gains.

How can you tell if the adult managing the child with behaviour challenges is struggling?

The child who is being managed in an unsuccessful manner might:

- Be making little or no progress in their behaviour
- Be “digging their heels in” more, the more poorly matched strategies are ramped up
- Appear to be ‘in charge’ of the challenging situations
- Appear indifferent to the feelings of others
- Display explosive and unpredictable behaviour that is not contained by the behaviour management action plans

The adult struggling to administer the behaviour management might:

- Describe their daily lives as “walking on egg shells” just waiting to see what sets the child off *that* time.
- Describe fear of the child (which might be physical or emotional) or pervasive anxiety about having to manage the child and their behaviour.
- Be quick to get frustrated, sometimes describing their anger escalation as from 0-100 in one second flat!
- Find it very difficult to keep their cool when they see the behaviour challenge build-up coming as they become anxious as well as during the episode.
- Change management approaches regularly, rather than sticking to the a consistent approach long enough to see its effects play out.
- Calm the child by giving in to them (so the child gets their *own* way) rather than the child having to modifying *their* inappropriate behaviour or expectations to meet the adults requests or societal norms.
- Avoid taking my child to typical social events for their age (e.g. swimming lessons, birthday parties, shopping centres).

When you see behaviour management difficulties, you might also see difficulties with:

The child:

- **Self Regulation:** The ability to obtain, maintain and change one's emotion, behaviour, attention and activity level appropriate for a task or situation in a socially acceptable manner.
- **Receptive (understanding) language:** The ability to understand what others are saying to you.
- **Expressive (using) language:** The ability to use language and communicate needs and wants to others.
- **Executive Functioning:** Higher order reasoning and thinking skills
- **Emotional regulation:** Involves the ability to perceive emotion, integrate emotion to facilitate thought, understand emotions and to regulate emotions.
- **Social skills:** Determined by the ability to engage in reciprocal interaction with others (either verbally or non-verbally), to compromise with others, and be able to recognize and follow social norms.
- **Planning and sequencing tasks or activities:** The sequential multi-step task or activity performance to achieve a well-defined result.

The adult:

- fatigue
- depression
- social isolation
- physical presentation of a lack of self care

What can be done to improve the adults behaviour management?

- **Know the motivators:** Behaviour management starts with the adult knowing the child's "currency" or motivators - the "what's in it for me?". These motivators might be: praise, time with parents, IT/screen time, access to special games or toys to name a few. These rewards need to be immediate (when you choose) or at least quantifiable so that the child

knows when they have earned it. You can either take these rewards away in the event of misbehaviour or take them away ahead of time so that the child needs to 'earn' them through good behaviour. Where possible, use visuals to support this by adding a visual counter (e.g. small pom poms) to a jar.

- **Dual parenting:** It is important that all parents and carers are implementing the *same* strategies in the *same* way. Where children live between two houses (in broken families), the more similar the behaviour strategies, the more effective they will be.
- **Plan:** Adults need to be strategic and formulate a well-considered plan about how they are going to achieve change and which of the child's behaviours they want to start *before* attempting to implement change. Ideally this is mapped out and placed in a common high traffic location so that when the adult just 'cant think' they simply refer to the written plan of what to do in the moment. Of course this also helps all involved parties to be consistent by sharing the common plan.
- **Consistency of strategies:** Most effective behaviour management occurs when parents/carers uses the *same* strategies in the *same* ways *each and every time* the behaviour presents itself, so the child becomes familiar with the expectations and penalties that will apply if they make poor behavioural choices.

What activities that can help improve the behaviour management?

- **Establish a support coach** that the adult can turn to to debrief when overwhelmed and to bounce possible strategy ideas off when it is identified that a strategy is not working.
- **Time out:** The purpose is to interrupt a non-desirable behaviour and at the same time provide an opportunity for the child to settle themselves before continuing to act. Time out works best in sight of the adult and should be relatively short. It is recommended to use 1 minute for each year of age. However, when adult need a moment themselves to gather their wits about them, they might make this out of their line of sight.
- **Choices:** If children are asking for something that is not on offer, it is important that adults to put boundaries in place for the child. Sometimes this means saying 'NO' and sticking to that. It is okay to say: "That is not

a choice. The choice is Or What choice are you making?”.

- **House rules:** Sit down as a family or classroom group and list the house rules for both adults and children. This will help all members know what is expected of them and when they have broken the ‘house rules’.
- **Isolate problematic child:** Having to deal with multiple children can increase an adults stress and anxiety, resulting in less effective behaviour management. Not to mention that one child may bounce their behaviour off others. Instead isolate the child whose behaviour is problematic to play alone for a timed period or by giving ‘time away’ to allow all parties involved the chance to take a breather.
- **Stop talking:** To reduce the possibility of a child becoming argumentative and both adult and child getting stuck in a battle of words, *stop talking!* Only tell the child what they need to do in the moment. Often there is nothing more powerful than silence.

Why should adults therapy if they feel challenged in their behaviour management?

- Mostly, because behaviour management is hard! It is exhausting and thankless! Sometimes just acknowledging this for real (rather than shrouding it in laughter at drop off time) can help.
- When adults are bogged down in the thick of it, it is hard to think sensibly. Talking with an objective outsider can often help the fog to lift long enough to brainstorm from a different perspective with different results.
- Behaviour management is used to help shape the children’s behaviour in the way we want. But if you are in a hole stop digging! Down tools! Take a breather with a trusted advisor and review the tools available – more of the same is unlikely to bring the change your a seeking. Strategic change of strategy is more likely to.
- Behaviour management is a lonely tasks, and adults need to feel supported in the midst of the hard slog.
- School transition may be difficult if they are reluctant to follow instructions within the educational setting (eg classroom instructions, academic task requirements).
- Social isolation can impact not only the child, but also the parents if they

are unable to venture out or leave children with other carers. When children can not to be trusted to behave appropriately in group settings (e.g. play dates or swimming lessons), both parents and children can become very house bound.

- Completing routine and unfamiliar tasks appropriately may be challenging, so day-to-day life feels harder than it needs to.

If left untreated what can behaviour management difficulties lead to?

In the child:

- little progress in their behaviour
- ill-intended reinforcement to the child of their inappropriate behaviour
- increased peer rejection and social isolation from peers, siblings, and adults
- a broadening gap in their academic and social progress between themselves and their peers
- poor self esteem and the self perception that “I’m bad, so I might a well keep on being bad”
- Difficulties following instructions from others in a position of authority at school or in the family.
- Poor academic outcomes as the children are often in a negative state that is not conducive to learning.

In the Adult:

- Peer rejection and social isolation of bother parents and children.
- Not only does a child become stressed and anxious when their behaviour is out of control, particularly when they are more aware of their behaviour, so too does a parent or teacher.
- Restricting a family’s ability to engage in typical day-to-day activities such as attending swimming lessons or sporting groups as well as going to the movies/zoo and visiting friends and families.
- The longer behaviour management challenges continue, the harder it becomes to break the cycle and the longer it is reinforced that the child is able to take control (as opposed to the adults being in control).

What type of therapy is recommended for behaviour management difficulties?

If you have difficulties with behaviour management, it is recommended you consult an Occupational Therapist or Psychologist.

Contact us today to make an initial enquiry or book an assessment for your child
on 1800 KID SENSE (1800 543 736)

