

“Take a step back”

An OSCAR problem-solving guide for challenging behaviour

This resource aims to help OSCAR staff follow a user-friendly problem-solving process aimed at helping children with more persistent off-track behaviour. A set of questions are used to guide staff in discussion and development of a consistent strategy which could also be shared with parents/caregivers.

Behaviour guidance is about learning

Behaviour guidance is about a positive effort to assist children’s learning, and you can’t learn to NOT DO something. We recommend that staff direct their as much of their attention and energy as possible to behaviour that they want to encourage.

The approach here is non-punitive. Punishing a child may suppress an unwanted behaviour in the short term but it is unlikely to be effective in changing a child’s behaviour. This doesn’t mean that the child is ‘let off’ inappropriate behaviour but it does require:

- 1) that staff ‘pick their battles’ and generally minimise their responses to minor misbehaviour
- 2) that there are clear consequences for significant misbehaviour that the child understands and agrees are fair and reasonable
- 3) that staff primarily focus on helping children identify what they are finding difficult and provide the child with support to help them learn skills and manage themselves better.

Behaviour guidance should not be ‘done to’ children; it’s best ‘done with’ them. At all stages staff should look for opportunities to ask, consult and gain insight into how the child is seeing situations that are challenging. The ultimate goal is for children to accept ownership of their actions and behaviour and this starts from showing the child that they can ‘have a say’ in what is happening around them. A good relationship is a good foundation for behaviour change.

Calmness and consistency are critical – staff need to support each other as well as taking a patient and committed approach to the child.

About this resource: you may find that some of the questions create more discussion and ideas than others. Each situation will be unique and we encourage you to follow the format here in a way that best fits yours and addresses the needs of the children affected. Effective communication with children at all stages is the most important requirement and this might require additional staff training.

There is unlikely to be a single right answer and there will be an amount of trial and error ahead for your team while establishing a constructive way forward.

Draft resource: we’d love your feedback!

1. Current behaviour and child perspective

a) In what situations is the child usually settled, at ease or positively involved?

b) What behaviours or situations are currently causing the most challenge for staff?

c) Is there any pattern or regularity in the challenging behaviour?

E.g. time of day, situation, things that tend to 'set the child off' *Behaviour is often a way for the child to communicate or get something – what might be the message or goal?*

d) After a challenging situation has calmed down, what does the child say?

e) What does the child have to say about what 'sets them off'.

f) What does the child think might help make their time at the programme better?

2. Prevention and self-regulation strategies

a) What are the child's strengths, passions or interests?

E.g. kicking a ball, dancing, telling jokes, naming insects.

b) What are some activities that would give the child opportunities to put these strengths to use and how could these be implemented?

c) Are there ways to reduce the occurrence of the 'triggers' in the programme that 'set the child off'?

Example: arguing over the rules of a game – spend a brief one-to-one time with the child first, explaining how you would like the game to work and getting their input; child often gets irritable when sitting with others during morning tea – child can sit slightly apart from the other children.

d) What strategies could the child employ to better cope with situations that they find more difficult or are more likely to lead to challenging behaviour? Ask the child if they have any ideas what might help.

Examples: "next time you are starting to get cross you can tell me and we'll count and breath together."

"If you need to take a break from the activity you can give me the T signal and go and sit under the quiet tree for a few minutes."

"Let's make a sign together to remind everyone about the steps to get ready for going to the pool."

e) Are there behaviours that the child would benefit from using more often? (No more than 2 or 3. Don't overload the child with too many expectations for improved behaviour.)

Example: raising hand when they want to say something.

f) Check with the child – do they agree that these would be helpful? Have they got other suggestions?

3. Interactions with staff & responding to challenging behaviour

a) What are some options to ensure staff have regular, ordinary, positive interactions with the child?

Are a lot of the interactions that staff have with the child, about their behaviour?

b) If there is challenging behaviour, what responses help get the child back on track with their behaviour?

c) Are there responses that might be *reinforcing* their challenging behaviour?

Example: if a child that talking over an adult gets 'told off' in front of their peers and their goal was to get attention, then by giving that attention the adult may be reinforcing the attention-seeking behaviour, which makes it likely that the child will repeat it later. More effective responses give minimal attention e.g. a non-verbal reminder to the child, or staff might engage the child positively by asking them a question.

d) When the incident has been more serious, what consequences will be used? These should be discussed and agreed to with the child ahead of any incident.

If a child is in a habit of challenging behaviour then CONFRONTATION WILL USUALLY NOT BE EFFECTIVE. It is better to step away from any power struggle and address the problem later, one-to-one, including implementing of a suitable consequence.

5. Implementation

- To be effective, strategies must be applied consistently by all staff.
- Help the child to identify a 'go to' staff person who can act as a sounding board and possible mentor.
- Long-term behaviour change is more likely to come from ADDRESSING UNDERLYING PROBLEMS - the situations that the child finds difficult.
- There will be a fair amount of trial and error. Review regularly. Expect it to take time and that there might be some escalation in challenges as the child starts to experience positive change.
- Don't hesitate to get some advice or confirmation that you are on the right track – ask us at OSCN!

Thank you for your concern and care for children.