

WAMHS Newsletter

Welcome back to the WAMHS newsletter! This year we have experienced an unprecedented disruption to normal life, this will be disrupted again as lockdown is eased, schools reopen and parents return to work. We expect that during this time there will be a period of adjustment when children may show unusual and difficult behaviours; we hope that the information in this fortnight's newsletter will be helpful to you during this time.

Understanding Behaviour

Behaviour = Communication

When a child is showing behaviour that can be difficult it is important to understand why?

All behaviour is a form of communication, so before you react to your child's difficult behaviour, try to understand how they are feeling and how this might be impacting on their behaviour. Take a step back and observe the situation. Try to understand what they are communicating to you through their behaviour.

What is my child trying to communicate?

- Tiredness, hunger, discomfort
- Lack of structure and/or stimulation
- Struggling with difficult emotions – are they upset, cross, embarrassed, worried or scared?
- Picking up on stress or worry from others
- Disruption to their routine

Are they trying to communicate their needs but don't have the language to articulate them?

Children's Developmental Needs:

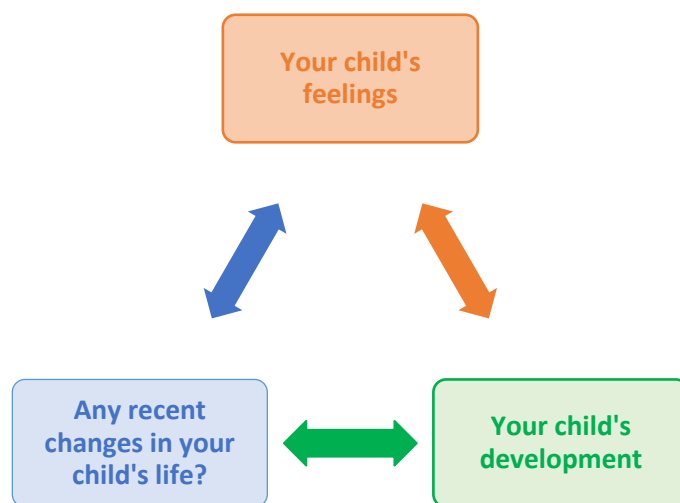
Safety, Security & Love (physical and emotional): warm, physical affection and displays of unconditional love help the bond between you and build your child's self-esteem.

Independence: sense of self & self control – children need new experiences and a sense of responsibility (that's right, it's good for them to make their bed/clean their room/wash the dishes!)

Self-Worth: from messages they receive from their environment - verbal and non-verbal – give plenty of praise & recognition

Sociability: learning to live co-operatively, develop communication and social skills

REMEMBER: Younger children's **emotional brain** has not fully developed and this can make it hard for them to deal with powerful emotions.



It might be helpful to ask yourself these questions:

1. Is this expected for my child's age and developmental stage?
2. Has anything been happening in the wider context contributing to how my child is acting at this moment? Have there been any recent changes (big or small)?
3. How well can my child communicate his or her needs to me? How were they feeling? What were they trying to communicate through their behaviour?

Improve Behaviour and Build Confidence

It is important to note that children's behaviour will be affected by everything that is going on right now. Children might feel that they have little or no control over everything that is happening.

It may help to give them choices where possible e.g. choose a book to read with you, choose their own clothes to wear or choose a family activity. Let them know that they make good choices and this will also boost their confidence and self-esteem.

Managing Behaviour

As highlighted in Issue 3, the first steps to improving behaviour are play, praise and strengthening your relationship with your child. Research tells us that special time is the most effective way to improve behaviour and should result in the need for fewer behaviour management strategies. However, all children display difficult behaviour sometimes, so below we've included ideas that we hope you will find helpful.

Preventing Difficult Behaviour

It's important to *identify trigger situations* and reflect on what was helpful or unhelpful at these times.

Consistency is key - make sure everyone in the household responds to difficult behaviour in the same way. It is also important to consistently *follow through on consequences* to avoid accidentally giving our children the message "if you scream/cry/tantrum for long enough, then I will let you have the thing you want."

State things in a positive way e.g. 'please do' rather than 'please do not do'

Teach appropriate ways for children to express negative feelings – drawing, writing these down making up a song, taking them self away from the situation.

Provide *opportunities for exercise* – a great way to get rid of frustrations

Be aware that while children may behave great at school they may act out when they get home as a consequence of being tired or 'holding things in all day' – think about what might help your child to relax or express themselves following a long day at school.

Set limits - All children need help to learn what behaviours are appropriate and which are inappropriate. Parents need to set rules in order for children to feel secure; however, it is normal and healthy for children to protest against these!

Talk to children about their difficult behaviour – explore what was happening for them at the time, how it made them feel and how they might respond differently next time. The key is to **strike when the iron is cold**.



Encouraging Positive Behaviour

Generally children like and need attention, and will work for attention from others – this includes negative attention (e.g. criticism, shouting).

TOP TIP: look out for times when your child is engaging in behaviour that you want to see more of (e.g. playing nicely, being kind to their sibling, completing school work, demonstrating confidence) and offer praise for this to see more of it.

Some of your child's behaviours might not be ideal (e.g. whining, minor squabbling, pulling a face). Giving these behaviours attention might make them worse, so it's best to ignore them (unless the behaviour is dangerous or abusive). Remember to pick your battles!

STRIKE WHEN THE IRON IS COLD

Talk to your child about their behaviour only when they are calm.

Avoid criticism in order to encourage them to talk about what happened - explain that it is the action and not them you are unhappy with.



Rewards, Incentives and Celebrations

These can help promote positive behaviours. It might be a spontaneous reward or treat when you notice that your child has done something well or it might be planned in advance. It might involve a small reward for an everyday achievement, or a bigger reward for something the child has put lots of effort into.

Many children respond well to stickers or reward charts for specific goals.

"When...Then" agreements can be helpful, e.g. "when you have tidied your room then you can watch TV".