



How to encourage positive behaviour

“....behavioural and/or emotional difficulty can better be defined as a pattern of behaviour, or even a single action, which interferes with the learning, development or happiness of a child or of the group of which the child is a part,....” (PSLA).

- Dealing positively with children’s behaviour requires energy, commitment and a lot of patience.
- Don’t forget – if children do need to learn new ways of handling everyday life – this will take time, merely telling a child to ‘share properly’ or ‘pay attention’ is not enough. Praise the behaviour rather than the child.
- Should be a whole team approach – need to discuss ways in which you are all going to help children in a more constructive direction.
- Learn to recognise and praise positive behaviour that is often overlooked in favour of ‘problems’.
- Look at the environment and ensure that it is arranged appropriately.
- Identify times that may cause problems and be prepared.
- Ensure that everyone is clear about what is expected of them and what they are doing.
- Help children to make and keep a few simple rules.
- Develop an environment that **‘encourages’** children to develop positive behaviour:
 - Encouragement is freely given for effort and improvement, rather than praising the end result.
 - Encouragement focuses on what a child has done today or within an activity.
 - Encouragement highlights positive feelings, adults express appreciation and children share their pleasure.
 - Encouragement taps into children’s feelings of satisfaction and their strengths.(Alfred Adler)

How to develop an encouraging approach:

- Spoken encouragement through sincere compliments (thank-you etc.).
- Non verbal encouragement – smiles, nods, friendly touch.
- Works best when expressed as close to the behaviour as possible, as part of natural communication with children, not saved until the end of a session.
- Try to develop a habit of ‘catching’ children when they are good.
- Make sure that you don’t overlook the child that is ‘always good’.
- Notice the co-operative behaviour of a child close to one who is not co-operating. This may alert the second child and help them to get back ‘on task’.
- Tangible rewards have their place, but need to be used with discretion. Ideally, a treat is something that everyone enjoys. Rewards of any kind are not working if you have to use them as a threat.

If a child needs ‘time out’

- If possible warn the child that a given consequence will follow if he continues to behave in an unacceptable way.
- Try to remain calm and don’t shout or threaten.
- Be consistent, even when it is difficult to be.
- Deal with behaviour immediately and then allow the child a fresh start.
- Give children plenty of praise and attention when they are behaving well.

Benefits of a positive approach

- Children feel appreciated for what they have done well.
- Self-esteem is boosted.
- Children learn to exercise choices and self-discipline.
- The time spent together is much more enjoyable for adults and children.

A small number of children continue to display disruptive behaviour and are not just being ordinarily naughty. Their bad behaviour is usually a front behind which they are hiding great anxieties. In this case it may be necessary to seek professional help with parental consent to assist the child while he is still young.

“The best way to help children to get ready to be five years old is to allow them to be three when they are three and to be four when they are four”
(Cathy Nutbrown, *Threads of Thinking*, 1999).