

Child Behaviour Management Vulnerability

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Child Behaviour Management

Description and Context

Parents and carers play a critical role in the health, development, safety and wellbeing of children, particularly in the early years of the child's life. Providing appropriately nurturing and stimulating environments for children in the early years is strongly associated with optimal outcomes such as improved intellectual development, improved educational outcomes and ultimately improved employment opportunities. Many parents participating in Brighter Futures will experience difficulty managing their children's behaviours. Brighter Futures provides a unique opportunity to support parents to develop effective skills in meeting children's developmental needs and appropriately managing children's behaviour.

Parenting does not occur in a vacuum; it is affected by culture, the social environment factors and experiences of being parented. Many parents in Brighter Futures will have experienced poor parenting themselves, trauma, violence, and abuse. The impact of other vulnerabilities including mental health, domestic violence, drug and alcohol or intellectual disability can also influence the capacity of parenting.

In DoCS Brighter Futures program, 'behaviour management' is about supporting parents to:

- better understand their child's behaviour
- understand the impact of their own experiences of being parented on how they parent their own children
- build strong, positive, and resilient relationships with their children
- understand child developmental needs and age appropriate behaviours
- develop age appropriate strategies for managing children's behaviour.

Effective child behaviour management is not so much about children but about parents. It is about parents having a good understanding of child developmental stages, what sorts of behaviours they can expect from their children, and what their children need to support them in their developmental tasks. It is less about what children do and more about how parents respond to any given situation.

Some children in Brighter Futures families may experience more serious and complex behaviours, for example, attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder, conduct disorder, or oppositional defiant disorder. If you are concerned that a child may have a recognised behavioural disorder, speak with your Manager or a local specialist service for more information and support. This practice resource does not apply to dealing with these behavioural disorders as this

requires the expertise of an appropriate health professional. Brighter Futures workers should not attempt to diagnose a 'disorder' but rather should refer the family to a health professional for assessment, diagnosis and treatment.

Key learnings from research

When considering child behaviour management, adults often tend to focus on how children manage (or do not manage) themselves and/or attribute a deliberateness to the child's behaviour (i.e. 'he is naughty'). In vulnerable families parents may have a limited understanding of the child's developmental stage and the capabilities associated with each stage. Parents may therefore respond in ways that create distress for children which is then interpreted by the parent as a 'child behaviour problem'. For example, if a parent expects a child to be able to undertake a task that s/he is not developmentally capable of, the child may become angry and exhibit a frustrated behaviour that the parent sees as difficult.

Disobedience and discipline problems in toddlers may reflect age related conflict or frustration or a lack of understanding of adult expectations (Campbell 1995) and children's behaviours often reflect their developmental stage and ability to understand and to communicate. A common misconception is that discipline is



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synonymous with physical punishment. The Latin root of the word discipline, however, means 'instruction' or 'knowledge'. Thus, discipline is really a process by which adults teach children and convey knowledge about appropriate behaviour for various situations. The purpose of discipline is to guide children to choose what is right through teaching and learning rather than forcing.

While it may be difficult for parents to deal with, isolated behavioural problems rarely reflect a problem that requires clinical attention. Physical aggression has also been shown to be common in young children, even in children as young as 17 months, of whom approximately 50% have been found to push others, and 25% kick others (Keenan 2002). Physical aggression typically peaks between two and three years of age, and most children learn to regulate their use of physical aggression by the time they reach middle childhood.

Some of the common everyday children's behaviours that cause concern include: whining, tantrums, bedtime resistance, fighting (with parents, other children or siblings), biting, kicking, and swearing.

Tantrums are a natural part of growing up, and are not usually cause for serious concern and will typically diminish without intervention as the child gets older. Temper tantrums most frequently occur in children between one and three years of age but may also occur after this. Tantrums may be ongoing especially where a child has been exposed to family conflict or violence. During this period

some children may have one tantrum a day on average (Potegal, Kosorok & Davidson 2003). Biting, pinching and hair pulling is also common in young children.

Fathers may require assistance to establish effective parenting skills. This is especially important when there is a family breakdown or shared custody and contact is not continuous. It is important that any behaviour management strategies used are consistent across environments and between parents. Supporting both parents to develop effective skills will help to promote consistency, whether or not parents are living together. Mothers' views and support can be influential in the roles that fathers take, and these views need to be addressed in any intervention with families.

It is important to recognise that children model their behaviour on the behaviour of their parents. If the parents want to teach their children effective coping skills, parents then need to demonstrate these coping behaviours in the way they manage their own lives from day to day.

The main ways culture influences family life is through beliefs, values and actual parenting practices. Within the home environment, this might mean speaking in a language other than English, following a religious belief, cooking and eating in traditional styles and raising children with traditional parenting styles, stories and values. Yet regardless of culture, parents throughout the world want their children to be healthy, develop skills for surviving

financially and to possess the positive values respected by their own culture. Studies have shown that in the long-term, parents from a range of cultures share the same goals for their children. These include happiness, healthy relationships, education, having a successful occupation, as well as developing the values of self-respect, respect for others, honesty and caring (Raising Children Network)

Parenting interventions for Indigenous families need to acknowledge and accommodate the role of extended family and kin. Family obligations may take priority over the interests of individuals, and decision-making about children is typically shared with extended family members. Grandparents, aunts and uncles play an active role in childcare. Grandparents play an important role in transmission of cultural knowledge and customs.

Evidence-based practice principles

The Parents as Teachers (PAT) 'Born to Learn' program is being rolled out as the home visiting program delivered by DoCS EI caseworkers. The program provides a detailed and structured home visiting program for families expecting a child and/or who have children aged 0-3 years. The program is designed to ensure the delivery of evidenced based information, support and encouragement to parents to help their children develop optimally during the crucial early years of life. The implementation of PAT program with parents therefore

will support parents to develop a good understanding of the developmental stages from 0 – 3 and the behaviours that can be expected from their child/ren. It will also provide a platform for caseworkers to address with parents issues around managing children's behaviours.

Practical strategies to share with parents

- Acknowledging and showing appreciation of desirable behaviour will increase the likelihood of a child displaying more desirable behaviour in the future.
- Using coping thoughts when children are behaving inappropriately can help parents feel better about their parenting and about the situation. Coping thoughts are those that encourage a parent to focus on what they are doing well as a parent and to consider their child's behaviour in a more positive and relaxed way. An example of a coping thought is a mother reminding herself when her child misbehaves that the child is young and there are many things he/she does not understand. A popular strategy to share with parents is to 'say four positive things for each negative thing that you say to a child'.
- It is helpful for parents to be aware of what is realistic to expect from their child in an upcoming 12 month period – eg. It is normal for children to have regular tantrums once they become toddlers.
- It is a good idea to plan activities for toddlers for situations when the parent knows that there is potential for the toddler to behave inappropriately.
- There are practical and simple strategies that can reduce some inappropriate behaviour and therefore the need for a response, including toddler-proofing the house, keeping up daytime sleeps, and setting simple rules and limits.
- Learn about child development. Young children change quickly as they grow and develop. When the parents learn about child development, they can have realistic expectations for the child's behaviour as she/he enters new stages. For example, knowing that most 2 year-olds find it difficult to share helps the parent see the child's reluctance to share a favourite toy in a new light.
- Think about the child's environment. Being hungry or tired makes it harder for young children to control their behaviour. Some types of entertainment or hectic schedules can be over-stimulating for the child. Looking closely at the child's routine and surroundings may give the parent clues to the reason for his/her behaviour.
- Look for patterns in the child's behaviour. When the child does something that puzzles or upsets the parent, the parent should try to remember what happened just before the incident occurred and what happened as a result of the behaviour. The parent may soon be able to recognize patterns in their child's behaviour.
- Know the child's temperament. Temperament is a combination of behavioural characteristics that is present at birth. For instance, some people are more active than others, some adapt easily to change and for others change is difficult. Knowing the child's unique personal style helps the parent to understand the child's behaviour.

The '[Encouraging good behaviour: 15 tips](#)' is a great resource to encourage behaviour that parents want in their child. These include:

- o parent as a role model
- o show child how you feel
- o give the child some positive feedback
- o get down onto the child's level
- o active listening
- o keep promises
- o reduce temptation by reducing the chances
- o choose your battles before you intervene in anything your child is doing
- o keep instructions simple and positive
- o increase the child's responsibility and consequences for their actions
- o say it once and move on
- o make the child feel important

- o prepare for challenging situations
- o maintain a sense of humour.

Brighter Futures workers can support parents in their parenting role by:

- o listening to their concerns
 - o clarifying your own understanding of what is happening by reflecting back what you are hearing, including how the parent is feeling
 - o using a positive tone of voice and facial expressions
 - o focusing on the parent's positive actions.
- ↘ Parents' goals and the decisions they make for their children are shaped by a range of factors including culture, gender roles, family background, environment and social conditions. Brighter Futures workers do not have to agree with all of the beliefs, choices and goals of the families they work with. However, understanding where the parent is coming from and how they understand the situation/problem, can help caseworkers to identify barriers to behavioural change and therefore enable interventions to be constructed that work for the family in an appropriate and sustained way.
- Practical strategies for Brighter Futures workers**
- ↘ Ask questions that empower parents to engage in reflective problem solving.

- o Summarise the parent's concerns as you hear them.
 - o Ask questions that assist the parent to reflect on concerns and elicit their ideas for solutions.
 - o Take into consideration the family's cultural customs and beliefs.
 - o Show respect for the parent's ideas by acknowledging them and, if you add to them, explain your reasons.
- ↘ Help parents understand the child's point of view.
- o Without giving advice, talk through your observations of the child (if the child is known to you).
 - o Assist the parent to gain appreciation of the way the child may be feeling by saying to the parent things like 'I wonder whether Ruby is feeling frustrated when you take the TV remote from her. This might explain why she starts screaming every time this happens. She probably likes playing with all the buttons'.
 - o Share your understandings about behaviour and child development (this can be done in the context of implementing the PAT program).
 - o Identify the things the parent is doing that are helping their child (eg 'It was good that when you took the remote from Ruby you gave her another toy

with buttons on to play with. This has obviously decreased her frustration').

- ↘ Parents expressing frustration about their children's behaviour need support in reframing the issue from 'my child is naughty' to 'how can I respond in ways that will support my child, reduce his distress and ease the way for him to behave in more appropriate ways?' It is about focusing on what can be done to generate appropriate behaviour, rather than focusing on a child's misbehaviour. Child behaviour management is also about giving children the confidence to take increasing responsibility for their own actions and for their effect on other people.
- ↘ Brighter Futures is committed to ensuring that fathers are particularly supported in their parenting roles. Fathers should be encouraged to build their parenting skills and involvement early in their child's life, as a normal part of family life ([resources to assist fathers in parenting](#)).
- ↘ Brighter Futures workers should always take into account the [cultural background of families](#). However, it is important to explore culture as it applies to individual families and not assume difference on the basis of cultural stereotypes. What is needed is an understanding of the role that particular cultural beliefs and practices have in each individual family The [Raising Children Network](#)

provides further information on this subject.

- Brighter Futures workers can assist parents in developing personal coping strategies, in establishing and maintaining positive social supports, and in using community services more effectively. Any effective intervention will need to address those things which are often a barrier to parents learning through their own experience, such as anxiety or a lack of personal sense of efficacy. More importantly, any intervention with parents and carers should aim to enable parents or carers to solve problems for themselves.

Endorsed resources

Endorsed Parenting Websites

The [Raising Children website](#) – The Raising Children website has been developed by a consortium of three early childhood agencies: Smart Population Foundation, the Centre for Community Child Health and the Victorian Parenting Centre. The site provides a comprehensive range of quality-assured information for parents of children birth to eight years.

[Parenting SA](#) – *Parenting SA* is administered by Children, Youth and Women's Health Service, SA. The site contains Parent Easy Guides (PEGs) which bring simple, easy-to-read information on many of the issues faced by parents from birth through adolescence.

[Healthy Start](#) – The Healthy Start website offers educational

resources designed for parents with learning difficulties who have children under 5 years of age. This website also offers links to research and home-based training programs.

[Early Childhood Australia](#) – The Early Childhood Australia website focuses primarily on supporting best practice. It contains quality assured early childhood resources and information from a range of people working within the early childhood field.

[Centre for Community Child Health](#) – The Centre for Community Child Health supports and empowers communities to continually improve the health, wellbeing and quality of life of children and their families. The site contains *Practice Resources* which have been developed to provide practitioners with a summary of the latest research in relation to a range of key issues.

[Father-Inclusive Practice](#) – This website offers information about the inclusion of fathers in parenting. It includes information, resources and fact sheets which promote father inclusive practices.

Information for parents and Brighter Futures workers

[NSW Department of Community Services](#)

[KidsHealth for Parents](#) – Nine steps to more effective parenting

[BBC Parenting: Your Kids](#) (Toddlers and Preschool Children; Primary School Children)

[School age behaviour toolkit](#) – Raising Children Network, see Department of Community Services 'Behaviour techniques in action' video clip

Parenting services

- [NSW Family Services](#). The aim of NSW Family Services is the promotion of quality support services provided by non-government organisations in NSW and the ACT to families experiencing stress. Family services are local community organisations that use trained, caring staff to strengthen families and their links with their community. There are over 184 across NSW. 02 9692 9999.
- The Parentline is a confidential telephone advice and information service for parents of children living in NSW. Trained professional counsellors with experience in helping families will listen and give support and assistance, and provide information on relevant issues and services. The Parentline is accessible 7 days a week. 132 055 (cost of a local call).
- Early Childhood Health Centres have child and family health nurses who can check the health of the baby. If the parent or caregiver has any concerns about their baby, their small child, themselves or their family, these nurses can help. Centre locations are listed in the phone book under Early Childhood Centres.

- [Karitane](#) provides support, guidance and information to families experiencing parenting difficulties, to health professionals and to the community. Karitane offer a 24 hours careline, a volunteer home visiting program, a residential facility and a number of education services. 02 9794 1852 - 1300 227 464 (STD Callers).
- [Tresillian Family Care Centre](#). A community service, providing positive and practical advice on caring for babies, for both parents and health professionals. Tresillian offer a 24 hours parenting helpline, outreach, day stay and residential programs. 02 9787 0855 – 1800 637 357 (freecall).
- [Relationships Australia](#) provides a range of support services to couples, individuals and families including relationship counselling, mediation, family violence intervention and support for problem gambling 1300 364 277 (cost of a local call).
- Playgroups are a great way for small children to practise getting along with others and to try new ways to play. They are good for parents too, with lots of support and social contact in a welcoming environment. To locate playgroups across the state refer to the [Playgroup Association](#) website.

- Triple P (Positive Parenting Program) is a behaviourally focused parenting program that is being rolled out across the state through the [Families NSW](#) strategy. Through this initiative all families with children aged 3-8 years will be able to access broad focused parenting information through information seminars, an 8 week small group program or a 10 week self directed program. The aim of the initiative is assist parents to receive information and support to help them enhance their parenting skills and improve their relationship with their child.

Working with Aboriginal people

[Early Childhood Australia Inc](#) – Indigenous children and behaviour management strategies

Working with teenage mothers

[‘Parents Story - Young Parents’](#) – Raising Children Network, see Department of Community Services video clip on young parents

Working with people from non-English speaking backgrounds

[NSW Multicultural Health Communication Service](#). Information is available on this NSW Health site about many topics in many languages other than English

Working with grandparents

[‘The changing role of grandparents’](#) – Australian Institute of Family Studies 2006

Working with fathers

[Parenting SA](#)

[Family and Community Services \(Australian Government\)](#)
‘Supporting fathers in families’ booklet

[Manhood Online: better men for a better world \(Australia\)](#)

[Men’s information and support centre \(South Australia\)](#)

[Men’s Line Australia](#) – Counselling for men (24hours/7days)

[Wipfler P ‘Fathers are primary parents’ Parents Leadership Institute](#)

Video clip on fathers – [‘Parent Story - Give dad a go’](#)

Resources related to specific issues

[Discipline](#)

[Toddlers - tips for toddler troubles](#)

[Swearing](#)

[Nightmares and other terrors](#)

[Family Break-up](#)

[Lies and fibs](#)

[Bedwetting](#)

[Second baby](#)

[Tips for toddler troubles](#)

[Information on how to protect children from everyday hazards, and how to respond to medical emergencies](#)

[Single parenting](#)

[Step-families](#)

References

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