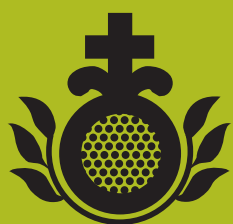


Positive behaviour support for children



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Callan Institute
Positive Behaviour Support

www.callaninstitute.org

Why do children sometimes behave in difficult ways?

Difficult or problematic behaviour is best understood as a language a child uses to tell us that something is wrong. A child is not being bold or naughty.

As a parent or carer, you can learn your child's language.

When you do this, you will be able to focus on what your child is trying to tell you through his/her difficult behaviour. You will then be able to help your child control his/her behaviour in the long term, rather than just focusing on trying to get it to stop in the short term. Yes – you do want the difficult behaviour to stop, but you need to hear the message of the difficult behaviour before you can address it.

When you know the message of the difficult behaviour, you can also prevent difficult situations from happening. You will be better able to respond to your child when he/she has difficult behaviour and you can teach your child how to tell you what the problem is and fix it together.

How do I know what the message is?

To understand what the message of a difficult behaviour is, you can ask yourself the following questions:

- What is the difficult behaviour?
- When did it start, and why might it have started then?
- When does it happen, and why does it happen at these times?
- When does it not happen, and why does it not happen at these times?
- How do I respond to the behaviour?
How do others respond to the behaviour?
How does this affect my child?
- What calms my child?
- What might my child be getting as a result of this behaviour?
- What might my child be losing as a result of this behaviour?

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Answering these questions may help you understand the message hidden in the difficult behaviour. Often, it may be something like 'I don't want to go without you', 'I'm hungry', 'I'd like something to do now', 'I'm tired', 'no' or 'I need help with this'. If the message is not clear, you can look for help from someone trained in Multi-Element Behaviour Support who can do an in-depth assessment.

This assessment will look at how your child communicates, your child's health, how he/she problem solves, his/her likes and dislikes, along with many other factors. This assessment will help you uncover the 'message' of the difficult behaviour.

What is Multi-Element Behaviour Support?

Multi-Element Behaviour Support is based on the idea that difficult behaviour is a language used by a child when they don't have another way to communicate their message. The difficult behaviour becomes unnecessary when the child finds a better, more appropriate way to say the same thing.

Multi-Element Behaviour Support does not use any form of punishment. Instead, it builds on the strengths of the child, using positive methods. These can include arranging the surroundings and providing activities that better suit the child, teaching new skills and providing encouragement and incentives for your child to behave in a more appropriate and ultimately more effective way. Should the difficult behaviour occur, the reactive strategy focuses on the message in the behaviour and tries to address this message. By doing this, a child feels listened to and is able to calm down.

A Multi-Element Behaviour Support Plan has four parts:

- **Environmental Strategies:**
Getting the environment right.
- **Skills Teaching:**
Teaching new skills so your child can communicate his/her message more appropriately.
- **Direct Interventions:**
Ways to prevent and avoid difficult behaviour, and how to encourage your child to change his/her difficult behaviour.
- **Reactive Strategies:**
What to do when the difficult behaviour happens.

The message of your child's difficult behaviour will be unique to your child. This means that every Multi-Element Behaviour Support Plan will be different.



David's Story

David was a six year old boy who often had tantrums in the morning. He would scream, shout and hit out at his younger twin sisters. When he did this, his parents gave him toys, food or anything that would 'keep him quiet'.

When they looked at what was happening, they learned that David had too much free time in the mornings while his parents were getting the twins ready for school. He was feeling left out and was not able to find anything else to do. By screaming, shouting and hitting, he was trying to say "Hey, what can I do now?"

So, what did David's parents do?

Once they knew what David was saying through his behaviour, they knew what they could do to help him. They put together an activity box that was full of things he enjoyed and could do quietly on his own.

He also had the job of setting the table and getting out the cereal. He learned to say "Is there anything I can do?" They also made sure they caught him being good and regularly praised him for keeping busy. As a result, mornings became a lot calmer in David's house.

When difficult behaviour occurred, David's parents knew that he was saying "Hey, what can I do now?" His parents would calmly say to him, "remember, come to me and say 'Is there anything I can do?'". They would also remind him that hitting wasn't a good way of saying this. They then offered David something else to do. David's parents felt calm and confident as they said this, and David knew that they understood him and he was able to calm down.

Developing a Multi-Element Behaviour Support Plan for your child...

What Can I Do Now?

Once you know what the message of the difficult behaviour is, a Multi-Element Behaviour Support Plan can be developed. There are four parts to a Multi-Element Behaviour Support Plan with each part based on the message of the difficult behaviour.

Environmental Strategies: Getting the Environment Right

You can prevent a difficult behaviour from occurring by making changes to the places where your child spends time, what they do during the day and the way you communicate with him/her.

- You can have a play area with a large plastic container for toys and books. Your child's favourite items are then easy to reach and play with.
- Throughout the day, talk with your child. Let your child know what you are doing and why. Explain your actions as you go about the day and include him/her in the activities.
- When your child approaches something, don't assume the worst – for example, that they will break it. Name the item, and say clearly what the item is used for. For example, you may say "That's a picture-frame to show the photograph. Would you like to hold it carefully and look at it?"
- Children enjoy routine and like to know what is happening next. You can use a picture diary to show what is happening throughout the day and even make up songs for particular activities like showering. Include your child in making the picture diary. Start with wake-up time, meal times and bed time. As your child gets used to the picture diary, you can add other activities such as bath time and playtime. Stick to the picture diary as best you can.
- Choices are an important part of learning responsible behaviour. Support your child in making choices throughout the day, such as what to eat, what to wear or what he/she would like to do. Praise your child for making good choices.



Developing a Multi-Element Behaviour Support Plan for your child...

Skills Teaching:

Your child can learn new ways to communicate the message of the difficult behaviour. Your child may need other types of skills too. Some skills that can help will include

- How can your child tell you what they want? Your child may need a new, more appropriate way to ask for what they want. If he/she is having difficulty finding the right words, think about other ways to do this, such as using pictures, gestures or objects.
- Are there things your child can learn to do, to he/she help themselves? Perhaps there are things could learn to do to prevent the behaviour from happening, such as learning to ask for help, or picking an activity to do by themselves. Perhaps a fun hobby may help your child shine in a new way.
- Are there things your child can do to help him/her relax? Learning ways of coping with difficult situations may be helpful. Learning how to take a deep breath, count to ten, how to cope with being told no, how to use relaxing activities like listening to music, and even learning how to say, What can I do about this? can help your child find an answer to a problem.

Multi-Element Behaviour Support can help your child learn new ways to communicate the message of a difficult behaviour.



Developing a Multi-Element Behaviour Support Plan for your child...

Direct Interventions:

These are ways to prevent and avoid difficult behaviour and also how you can encourage your child to change their difficult behaviour.

- Catch your child being good. Be specific about what he/she is doing right. For example, you could say “You’re sitting nice and quietly, well done!”
- Be positive. State what you would like your child to do, not what you don’t want them to do. For example, you could say “Hang your coat up in the hall, please” instead of “Don’t leave your coat on the floor”.
- Think about how to motivate your child to encourage appropriate behaviour. For example, you could set up a lucky dip of small prizes for successfully completing household tasks, using their words, for having a bath or for going to bed on time. Be creative and have fun!
- Acknowledge your child’s feelings. For example, you could say “I know you would like to stay and play for longer and that leaving makes you sad, but we are going home now to make dinner for everyone. We can come back another day”.
- When giving your child directions, try to use clear, step-by-step instructions. If you ask for a tidy bedroom, say what that is - for example, putting the dirty clothes in the laundry basket and making the bed.
- Every home has rules, such as saying please and thank you, sharing and tidying up. Agree the rules and make sure they are clear, fair and that everyone agrees to follow them.
- If there are hotspots where difficulty behaviour often happens, such as bath times or meal times, try to plan for those in advance. For example, you could try a shower instead of a bath, or plan something fun to look forward to after the activity.

Think about how to motivate your child to encourage appropriate behaviour.



Developing a Multi-Element Behaviour Support Plan for your child...

Reactive Strategies: What to do when the difficult behaviour happens?

Your child needs you to be calm, so that in turn you can help him/her to calm down. Try to intervene when you first notice your child getting upset – don't wait for the problem to get bigger, and remember, listen and respond to the message of the difficult behaviour.

- This is not a time to try to teach your child. Your child is too upset to learn. Instead think about what he/she might be trying to tell you. What is the message hidden in your child's difficult behaviour? Can you help meet this need? Respond to your child based on the message of his/her difficult behaviour. For example, if the child's message is, I don't understand, can you give them some more information? If he/she is still upset, perhaps you could offer your child something that he/she may find calming.
- When talking with your child about the difficulty behaviour, you can also be clear that the difficult behaviour is not OK. For example, you could say "I know you're upset about having to leave the playground, but there is no hitting". If you can, find a quiet place to talk with your child when he/she is upset. Try to stay calm, do not raise your voice and remember that your child is trying to tell you something – something that is very important to him/her.
- When your child is calm, don't feel you have to make him/her apologise, as this may upset him/her again. Instead, think about the incident and try to figure out what your child was trying to tell you. Then consider what skills your child might need to learn, or how the environment could be better arranged to avoid a similar incident happening again. You can talk about the problem with your child later in the day or even the next day, when you feel he/she will be able to talk about it calmly.
- Always try and think about how you would like to be supported when you are upset, and this will guide you, as you love your child and address the difficult behaviour at the same time.

Your child needs you to be calm, so that you can help him/her to calm down.



Look for Support

Early support for difficult behaviour can prevent the development of more serious behaviour problems later. What may seem like a small problem now may develop into a bigger problem if not addressed. Some of the suggestions in this leaflet may give you ideas of how to provide this support. Other areas you can look for support include:

- A good source of support is often from those around you, including partners, friends, extended family and teachers so talk to them.
- Talk with your child's School Principal/Teacher who will be able to inform you about the school's policy on behaviour support. They may be able to suggest resources you could access.
- Discuss any concerns with your General Practitioner. They may be able to help you identify if there are any physical or medical causes for your child's difficult behaviour.
- Talk with your Public Health Nurse who can provide you with advice and assistance on where you can get additional support and help. Visit www.hse.ie.
- Talk to a social worker or the Citizens Information Board to see if you are entitled to any additional formal support, such as grants, benefits or home-based assistance.
- Listen out for any parent training courses in your local community. These courses can offer practical advice and give you the opportunity to meet with other parents or carers in similar situations. Before taking a course, talk with the organiser to ensure you are comfortable with the values and principles they teach.
- Visit www.activelink.ie. The Activelink website and Community Exchange E-mail bulletin (free subscription) provides information on community and voluntary activities in Ireland, including upcoming training and workshops.



Family Life:

- Try to take a similar what-is-the-message approach with other family members so that everyone is thinking the same way.
- Try to fit in time to spend with your other children individually, with your partner and by yourself.
- Sit down as a family and agree on activities that everyone will enjoy. This way everyone has an input and you can plan how to enjoy your time with each other.

Multi-Element Behaviour Support is based on the idea that difficult behaviour is a language used by a child when they don't have another way to communicate their message.



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Multi-Element Behaviour Support

Callan Institute, is a service of St. John of God Community Services, Ltd., Ireland and was founded in 1994 to provide consultation services to individuals with an intellectual disability and behaviours that challenge; to provide training and support services to their families and staff teams; and to support the use of effective, non-aversive methods, using the Multi-Element Model.

With thanks to:

The National Lottery, and the staff and families in St. John of God Carmona Services, St. John of God Menni Services, Trasna Training Services and Brothers of Charity, Cork.



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