

Individualized Supports

Understanding and Dealing with Behaviour

Behaviour is communication

All behaviour is a form of communication. In order to understand, respond to, prevent or change behaviours, program leaders must try to understand the message behind it. Getting to the root of the issue makes it easier to provide support.

Functions of Behaviour

A child may use behaviour to communicate their needs in the following areas:

- attention seeking (lack of awareness for personal boundaries, pinching, yelling)
- access to items or things they want (grabbing items, pushing people)
- escape or avoidance (running away, flopping on the ground)
- sensory seeking (mouthing items, seeking hugs or physical touch, self-injurious)

Challenging, Concerning or Unsafe Behaviour

Challenging behaviour can be frustrating, annoying or difficult to deal with but it does not significantly or consistently impact participation or relationships.

Concerning behaviour has the potential to cause harm to themselves or others if not addressed. This type of behaviour can affect a child's participation and is outside age-based expectations based on its frequency or intensity.

Unsafe behaviour puts the child or others at imminent risk of harm.

Responding and Redirecting

Before engaging with a child who is displaying challenging or concerning behaviours, pause to reflect on your own feelings. Consider what type of intervention will be most effective - you want the child to recognize that you are there to help.

Depending on the child, you may be able to redirect them with words or non-verbal actions. For children needing more connection, acknowledge their behaviour by describing what you see (such as their body language) or sharing what you think they are feeling or thinking.

Remember that emotions control the brain - when a child is angry, frustrated or overloaded, their brain may enter the 'fight, flight or freeze' response. This means they may not think or respond rationally and first need support to calm down. Model deep breathing, offer a distraction or use some calming tools to help with redirection.

Addressing Behaviour

As you develop a stronger relationship with the child and begin to see patterns, work to understand what the function of the behaviour might be. This can influence the way you respond in order to avoid reinforcing the child's use of that behaviour.

When children are calm, take the opportunity to support them by discussing or demonstrating more appropriate ways of expressing their needs or emotions.