

Providing foster and kinship care

Promoting positive behaviour



Children and young people in out-of-home care may display behaviour that is difficult to manage. Often this behaviour will be quite normal for their age and that particular stage of their life. However, in some cases a child or young person may display a pattern of challenging behaviour that is disturbing or unusual.

There is usually a reason for challenging behaviour, and understanding its causes is the first step towards promoting positive behaviour.

Reasons for challenging behaviour

There may be a number of reasons why children and young people display behaviour that is difficult to manage. For instance, they may have been exposed to traumatic and distressing situations.

Children and young people respond to situations in different ways, but trauma and distress are often shown through their behaviour. It is important to consider what feelings, such as fear or anger, may be the underlying reason for their behaviour.

It is also important to consider your own feelings about a child or young person's challenging behaviour, as this can help you manage both your feelings and the behaviour of the child or young person in your care.

To help you to manage challenging behaviour and promote more positive behaviour, ask yourself:

- How am I feeling about the child or young person's behaviour and are my feelings helping or hindering this situation?

- How is the child or young person feeling and what are the reasons for the challenging behaviour?
- What strategies can I use to manage the child or young person's challenging behaviour and promote positive behaviour?

Short-term strategies to promote positive behaviour

- Provide a role model to show the child or young person what your expectations are.
- Listen and ask questions to help you understand the reasons for the child's challenging behaviour.
- Use positive reinforcement and tell the child or young person when you are pleased with something they have done, for example, "it is great that you picked up all the toys today after you finished the game".
- Focus on the child or young person's strengths, such as their personality and talents and not on their behaviour.
- Reward good behaviour by offering an incentive for them to behave positively and let them know when there are improvements. Make sure this is done consistently and with particular goals in mind.
- Establish and explain family routines you have at home that help the household run smoothly. How will you let the child or young person know what the routines are and what they might need to do? Do these routines need to change depending on the child or young person's age?
- Encourage shared learning by demonstrating a skill to a child or young person and let them take responsibility for the task so the skill is reinforced.

- Promote privileges and reward children by asking them to do something that they would rather avoid in order to do something they like, for example, "let's eat all of your dinner so we can watch your favourite program", rather than "if you don't eat your dinner then you can't watch TV".
- Prepare for difficult situations and avoid a battle. You do not need to prove who is in charge — you are.
- Acknowledge anger and allow time to listen. Ask the child or young person what would make them feel better.
- Set limits by calmly and firmly explaining your rules and boundaries with the expectation that it is normal for children and young people to respect them.
- Create a calm, safe environment to reduce anxiety and stress for you and the child or young person.

Long-term strategies to promote positive behaviour

- Build a positive relationship with the child or young person in your care and help them to develop other positive relationships. A relationship built on trust and respect provides a basis for a child or young person to feel safe, secure and cared about. This will often help to alleviate feelings of insecurity and fear that may be contributing to challenging behaviour.
- Be consistent in how you relate to a particular child or young person, and be consistent in how you treat different children and young people in your care. Consistency helps a child or young person see your boundaries as fair, and may make them more likely to listen to you.

- Listen to, and communicate with the child or young person to enable them to express their needs, and help you to talk about your expectations. Communication is an essential part of understanding and responding to challenging behaviour.

It is also important to communicate with other significant people in the child or young person's life, such as school teachers, coaches, child safety officers and staff from other non-government services. This will help you understand the reasons for, or extent of, the challenging behaviour and to work together to resolve it.

Unacceptable methods of managing behaviour

As a foster or kinship carer, it is your responsibility to ensure that behaviour support strategies are consistent with Standards of Care outlined in the Statement of Standards in Section 122 of the *Child Protection Act 1999* (the Act).

The Act states that 'techniques for managing the child's behaviour must not include corporal punishment or punishment that humiliates, frightens or threatens the child in a way that is likely to cause emotional harm'.

For more information about the legislative requirements, refer to the Prospective carer fact sheet 5: *Foster and kinship care – Legislative requirements for providing care*.

The way you manage challenging behaviour must also comply with the department's Positive Behaviour Support Policy. This policy includes information about responding to unsafe behaviours in order to protect the child, and prohibited practices that must never be used when responding to a child's

behaviour. The policy also outlines reporting requirements that carers must follow.

Please request a copy of this policy from your child safety officer.

Support for carers in promoting positive behaviour

You are part of a team providing care for a child or young person and support is available to help you to promote positive behaviour.

These supports should be discussed with your child safety officer and included in the Placement Agreement. For more information, refer to Carer fact sheets 3: *Support for carers* and 10: *Case planning and Placement Agreements*.

There are times when a child or young person's behaviour may become extremely disturbing or difficult to manage. In these situations the child or young person may need special support. You must discuss this with your child safety officer.

Other support programs

Triple P Parenting Program

The Triple P Parenting Program is a course to help parents and carers manage challenging behaviour. To find out more about Triple P locations, visit www.health.qld.gov.au

Parent Help Line

The Parent Help Line provides telephone counselling for parents and carers. Hours of operation are 8am to 10pm, seven days a week. Contact **1300 30 1300** or visit www.parentline.com.au

Raising Children Network

The Raising Children Network provides a range of information for parents and carers of children up to eight years of age. Visit www.raisingchildren.net.au

For more information

To find out more information about promoting positive behaviour:

- call the department's general enquiries on **1800 811 810** or **3224 8045**
- visit www.communities.qld.gov.au/childsafety
- visit your local child safety service centre
- call Foster Care Queensland on **3256 6166**.