

INTRODUCTION

Hi and welcome to the Cerebral Palsy Foundation's ParentWise Podcast series. I'm Robyn Cummins.

Today, in the last of four podcasts about behaviour management, social work consultant Jenny Griffiths discusses how you can help your child to learn new skills and behaviours and what you can do to manage challenging situations when they arise.

ENCOURAGING POSITIVE BEHAVIOUR

Hi, I'm Jenny Griffiths.

If you're tired of seeing your child's challenging behaviours, what behaviours would you like to see instead and how do you encourage this desirable behaviour?

Encouragement and positive attention will help your child develop their skills and learn appropriate ways of behaving. Encouraging the behaviour you like will increase the chance of the behaviour happening again.

So the first thing to remember is to praise, encourage and reward behaviour you like.

When you see your child displaying a behaviour that you like, it's important that you verbally praise them, encourage them or provide a material reward.

COMMUNICATION SKILLS

Teaching your child functional communication skills is another important strategy in piecing together the challenging behaviour puzzle.

Helping your child learn how to express their needs appropriately and/or to request help when they need it are examples of important skills in communicating effectively.

Depending on your child's abilities, this might mean using real objects, picture vocabulary, photos, signing, voice output devices or speech.

The more your child can communicate functionally, the less they may rely on their misbehaviour to get their point across. You might need to work with a speech therapist to assist you to develop a functional means of communication for your child.

Apart from teaching functional communication skills, providing your child with interesting and engaging activities encourages independent play.

Environments that are safe and full of interesting things to do and explore stimulates kids' development and keeps them busy.

It can be challenging for children with physical disabilities to find fun activities that are stimulating for them to do independently, so a referral to an occupational therapist for a play assessment might be beneficial.

Most children with special needs are visual learners as opposed to verbal learners.

Using visual supports like activity schedules or social stories can reduce your child's confusion about what you are asking them to do.

Activity schedules consist of objects, photographs, drawings or words representing various activities.

They can help your child to keep busy, to learn new tasks, to get organised, to move from one activity to the next and to accept changes in routines.

Social stories are personalised stories written in a storybook format.

They can be used to learn new routines and activities but can also teach your child how to respond appropriately to feelings and how to interact in social situations.

MANAGING CHALLENGING SITUATIONS

Another major piece of the puzzle in behaviour management is managing challenging situations.

You may have tried to prevent the behaviour from happening and have attempted to encourage desirable behaviour and/or teach new skills, but sometimes misbehaviour may still occur.

Some negative consequences of this type of challenging behaviour and more detailed information can be found on the Triple P website at www.triplep.net.

So what else can you do if your child continues to display challenging behaviour? Here are some tried and tested tips:

- Deliberately pay no attention to your child when minor behaviour occurs that does not harm themselves or other people.

Your child might become quite noisy to get your attention but keep ignoring the behaviour until it stops and then give praise for the appropriate behaviour.

Do not, however, ignore more serious behaviours!

- Secondly, using time out or quiet time in these situations allows your child to develop self control as well as it gives you a chance to calm down.

Time out and quiet time are done in the same way, however quiet time happens in the same room as the incident occurred and time out happens in another room.

Basic procedure for time out and quiet time is that you tell your child what behaviour is expected, back up your instruction with time out if the challenging behaviour continues, ignore misbehaviour in time out, and after time out, do not discuss the incident with the child.

A general rule is for the child to be quiet in time out for 1 minute for 2 year olds, 2 minutes for 3-5 yr olds and a maximum of 5 mins for children aged between 5 and 10 years.

But remember, the timing only starts when your child is calm.

- Another important strategy is to use a firm and calm voice together with the appropriate facial expression that sends a clear message that you are serious and you want them to comply with your request.

- Use clear instructions. Your instructions need to be clear, direct, short and simple.

Make sure you have your child's attention by using their name and bending down to their eye level before you give your instruction.

- Distracting and re-directing can also be very effective. If you know the signs that come before your child's misbehaviour, it can be possible to gain their attention before the behaviour occurs, and direct them to another activity.
- Blocking involves catching or physically stopping a dangerous behaviour that needs immediate action.

Brief interrupting involves stopping an activity when your child is being disruptive until they have been calm for a short time.

- Finally, if your child does not follow a rule or clear instruction, then choose a consequence that fits the situation.

If possible, remove the activity or toy that is the centre of the problem and logical consequences work best if they are brief, lasting for 5 to 30 minutes.

When the time is up, return the activity so your child can practice how to behave appropriately.

CLOSE

Thanks for listening. We hope you've found these strategies and ideas useful.

You can download or listen to more episodes in the ParentWise Podcast series at the Cerebral Palsy Foundation's website - www.cpfoundation.com.au