

BEHAVIOUR

Tips & tricks



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A guide on supporting appropriate behaviour and communication.

BEHAVIOUR AND COMMUNICATION



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Every behaviour is a form of communication. When a child displays behaviours that are difficult or undesirable, understanding what the child is communicating through the behaviour is the most important step in changing the behaviour.

A behaviour can have many underlying causes:

- Emotional: fear, anxiety, isolation, frustration
- Physical: metabolic, ADHD, sensory (hunger, thirst), tactile sensitivities
- Environmental: noise movement, allergies, temperature
- Responses to abuse and bullying
- Inability to ask for help
- Situation avoidance.

When children and adults can't tell us what is bothering them, it is often difficult to determine the behaviour's cause. A behaviour may have multiple causes and peeling back the onion to find the origin is not always easy.

One day, a fifth grade student with Down syndrome slapped several typical peers. The school team attempted to interpret what the behaviour was communicating by investigating what happened right before the slaps. In a water fountain incident, the peer let the student with Down syndrome go in front of him and the student received a slap. The confused team could find no apparent reason for the slapping. Luckily, an

insightful team member remembered that the slapping happened the day the student visited the middle school he would attend the next year. This was a major change after six years at the elementary school. After exploring and addressing his fears, the slapping ceased.

Sometimes, a Functional Behaviour Assessment (FBA) can determine the cause and an intervention plan can be developed to provide an alternative way of communicating. The FBA should lead to a positive behaviour intervention plan (PBIP) to help reinforce good behaviour and extinguish noncompliant or troublesome behaviour. A proper FBA includes everyone who has information about the child's problematic behaviour and includes:

- The antecedents (what happens before the behaviour)
- The behaviour, and
- The consequences (what happens after the behaviour).

For example, when the teacher asks children to get in line, one child runs up without pushing his chair in, causing other children to trip. So, the teacher's announcement is the antecedent and the child running to the area and failing to push the chair in is the behaviour. What is the consequence? It might be, that he is always first in line because he was the first one to get there. Does he want to be first in line? Or, is he sensitive to the clamour of moving children and chairs on the tile floor and trying to protect himself?

By determining the underlying reason, the FBA team can remedy the situation through a PBIP that helps develop acceptable communication skills.

23 strategies that support appropriate behaviours and communication Try them and see what works for you.

1. Prepare for expected situations

Sometimes you are aware of upcoming situations and can help prepare your child in advance. If you anticipate a stressful situation, talk about feelings and emotions using pictures and discuss what each emotion feels like, when it might happen, calming strategies, and appropriate expression. For specific situations, practice how to behave by using scripts, social stories, or video modelling. If a setting has been traumatic or confusing in the past, it may help to write a combination of script and social story to prepare for the future.

2. Develop skills for telling what happened

Just as with other children, it is unlikely that your child will want to tell you about situations and events that occur at school, camp, community activities or jobs. Help your child learn how to retell a story. Provide visual cues, pictures or written cues and practice telling what happened.

Start with this simple format and ask:

- Who was there?
- When did it happen?
- What happened?
- Where did it happen?

After the child masters who, what, where and when, another form supports the child in adding more details as he is retelling the story:

- First
- Then
- Then
- Last

3. Create an agenda

Whenever possible, communicate the planned activities for the day, week, or month depending on the child's age and understanding of concepts.

4. Being able to transition

Being able to transition and deviate from routines when necessary are important school and home skills.



Communicate changes and transitions ahead of time. For younger children, use pictures.

5. Give choices

Always help people feel they have control. Try to use real choices. Don't use threats disguised as choices "You can either wash your hands or go to bed".

6. Try the 'Spin and Speak' technique

If the child is in 'debate' mode or talking on and on to avoid an activity, state simply what needs to be done, turn your back and walk away. Once clear instructions have been given, end the conversation.

7. Investigate a reaction

hunger, thirst or sensory issues such as a scratchy sweater, can manifest into bad behaviour. Consider this possibility and address your child's state to preemptively stop bad behaviour.

Every behaviour is a form of communication. The cornerstone to effectively changing behaviour is understanding why a child behaves that way.



8. Heap praise

Positive words go a long way. Every chance you get, catch children doing something right. Try giving two positive comments for every negative one. Use specific and real praise, e.g. “Amy, it was very polite of you to introduce your new friend to our class. Thank you.”

9. Ask for help

Your child can learn that everybody needs help sometimes and it’s ok to ask. Specifically point out when, how and who to ask for help. Let her see you and other family members seeking and accepting help in many situations. Thank others enthusiastically for their help. Work on scripts that your child can use to ask for help, such as “Excuse me” and “Could you help me?” Children must know they will not be penalised or ridiculed or they will avoid asking for help.

Use social stories to specifically teach your child how to handle difficult situations. For example, if he will need help applying bug spray on a camping trip, write a social story about what will happen at the campsite, including what to say to get the help he needs.

10. Ask for clarification and make repairs

Children need to ask for clarification when they don’t understand what to do. They are more likely to ask at home than at school or in the community. They also need to be able to explain more fully (making repairs) when someone does not understand them.

11. Follow rules and routines

When a child does not follow the rules, behaviour cooperation is usually blamed. Consider other possible underlying causes, such as hearing loss, sensory processing disorder or auditory memory and receptive language problems.

12. Promote generosity

Children and adults with disabilities often receive help; however, nothing is more rewarding than being able to give to others. Ensure opportunities for responsibility and giving back to the community.



13. Empower leadership

Provide leadership opportunities, e.g. running a family meeting, making the family meeting agenda, planning a meal, making morning announcements at school, serving on the student council, etc.

14. Discourage imitating inappropriate behaviour

Children with Down syndrome often model typical peers -both appropriately and inappropriately. They get into trouble by repeating “bad” words or staying put when everyone else runs away. To help children learn appropriate behaviour for a situation, use video modelling or selfmodelling.

15. Set boundaries and consequences

Be a person of your word. Set boundaries and consequences ahead of time and stick to them.

16. Offer breaks

Give natural breaks when working on difficult or stressful tasks. At school, walking to the rest room or water fountain, returning media books or taking notes to the front office are natural breaks.

17. Give simple, clear instructions

Keep instructions short. Where possible, wait until the child responds to the instruction before you go on to the next instruction. Don't give a long list of instructions verbally. If possible, provide a check list or written instructions for children and adults who can read.

18. Try diversion

Redirect the child or adult to a different activity if possible.

19. Use humour

Almost everyone responds to humour.

20. Provide information on consequences (positive/negative)

Use “if/when” strategies, e.g., “When you finish this activity, you can use the computer”.

21. Work with strengths whenever possible

Acknowledge efforts to use appropriate behaviour, even with limited success.

22. Match the consequence to the behaviour

Consequences or punishment should relate to and reduce the behaviour. For a student who writes graffiti on the walls, washing the walls would be appropriate. Writing a paper on proper school behaviour would not be.

23. It is essential to communicate between home and school

Parents, teachers and community activity leaders can all reinforce and practice the same behaviours when they communicate and are on the same page.

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Want to know more?

The NZ Down Syndrome website can provide more information and link you to many more articles and organisations.

www.nzdsa.org.nz



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