

## Dealing with difficult behaviour and emotions

### Playing together

When a parent plays an uninterrupted, fun game with their child (even for 10-15 minutes a day), the child receives lots of positive attention. The child will naturally crave this attention and want more of it. This can be one of the very first steps in dealing with difficult behaviour.

### Changing behaviours

The belief is that you cannot extinguish a behaviour unless you can replace it with a new one

- A child who communicates their frustration by kicking, biting or hitting has to learn to communicate their frustrations in other ways, such as using words, before the kicking and biting will go away
- Often people try to put in a strategy to lose the undesirable behaviour, but the child has not yet learnt to use a different way to communicate how they are feeling
  - They might stop kicking, but they might start biting instead
- Better to teach children to use new strategies and the old ones will naturally go away
  - This is where emotion coaching can be useful

### Emotion Coaching

Emotions experienced by children on a day-to-day basis

Happy / sad / angry / frustrated / excited / lonely / annoyed / anxiety / worry / upset / jealous / relief / guilt / disgust

Children cycle through these emotions extremely quickly

#### Emotion coaching

- Helps children to understand it is okay to have these emotions and teaching them to regulate them in a safe way (but not squash them)

Example:

A child bounds out of school, runs across the playground smiling and tells their parent they have been picked for the football team

- Child is feeling - happiness / excitement / elation / pride
- Parents says, "You are feeling really excited and proud because you have been picked for the football team"
- This will make the excitement go up (drawn attention to the emotion)

Example:

A child marches into the room and shouts that it is not fair; my brother has trashed my bedroom again

- Child is feeling anger / sadness / disappointment / frustrated
- Parent says, "You are looking really upset because your brother has trashed your room"
- This might make the upset go up (drawn attention to the emotion)

We do not want to make the distress bigger, so with a negative emotion we have to also name the coping strategy that goes with it

- "You are looking really upset because your brother has trashed your room and it is really good that you came to talk to me about it"

This will teach the child that talking about something that makes them have a negative emotion is the best thing to do

With a negative emotion, you can only coach in the moment that the child has self-regulated / calmed them self down

- Emotion coaching cannot be used as a strategy if the child has already hit someone or trashed a room

Can also use persistence coaching alongside this

- You look like you are really frustrated and you are staying calm

Examples of when emotion coaching can be used:

- A child gets something wrong in their work
  - You are disappointed because you got something wrong and you have done well to ask for help
  - The child might rip up their work 9 times out of 10, but you do not comment on those
  - Try to step in whilst the child is trying to manage the difficult emotion, before they have had a complete meltdown - label the emotion and the coping strategy
- A child is hurt by another child while playing a game
  - You are frustrated and angry because another child hurt you and you have done really well to come and tell me about it
  - You are frustrated and angry and you have stayed calm
- A child is asked to stop playing and pack away, but they do not want to
  - You are frustrated because you want to finish playing and you are using your words to tell me
  - You are really upset because you do not want that activity/game to finish and you are keeping your body calm
- A child is trying to play with some children but they will not let him join in
  - You are really upset because your friends won't let you play and you have been really brave to come to talk to me about it

- A child wants some really expensive trainers but you cannot afford them
  - You are really frustrated and disappointed that you can't have those trainers and you are being really understanding to why you can't have them because we can't afford them
- A child is very upset because they do not want to go to school
  - You are worried about going into school and you are being really brave thinking about going in and seeing your friends
  - Give the child time to process this
  - Then maybe ask is there anything I can do to help

Adults often squash a child's negative emotions because they do not like to see the child struggling. Adults need to acknowledge the negative emotion and equip the child with the skills to cope with this emotion themselves.

### Problem Solving

Do not try to fix the situation for/with children at the time they are feeling a negative emotion

- Leave that for another time when they are feeling better

Trying to make children say sorry whilst they are still feeling frustrated will not work

- As an adult, most people say sorry once they have calmed down and had a chance to reflect on what happened

Take time to reflect and problem solve with the child once they have calmed down

- This will be a more meaningful conversation
- People struggle to process things when they are highly aroused

Parents more often tell their children when they have upset them or disappointed them, but do not often tell a child when they have made them happy

Think about the positive opposite of the behaviour

- What is the problem behaviour here?
- What is the opposite of that behaviour?
- We want to increase the frequency of the opposite behaviour
  - A child is kind to their friend
  - You have been really kind to your friend and you have made them happy
  - The child starts to make the connection of what they have done and the other child being happy
- Labelling the negative
  - You have taken the toy from your friend and now they feel sad
  - This can help the child to come back and make the repair

There is no quick fix and there may be times when you feel this will never work, but persevere. It'll be worth it.