

Behaviour Management Techniques

These techniques can be used to stop situations escalating into a crisis.

Managing the environment.

Orderly home; activities planned for; having adult space away from toys etc; noise levels appropriate; privacy where conversations can take place; how adults position and conduct themselves.

Prompting

A signal to the child to begin the desired behaviour or to stop undesirable behaviour. These can be verbal or non verbal. Tone of voice should be firm but NOT over loud or a shout- assertive but not aggressive. Questions can work well- "what did we decide about bedtime?"

Non verbal prompts such as a facial expression, eye contact, a hand gesture, point to the clock, or checklists, timetables or star charts on the wall. It is useful to pay attention to a child's "warning signals" eg, groans, kicking things, shouting etc.

Caring gesture

Affection helps to increase children's self esteem and the ability to look past the child's behaviour to determine the child's needs is an important skill for parents. A light touch on the shoulder or a hug at the key moment may help the child to feel secure and calm. For children who don't like to be touched, eye contact with a smile or a caring comment may help. Alternatively, try asking them to join you and share what you are doing. Show them that you enjoy their company.

Hurdle help.

If a task seems overwhelming for a child, they may lose their temper or flounce off. Giving a little help to get them going will calm them down and increase their confidence. Give plenty of praise.

Redirection

Divert the child's attention away from undesirable or stress inducing activities to do something more productive or desirable. Questions and requests can work well. With younger children distraction may need to be more direct.

Proximity

A child can sometimes be prevented from losing control by the adult simply moving to be nearby. This can be enough to remind the child of appropriate behaviour or encourage him/her to stay in control. If the adult places her/himself between the child and the trigger to anger, an explosion can be prevented. This does require personal knowledge of what makes the child tick. Sometimes a physical touch (eg on the shoulder) can be calming for some children, but others may find this intrusive.

Positive attention

For some children negative attention is better than no attention. They get into the habit of provoking adult attention with bad behaviour. The adult's angry response gives them the reward they are seeking and perpetuates the behaviour. The adult needs to be able to recognise this and, provided

the behaviour is not dangerous to anyone, ignore it. This means not speaking to the child, not having eye contact or looking at their face (but remain vigilant), having a neutral expression and not touching the child. It is then crucial to reward positive behaviour, which may not have been fully noticed before. This can be done with praise, encouragement and other forms of warm attention.

Directive Statement

When a child is stressed out or out of control they need clear, calm, simple instruction. A directive statement tells the child specifically what is required and could be a request, a statement of rules or a demand. It needs to be spoken in a calm, level voice, not shouted. It also needs to be phrased in positive terms, ie, "Talk in a quiet voice." not "don't shout." It is an assertive statement, not the start of a conversation.

Time Away

This involves sending or taking the child to a quiet space on their own so that they can calm down. With young children, a designated "naughty spot" is useful. They should be left for only 3 to 5 mins. If they won't stay put they should be continually returned until they accept the situation. After the time they should be calmly reintegrated into the family with no further reference to the previous bad behaviour.