

Behaviour as Communication: Aggressive Children

Most little children are not particularly violent or aggressive

Those children that are violent or display violent behaviour may be doing so due to other reasons. These may include:

- Inability to communicate verbally
- Hearing or other processing difficulty
- Lack of understanding of the presenting issue
- Developmental delay
- Fear
- Uncertainty of what is happening
- Physical or intellectual disability

The point is that we need to take notice of the **context** for the aggression or aggressive behaviour.

We do this by asking ourselves some observational questions such as:

- Is there something else going on in the child's life?
- Has something changed in the child's life recently?
- What Family issues may the child be experiencing – break up, new baby arriving, any unsettling or new thing in the child's life?
- Is the child feeling scared or threatened?

- How is this behaviour received at home?

Aggression may also be a learned behaviour

Where the child comes from a family where aggression or violence has some currency – ie, that it is a legitimised form of communication within that household, the child will bring it into the centre. This needs to be dealt with differently again because there are issues external to the centre that need to be taken account of.

This is a type of cultural clash. Not cultural in the broadest sense of the term such a different cultural backgrounds etc. but a narrower sense such as family relational culture – how the family communicates generally and at specific times such as when arguing – some families will argue aggressively while others are less aggressive. This will be picked up on by the child and they may see that it is a successful way to engage in an argument.

This needs to be taken into account because you will have difficulty in changing or modifying the behaviour.

If we do not contextualise their behaviour, the child may become confused, we may set that the child up by telling the child that the behaviour is unacceptable because they will now that they can engage in the behaviour elsewhere, and so it is not a completely true statement to say it is unacceptable.

Try telling the child that the behaviour is unacceptable **HERE**. This contextualises the behaviour and begins the process of the child managing their own behaviour in different settings, rather than having their behaviour managed for them. This is called Behaviour Support.

When do we Manage Behaviours with Positive Behaviour Support?

While inappropriate behaviours are likely to escalate, and consequences can be useful, it is often a question of *timing* around when we use behaviour management techniques. Because it is less effective to wait until the child is playing up to implement a behaviour management technique behaviour management is a process that needs to occur all the time and in a variety of ways.

If we start to manage inappropriate behaviours **before** they occur, we have a process of Positive Behaviour Support.

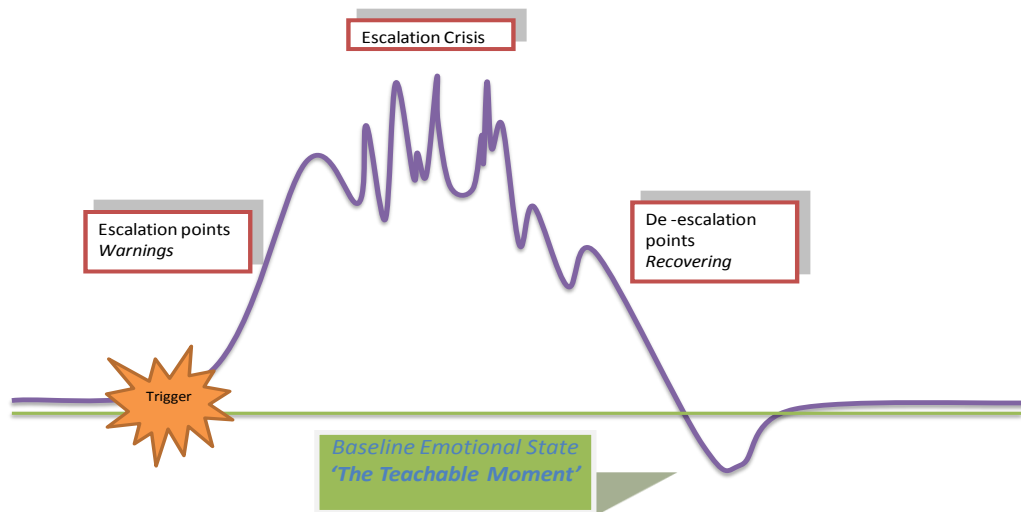
The reason we should start to think about an approach that takes into account a Positive Behaviour Support framework is that *behaviour* is occurring all the time.

We can't tell a child, to *behave* because they are already *behaving* in some way or another – Usually when we tell a child to behave – it is because they're not behaving the way we want them to. Either way, children will always behave in different ways at different times. What changes is the location or context for the behaviour and children don't always know or remember how to act, but they are always behaving in one way or another.

Because you are an adult, you developed some skills that will enable you to deal with most of the situations you run into. Remember, children are beginners. They don't have much experience.

Remember... most situations children face are new and they need to learn how to cope within these new situations.

Crisis Cycle



Remember:

Positive Behaviour Support and Behaviour Management Strategies

There are as many strategies for dealing with and managing problematic, negative or inappropriate behaviours as there are people trying to manage these behaviours. The problem is that not all of these will be effective in the context of the young person and their behaviour.

The trick is to have as many options available to you as you can.

Behaviour management;

- Can sort out an issue quickly and attach a consequence, but it can inhibit space for learning about what is going on for the child.
- Can be used to give the child choices about their behaviour and consequences for inappropriate behaviour, but it can make the adult responsible

for managing the child's behaviour.

- Can restore order and routine quickly but can be limiting and inflexible.

Positive Behaviour Support

- Can teach children that their feeling and emotions about an incident can help them understand their behaviours, but it can take some time for

children to learn this in some situations.

- Can give children the opportunity to learn when and where behaviours are appropriate and not so appropriate, but this learning usually needs to occur before

the behaviours start and may not address the behaviours immediately.

- Can teach children to be aware of and considerate of others, but again, may not work in the moment the child is behaving inappropriately.

Developing a concept of Interactional Dynamics ***(Anglin, 2002)***

1. Listening and responding with respect

Helps young people develop...
a sense of dignity, being valued and self worth

2. Communicating a framework for understanding

Helps young people develop...
a sense of meaning and rationality in their daily life

3. Building support and relationships

Helps young people develop...
a sense of belonging and connectedness with others

4. Establishing structure routine and expectations

Helps young people develop...
a sense of order, predictability, trust and reliability in others

5. Inspiring commitment

Helps young people develop...
a sense of value, loyalty and continuity.

6. Offering emotional development and support

Helps young people develop...
a sense of caring and mastery

7. Challenging thinking and action

Helps young people develop...
potential and capacity

8. Sharing power and decision making

Helps young people develop...
a sense of personal power and discernment

9. Respecting personal space and time

Helps young people develop...
a sense of independence

10. Discovering and uncovering potential

Helps young people develop...
hope and seek opportunity

11. Providing resources

Helps young people develop...
a sense of gratitude and generosity

And don't forget...

- Children with disrupted attachments DON'T respond easily to adults
- It is less about attention seeking behaviour, as it is about attention AVOIDING behavior
- PLAN how to respond to the child BEFORE there is an issue
- PLAN how to respond to the child based on your OBSERVATIONS of their PAST behaviour
- Children are often trying to communicate a level of anxiety in their outburst behaviours
- Try not to communicate complex messages to an escalated child
- The more escalated, the direct and simple the messages
- Seek opportunities to TEACH rather than punish
- Talk together and plan together, a team of people is better than single approaches
- ALWAYS follow up the behavior
- Wait until they are calm and at their BASE LINE EMOTIONAL STATE
- Escalated children communicate this way because:
 - It works
 - It is quicker and often easier at the time
 - It requires less cognitive functioning

