

Conference Paper for ECA Conference – October 08

Title: Developing Individualised Behaviour Plans that promote a child's social and emotional development and protect the safety and well being of all children and adults in Early Childhood settings.

Presenters: Elizabeth Fulton and Pam Macrossan

Main Contact Author Elizabeth Fulton
Paper Number 111

DRAFT Session details Concurrent Session 10
6 October 2008
1200 to 1250

Stream Social and Emotional Wellbeing
Presentation Type Interactive Workshop

When a child appears to need your support, there is usually some aspect of the child's behaviour that alerts you and brings it to your attention. The behaviour can range from trying out new skills in an inappropriate place, using ineffective means to enter a play situation, to hurting a peer or carer. The behaviour could be a one-off incident or an established pattern of interacting.

When difficult behaviour becomes an established pattern of interacting, we usually talk about it in terms of *Challenging Behaviour*. This can be defined as behaviour that is of such intensity, frequency or duration that the physical safety and well being of the child or those nearby is put at risk. Such behaviour may also limit the child's ability to participate in daily life and enjoy wider experiences in the program.

(NSW DoCS SCAN Guidelines for Challenging Behaviour, 2003.p.16)

This is behaviour that interferes with a child's participation in any situation. For example, when a child loses his/her temper frequently, destroys things with rage and seems unable to control themselves, their behaviour would be initially described as challenging. The form that challenging behaviours take will vary and may be determined by underlying causes, their environment or current circumstances.

The impact of challenging behaviour upon the early childhood setting is both diverse and complex. Predominantly the child's actions may:

- interfere with their own learning and development,
- interfere with the adults ability to work with all children,
- inhibit other child's opportunities to learn,
- compromise the child's safety and the safety of other children and staff, and
- make the adult feel threatened.

Regardless of the impact, the centre community must seek to understand this behaviour and guide the child in a positive manner. It will be easier to interpret and respond to a child if there is an understanding that behaviour may be prompted by particular risk factors, and not by a "desire to ruin your day" (Kaiser and Rasminsky, 2003,p.22).

It is acknowledged however, that children with challenging behaviour do have additional needs to be met in the early childhood setting. It is much easier to meet

those needs and respond effectively, if the behaviour and underlying causes are understood before action is taken.

Why we must take action:

For the child - Children with persistent challenging behaviour can miss out on opportunities for learning because they may be rejected by their peers, or their difficult behaviour is so frequent or intense that it affects their participation in the program. If, at this early age, a child exhibits inappropriate social behaviours and play skills, they may miss out on many experiences that would otherwise allow them to practise and master social development.

Challenging behaviours indicate a child is struggling and is attempting to resolve their own emotional difficulties. If these attempts remain misunderstood or unchecked by the adults in their world, they can create further problems and perpetuate challenging behaviour.

For the group of children - The safety and emotional wellbeing of all children and staff is vital in the early childhood setting. Children with challenging behaviours may inevitably have an impact upon the emotional and physical wellbeing of children and staff.

Porter (2003) talks of the risk to surrounding children, of those with challenging behaviours. She insists that children must not be victimised and that the needs of children who have been affected by an emotional or physical outburst, must not be marginalised. Accordingly family members must be kept informed of situations that may have occurred. Discretion must be exercised in talking with parents, and staff must act in a confidential manner, within the ethical codes of the early childhood profession.

A child's challenging behaviour cannot be ignored. Instead it must be given careful consideration and a proactive response within the context of the the early childhood setting and the family home. We must be comprehensive in our consideration of a child's behaviour showing an understanding of their background, temperament, development and other setting conditions.

All children, staff and families of the centre have the right to an emotionally and physically safe environment and this goal must be constantly pursued by staff and management. Where that safety has been compromised, a Director must take action confidentially to guide and support the situation, while responding to all parties who are involved.

It is essential for the early childhood professional to take responsibility for understanding and guiding the behaviour. If a child's behaviour remains challenging, additional efforts must be made. This involves a thoughtful and considered approach to developing individualised plans.

The approach used by KU Children's Services is the **Individualised Behaviour Plan (IBP)**. The **IBP** will only be initiated in consultation with the Child's Family, Carer, Director and other relevant professionals. It is a thoroughly considered and planned approach that follows a cycle constantly under review.

The cycle includes:

1. Observing, Gathering and Recording Information
2. Analysing and Interpreting that Information

3. Responding Consistently with a Planned and Documented Approach
4. Implementing and Reviewing.

Explanation of each stage and guide to completing the IBP:

Gathering Information

The first step in the process of managing challenging behaviour is to **observe** and **analyse** and then to **plan** for preventing that behaviour and/or responding to that behaviour if prevention fails. To learn the exact nature and relevance of the child's behaviour, staff need to:

- build a supportive and responsive relationship with the child,
- observe the child carefully to identify why the behaviour might be occurring, and
- document the situations in which the behaviour is occurring.

There are a number of useful observation tools for recording these facts. Some examples are the Behaviour Frequency Chart; Scatter Plots and Assessing Behaviours Chart (ABC). Other forms of observation include anecdotal observations, discussion with team members and families and enrolment forms. Observations are not limited to these tools and your service may have other approaches in place. It is essential that individual staff members use approaches that have been discussed and agreed upon with the Director and within the staff team.

The process of documentation must never compromise the care and safety of the child. The management of a child's behaviour must take precedence over recording the child's behaviour.

The child's behaviour will be easier to interpret if there is a meaningful relationship between the adult and the child, if there is a professional knowledge base, and if time is taken to reflect upon and analyse the child's behaviour, the context for that behaviour and how you are responding to the child.

" Finding deeper meaning in children's behaviour requires that the professional truly attends: is reflective, takes time to think about the child's perspective, looks and listens for what is really happening, and resists obvious or superficial explanations and quick judgements." (NSW Department of Community Services, 2002, p.22)

Additionally, when making observations for the purposes of developing a child's IBP, it is also helpful to categorise and refine our observations to those which will be most useful in guiding our response. For example, if we take the time to really look at:

- where the child is at their best – ie. where are they most settled and engaged;
- what calms the child most effectively and immediately;
- what the child's earliest warning signs of anxiety are (Kaiser and Rasminsky, 2003, p.177);
- which adult the child prefers to be with; and
- which children the child is seeking out to play with.

These observations can be recorded on a Format developed by KU and called the **Staff Observation Format to Assist in the Development of an IBP**.(see Appendix 1)

By using this particular format, we can build a profile of the child that is based on their strengths, rather than simply their difficult behaviour. From a strength's based profile, we can build a more effective working partnership with the child that will

create more opportunities for the child to succeed. A child experiencing success will have less need to 'act out' or behave in a challenging way. That is, by focusing our work with the child on what they **can** do, rather than what they **can't** do, should prevent the challenging behaviours from occurring in the first place.

In support of this premise, Kaiser and Rasminsky (2003) claim that "any child, even a child whose prone to challenging behaviour, can be in a competent state. And any child can drop out of this state at any time. Anxiety is a kind of early warning system that something is amiss." (p.174) Hence looking for those early signs of anxiety is one of the most important observations we can make, as it is here that our intervention can begin, because "no matter which state they're in, children need support and guidance to return to the competent state." (Kaiser and Rasminsky, p.175) Our observation of "where the child is at their best" provides us with knowledge of their most competent state and hence is another vital observation to inform our planning.

In addition to this, Martin (2002, p2) recommends collecting information about the 'whole' child. The following elements help to construct a full picture of the child within his/her family context as well as the context of your early childhood setting, and thereby form the framework for developing an **Individualised Behaviour Plan**. (see appendix 2)

Background Information

This will include information about:

- the environments where the child lives and plays,
- the lifestyle activities and people in the child's life,
- history and current situation of the child – including health and medication,
- living situation, diagnosis, referrals in place,
- the behaviours that have led to developing an IBP,
- interactions with people in a variety of settings and
- child's experiences in the group setting.

Observations and Concerns

A summary of **observations** needs to be recorded in a clear and organised list that is easy for others to follow. If using the *Observation Chart to Assist Staff in Developing and IBP*, observations can be recorded in bullet form directly from the chart to this section of the IBP. The use of these observations is again, to demonstrate the strength's based nature of your approach. This is also an effective tool for developing a more collaborative partnership with the child's parents. They will be able to see the thoughtfulness and interest that has been shown in their child's abilities, rather than just his/her difficult behaviours. And as Kaiser and Rasminsky (2003) point out – "connecting with a family is important with any child, but it's especially important where challenging behaviour is concerned... Families know their child best and their insight and collaboration can be invaluable." (p.213)

Concerns need to be listed under the **Observations**, again in a clear and organised manner which identifies each of the specific behaviours that are of concern to you and the family. If the child is hitting, biting and destroying equipment, then this needs to be listed under Concerns.

Analysis and Interpretation

The next step is to analyse and interpret the child's behaviour. Sometimes the situation will be resolved as a result of carrying out in depth observations. Staff may immediately see a cause for the behaviour and have an easy and effective solution. It is more likely the behaviour will need further interpretation through analysis and discussion of the observations.

It is vital to have as many perspectives as you can when taking this step. It should be a team approach with parents and other relevant professionals involved. Take time to reflect on these as a team before moving to the next step in the process of developing your IBP.

Planned Approach

After the social and physical environments of your early childhood setting have been evaluated and modified to suit the needs of this child, your planned approach will cover **prevention** and **intervention** strategies. It will inform staff as to how they should respond immediately in a consistent and carefully considered manner. These strategies will link directly to the observations you have recorded for this child.

The aim here is to plan specifically for the challenging behaviour. It is essential that adults consider themselves central to helping children regulate and manage their own behaviour.

Preventative Strategies

Any behaviour plan must begin with preventative strategies that aim to avert the challenging behaviour before it occurs.

The following three approaches contribute towards a preventative approach:

1. The Preventative Checklist
2. Planning to minimise stress
3. Planning to respond immediately to early warning signs.

These are as follows:

1. Prevention Checklist

Does the staff team of your centre –

- provide a social environment that is responsive and nurturing, created to promote positive behaviour?
- establish a physical environment that is rich and engaging, organised and structured to promote positive behaviour?
- provide an environment that is safe and free of hazards?
- interpret and respond effectively to all children's needs?
- ensure a secure attachment for each child with a primary care-giver?
- provide a program that focuses on teaching and modelling social skills and socially appropriate behaviours?
- give children opportunities to make choices, decisions and solve problems?
- encourage children to explore with confidence and independence so they can construct their own learning opportunities?
- offer reasonable opportunities to take responsibility?
- give opportunities to engage in experiences that are based on children's strengths and interests?
- encourage families to participate and make use of centre support?

There are other universal prevention strategies that staff may find useful in developing their plan such as:

- maintaining a predictable daily plan that respectfully and visually alerts children to changes in routine,
- giving children step-by-step directions, both verbally and visually when guiding them through routines,
- limiting the number of choices for children who become easily overwhelmed,
- developing skills in managing smooth and gradual transitions throughout the day,
- teaching children social skills at every opportunity and teaching and modelling self regulation,
- avoiding power struggles, overreacting, raising voices and issuing ultimatims,
- focusing on children's strengths – looking for positive behaviour to comment on in an authentic manner and
learning to identify when you are becoming overwhelmed so that you can ask for support.

2. Planning to minimise stress

It is important to acknowledge that children may become stressed throughout the day and this may lead to behaviours that are more challenging.

These situations include:

- separating from their family at the beginning of the day,
- re-uniting with their family at the end of the day,
- needing comfort and not knowing who to turn to,
- transitions in the day, such as moving from indoors to outdoors, changing staff and packing away,
- lunch time,
- group time,
- following directions,
- coping with a noisy, busy group,
- navigating a room that is always changing,
- being excluded from play by peers.

These situations may affect any child. Children can be rushed, given no warning, or taken away from a situation that they are fully engaged in. These actions may be felt more by children who are already anxious, experiencing emotional difficulties or who have a disability or delay. It is essential staff consider the situation from a child's point of view and take time to minimise the stress.

3. Planning to respond to warning signs

Even to the most experienced staff, it can sometimes seem as if a child's behaviour comes 'out of nowhere'. However according to Butchard and Spencer, children nearly always present early warning signs. If adults are able to identify these early warning signs and intervene early enough, it is more likely that the behaviour will not escalate and become difficult or challenging (in Kaiser and Resminsky,2003)

According to Kaiser and Rasminsky (2003,p.174), each child has his/her own characteristic physiological and behavioural signs that can help you to comprehend their state of mind. These are sometimes termed the 'tell tale signs' and an adult can prevent a child's behaviour from becoming challenging by intervening in its earliest stage – anxiety. Without this intervention, anxiety can lead to agitation, then to aggression and even abusive behaviour – especially if the adult's response is inappropriate or delayed. How the adult responds to this child can accelerate or decelerate the behaviour.

A child trying to function in an anxious or agitated state, may not be able to articulate his/her feelings, particularly if the child has speech and language difficulties or a communication disorder. Neither will they be able to listen to a message or learn from your teaching, until you have calmed the child and helped them to regulate their emotions. Not until this has been effected can your teaching begin. Therefore, your knowledge of how the child can be calmed would be an essential element of your prevention strategies as, well as an element of your intervention strategies, as it can both prevent the behaviour from escalating, as well as guiding your intervention if the behaviour has already escalated. Your response needs to show the child that you are emotionally available – that is, someone they can turn to when things get difficult.

Having considered all the elements of prevention, it is necessary to list the preventative strategies in place for the child. Where appropriate, note the sequence of events to occur and the role of each staff member.

Intervention Strategies

When you have been unable to prevent a child's behaviour from occurring, it will be necessary to intervene at the earliest possible time. This is why your observations of the child early warning signs, how to calm them and where they are at their best are so important. As soon as these have been identified by an adult, intervention must occur immediately.

The intervention that takes place can vary according to the child and the level of behaviour. For example, a simple teaching response such as the 'interrupt' which redirects the child's interest; or the 'options statement' which gives the child choices and the opportunity to take some responsibility, may suffice to diffuse the behaviour while also teaching the child about your expectations of their behaviour.

Other simple techniques can include coming in close to the child so that they know you are there to help; offering the child time away from the group with you to support them; or simply giving the child physical comfort such as a cuddle. Porter (2003,p.97) recommends staying with children and showing them the adult is willing to help them to calm down. Moving children into physical contact, again has the intention of helping children achieve a level of self control.

However, if you can predict that the child's behaviour will escalate quickly and may even become out of control, you will need to base your intervention strategies on the above three observations. At these times, the child will be stressed and not thinking clearly or listening well. They might say and do things they do not mean. Therefore it is not the time to teach new behaviours. A planned response that is aimed at calming the child and bringing them back to a 'competent state' (Kaiser and Rasminsky, 2003.p.174) will help the child to slow down, think about what is happening and learn how to self regulate. Therefore, you will need to respond immediately to the early warning signs by calming the child down first. Then you can guide them to where they are at their best – because this is where they can remain settled and engaged. Once this has been achieved, the child can be more receptive to learning from your teaching and from your reminders of the expectations you all have of their behaviour. Following this you would help them to return to play with a new option – a better way of doing things next time.

It is important to remember that your tone of voice, facial expression and body language are critical in any response. These elements need to be just as calming and empowering as the words you use. If your message is communicated clearly and simply, it will support the child in a positive way, guiding them to follow through. "I"

messages are assertive and therefore usually more effective. They are also a good way of role modelling empowerment to the child.

Write in clear and simple form the intervention strategies you would like in place for the child, noting a sequence of events or options where appropriate. Also note the role of each staff member in the intervention process.

The final step in the development of your IBP is to implement it in a consistent and repetitive manner, continually followed by ongoing review.

Implementation and Review

Implementation of an approach, must be made as a team effort – preferably as an entire service community. This will be aided by good communication and a thorough understanding of the strategies used.

The whole team will feel ownership of the plan and thereby be more committed to its implementation, if they have:

- all participated in the observations stage;
- embraced the philosophy of understanding the child's behaviour and guiding the child to learn new ways of behaving;
- developed the prevention and intervention strategies collaboratively;
- accessed any training they may require to build their capacity in working with children with challenging behaviours;
- confidence about implementing the IBP;
- willingness to monitor and review the IBP continually, and return to the observation stage if necessary and
- support throughout the entire process of developing, implementing and reviewing the IBP.

The essential process of **review** ensures that progress is monitored and adjustments are made to the IBP where necessary.

When reviewing the IBP, it is important to conduct the same series of observations to accurately measure change in the child's behaviour. Once observations have been completed, the team involved should discuss:

- What has been observed?
- Has the frequency of behaviour changed?
- Has the plan contributed to a change in behaviour?
- Have the family and other professionals been involved in this stage and how?
- Does the plan need to be changed?

It may follow that the IBP needs to be rewritten which will mean that everyone involved needs to go right back to the observation stage because if the observations are not accurate, the IBP cannot work. Likewise, if all adults are not following the plan at every opportunity throughout the day, it cannot work. This can be very disheartening, but can also be a wonderful learning opportunity and team building experience for the adults involved. However it is perceived, it is necessary.

When staff are dealing with behaviour that they find challenging, they often say they feel frustrated, stressed, overwhelmed and even disrespected and inadequate. When people feel like this, it is difficult to think clearly and respond effectively to the children in their care. They do need support and strategies to enable them to maintain their role as a stable and responsive adult to the children and staff of their service.

Young children are very sensitive to the significant adults in their lives and build their self-understanding upon the interactions they have with their parents, teachers and carers. When these attachment figures have a deeper understanding of the children in their care, they can offer a foundation of emotional well being and security that enables children to thrive. (Siegel & Hartzell, 2004, p.80)

The most wonderful part of working with a child with challenging behaviour is how our knowledge and empathy can be broadened and strengthened. A child with challenging behaviour can force us to reflect on our practice, make the necessary adjustments and improvements to our environments and programs, and focus greater attention on the quality of our interactions and relationships. Through this process, they can build our capacity to be the type of adult every child needs. And without them, we may well be quite ordinary.

Reference List

Fox, L., Dunlap, G., Hemmeter, M.L., Joseph, G.E., Strain, P.S. (2003, July) *The Teaching Pyramid: A model for supporting social competence and preventing challenging behaviour in young children*, 48-52.

Harrison, L., (2003) *Attachment research in Practice Series* Volume 10 No.2.

Kaiser, B., & Rasminsky, J.S. (2003) *Challenging behaviour in young children*, Pearson.

Kaiser, B., & Rasminsky, J.S. (2004) *Including Children with challenging behaviour in your child care community*, Beginnings Workshop, Child Care Information Exchange Washington, DC: NAEYC

Martin, M. (2002) *Managing challenging behaviour in Department of Community Services* (2003) *Managing Challenging behaviours* Special Needs Working Group, NSW Department of Community Services.

NSW Department of Community Services (2002) *NSW Curriculum Framework for Children's Services. The practice of relationships, Essential provisions for children's services*, Office of Child Care DoCS

Porter, L. (2003) *Young children's behaviour practical approaches for caregivers and teachers*. MacLennan & Petty

Rasminsky, J. (2004) *Meeting the challenges*, (2nd Edition) NAEYC

Siegel, d., & Hartzell, M. (2004) *Parenting from the inside out: How a deeper self-understanding can help you raise a child who thrives*. New York: Penguin