



Managing behaviours of young children

By Dr. Roselyn M. Dixon, Lecturer in Special Education, Faculty of Education, University of Wollongong

Young children with disabilities may present challenging behaviours at home and in pre-school settings for any number of reasons.

Some lack communication skills needed to express themselves. Others have not experienced group settings before and are used to having their needs met immediately. Some children respond to crowded settings with aggression or withdrawal.

Health factors such as illness and chronic conditions and hunger and sleepiness can also contribute to behavioural difficulties. Caregivers must deal with these problem behaviours in young children.

Why is it important to deal with challenging behaviours?

Caregivers are in a unique position to assist young children in learning appropriate social behaviours and in controlling aggression and other anti-social behaviour.

If serious behaviour problems are not addressed early, long-lasting conduct problems may result. According to Walker (2002), "children do not grow out of behaviour problems – they grow into them".

We know that appropriate social behaviours are associated with better performance at school, teachers feeling more positive about children and less rejection from normally developing children (peers).

Positive peer relationships are seen as so important that Guralnick (1999) feels that peer-related social competence should be the goal of early childhood intervention programs.

What social skills are valued in young children?

These may vary but most parents, teachers and caregivers list the following:

- empathy-recognition of the feelings of others,
- being able to work in groups,
- delayed gratification for example waiting in lines,
- turn-taking,
- being able to give and respond to a greeting, and
- accepting other's decisions and suggestions.

What can be done to help children, teachers and parents?

There are many strategies that can be used by teachers, parents and caregivers if children are exhibiting challenging behaviours.

1) Peer-mediated interventions

This technique is used in pre-school settings where a socially competent peer implements the intervention. The teacher provides instructions to the socially competent child, prompts them to go and, for example, share a toy with the child and then reinforces the socially competent child for doing this.

2) Introduce the problem solving approach

Teaching children how to go about solving their own problems instead of telling them what they need to do helps children learn to manage themselves (Hune and Nelson, 2002). One system for problem solving involves the following steps:

- stop,
- look,
- think, and
- act.

Learning Links is a non-profit charity assisting children who have difficulty learning and their families.

We raise funds to help children from birth to 18 years by offering a range of services including the following.

Early Childhood Services for children from birth to six years.

- Early childhood intervention and support for very young children.
- An inclusive preschool for children with and without special needs.
- An assessment and consultancy service for families who are concerned about their young child's development.
- Specialist early childhood teaching and therapy.

School Age Services for children from Kindergarten to Year 12 who have low support needs.

- Comprehensive assessments.
- Small group tuition and therapy.
- Occupational and speech therapy programs combining specialist education services and therapy.
- Outreach programs.
- The Ronald McDonald Learning Program for seriously ill children and the Reading for Life Program for children falling behind in their reading.

Family Services helping and supporting families and health professionals.

- Centre and home-based family counselling.
- Parenting Programs and groups for families.
- Case Management Services.

Professional Development for teachers and health professionals.

Presentations, workshops and advice on identifying and helping children with learning difficulties, learning disabilities and developmental delays.

Learning Links has branches in six Sydney locations at Peakhurst, Penshurst, Fairfield, Miller, Dee Why and Randwick. We also offer some services to children in country NSW, the ACT, Victoria and New Zealand. A complete list of branch locations and contact numbers is on the back cover.

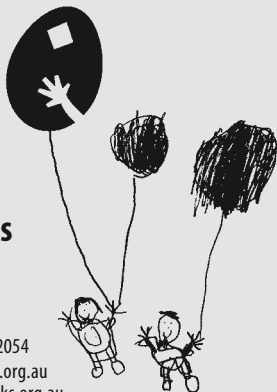
Learning Links

Head Office

12-14 Pindari Road
Peakhurst NSW 2210
Tel: 9534 1710 Fax: 9584 2054
Email: mail@learninglinks.org.au
Website: www.learninglinks.org.au

Enquiries regarding this Information Sheet should be directed to Robyn Collins
Tel: (02) 9534 1710 Fax: (02) 9584 2054 Email: rcollins@learninglinks.org.au

© Learning Links 2006. The material in this publication cannot be reproduced without the written permission of Learning Links.



For example, we can see two children arguing over who is going to be the mum in the home centre and we know that argument is likely to turn into something more serious. Caregivers can use this technique to encourage children to problem-solve this situation.

3) Teach children to negotiate

Often young children want the same toy or activity. This can result in tears or aggression. We can teach children to ask for what they want and how to share and take turns.

4) Help children to understand others' points of view

Talk about your own feelings, the feelings of children when things happen and the feelings of characters in books at home and in group story reading.

5) Preventative Strategies

Grandma's Rule

A common preventative strategy is Grandma's Rule. This is, if you eat your vegetables you will get your dessert. For example, you tell a child he/she will be able to go outside and ride his/her bike after he/she has picked up the blocks.

Delay Cues

If a child is tired of sitting still or tired of shopping and you can see that they are near their limit, you can say, "Just one more shop and we can have a ride on the aeroplane". Or a teacher can say "Just one more minute and then you can play with what you want". This helps a child develop self-control and is certainly better than having to punish a child or have a child who throws a tantrum in a shopping centre.

Giving children choices

Some children show challenging behaviour when they are asked to do something by a parent or teacher. If you can offer a choice then the child gains a sense of control and challenging behaviour can be avoided. Caregivers should offer only a few choices. Examples of effective choices are the following.

- Do you want to take your nap in your cot or on the floor?
- Do you want milk or juice to drink?

Parent Involvement

When a family and pre-school teachers work together to help a child with challenging behaviour then the child is more likely to use the skill outside the preschool setting. Consistency between all adults involved with the child is absolutely essential.

Conclusion

Teachers, parents and caregivers are in a unique position to promote a foundation of appropriate social behaviour that will help young children as they develop and mature.

If all adults who are involved with these children show consistency in how they respond then the children are more likely to use the skills that they learn in their homes, preschools and in the community.

**Dr. Rose Dixon is a Lecturer in Special Education at the Faculty of Education, University of Wollongong. She has a wide range of experience in teaching young children with disabilities in Support Units and as an Itinerant teacher of the Deaf for the NSW Department of Education and Training. She has published papers relating to the development of social skills in young children, as well as the development of self-concept. She has also published chapters relating to Quality Teaching and Special Education.*

References

- Guralnick, M.J. (1999) The nature and meaning of social integration for young children with mild developmental delays in inclusive settings. *Journal of Early Intervention*, 22, 78-86.
- Hune, J.B. & Nelson, C.M. (2002). Effects of teaching a problem-solving strategy to preschool children with problem behaviour. *Behavioural Disorders* 27 (3).
- Walker, H. (2002) Hill Walker Interventions Conference 2002. Retrieved December 28, 2003 from <http://www.csr.usu.edu/HillWalker/HillWalker.ppt>.



www.learninglinks.org.au

Early Childhood Services
– all enquiries to Head Office

School Age Services
– contact your local branch

Family Services
– contact your local branch

All other enquiries
– Head Office

Head Office
12-14 Pindari Road
Peakhurst NSW 2210
Telephone: (02) 9534 1710
Preschool: (02) 9533 3283
Facsimile: (02) 9584 2054
Email: mail@learninglinks.org.au

Northern Suburbs Branch
2 Alfred Road
PO Box 634
Brookvale NSW 2100
Telephone: (02) 9907 4222
Facsimile: (02) 9907 4244
Email: nsb@learninglinks.org.au

Western Suburbs Branch
Unit 7/9 William Street
PO Box 1026
Fairfield NSW 1860 (2165)
Telephone: (02) 9754 2377
Facsimile: (02) 9755 9422
Email: wsb@learninglinks.org.au

Southern Suburbs Branch
10 Railway Parade
Penshurst NSW 2222
Telephone: (02) 9580 4888
Facsimile: (02) 9580 4788
Email: ssb@learninglinks.org.au

South West Sydney Branch
88 Shropshire Street
PO Box 42
Miller NSW 2168
Telephone: (02) 8783 7111
Facsimile: (02) 8783 7222
Email: sws@learninglinks.org.au

Eastern Suburbs Branch
1/20 Silver Street
Randwick NSW 2032
Telephone: (02) 9398 5188
Facsimile: (02) 9326 5364
Email: esb@learninglinks.org.au

Please help us help children

Please PRINT

- I would like to donate \$_____ to help kids who have difficulty learning.
- I would like to be a member of Learning Links. *Please tick appropriate box below.*
 - Individual or Family \$45 (including GST)
 - Professional \$45 (including GST)
 - Not for profit Organisation \$55 (including GST)
 - Corporate \$70 (including GST)

Individual, Family and professional membership includes one copy of *Learning Links News*

I enclose my: Cheque Money Order **or**

Charge my: BANKCARD VISA MASTERCARD AMEX

Account No: _____ CCV*: _____

Visa and Mastercard last 3 digits on back of card.

Account Name: _____ Expiry Date: ____ / ____

Signature: _____

Name (Dr, Mr, Mrs, Miss, Ms): _____

Organisation/Business: _____

Address: _____

Postcode: _____

Tel: (Home): _____ (Business): _____

Please post to Learning Links: 12-14 Pindari Road, Peakhurst NSW 2210. *Donations over \$2 are tax deductible and will be receipted.*

