



Does your child have behaviour that you find challenging to deal with? Do these behaviours appear to come out of nowhere or for no reason at all? Behaviour looks different for each child. One child may have tantrums with screaming, kicking, and biting while another child might simply fall to the floor and cry quietly. Challenging behaviour can include anything from ignoring your instructions to being physically aggressive. Challenging behaviour can be stressful and frustrating for both you and your child.

All behaviour happens for a reason!



Your child engages in challenging behaviour for a variety of reasons. In some cases, the reason might be clear but in others, it may not be. When you spend a little time observing the behaviour, you can begin to understand what your child's triggers (antecedents) are and what responses (consequences) they get after the behaviour that helps them achieve their goal.

Once you understand what the purpose of the behaviour is, you can begin to effectively prevent it from occurring again in the future, teach new appropriate ways to help your child get what they want and create a plan on how to intervene should the behaviour happen again.

What are the reasons for behaviour?

Every behaviour has a purpose. There are two main reasons why children display challenging behaviour:

1. To get/achieve something.

- Attention (e.g., Peer/parent attention)
- Items (e.g., candy at the store)
- Activities (e.g., turn on a video game)
- Internal sensations (e.g., Swinging)

2. To escape/avoid something.

- Attention (e.g., avoiding supervision of adults)
- Tasks (e.g., chores)
- Environments (e.g., noisy room)
- Internal sensations (e.g., scratching and itch)



Your child behaves the way they do because it works. It is the quickest and easiest way to get what they want! Attempting to stop or change a behaviour is not an easy task. It takes time, patience, and a lot of information about the behaviour. The information you gather about the behaviour will reveal the circumstances under which the behaviour is most likely to occur.

Important Skills You Can Teach Your Child

To get/achieve something:



- Teach your child to communicate their wants, needs, thoughts and feelings using appropriate words/phrases rather than physical behaviour.
- If your child struggles with language, use pictures to help them better communicate.
- Teach your child to make appropriate requests to get what they want from peers (e.g. “Can I have a turn when you are done?”).
- Teach your child how to tolerate being told “No!” · Teach your child how to wait for access to preferred items/activities.

Advice for parents

- Build a positive relationship with your child.
- Give your child positive attention when they are behaving appropriately.
- Ignore attention seeking behaviour. It is okay to ignore the challenging behaviour, but always monitor your child’s safety.
- Explain when they can access what they want. Use a timer or calendar to help them understand the passage of time.
- When something is not available, offer other choices that are of equal value.
- Model other appropriate behaviours that work to get them what they want.

To escape/avoid something:

- Teach your child how to ask for help.
- Teach your child to request a break.
- Teach your child relaxation/coping skills.
- Slowly expose your child to environments, situations and/or things that make them feel anxious.
- Stressor presented for very short periods of time, under controlled situations, to minimize discomfort.



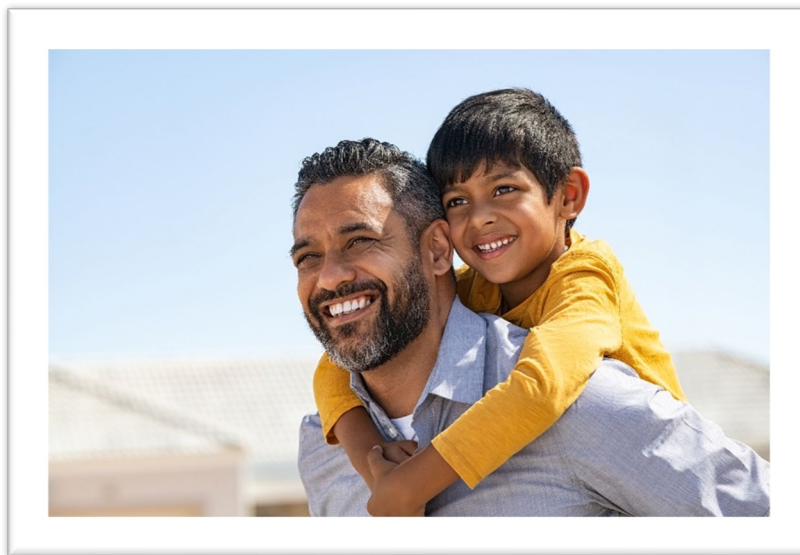
Advice for parents

- Offer an incentive to help motivate your child to complete a task. First your child must do something you want (clean room), and then they get access to something they want (e.g., the Wi-Fi password).
- Offer choices on how to complete the task (e.g., “Would you like to clean up the Lego or your clothes?”).
- Make sure that the task you have given your child, actually gets done. Don’t ask unless you are prepared to follow through.
- Reduce the big task by offering help (e.g., “You pick up the red Lego and I will help pick up the green Lego.”).
- Try to imagine the situation from your child’s perspective and be patient. They are still learning to navigate and regulate their behaviour, and emotions and they need your support to do it effectively.

Remember that behaviour can be a form of communication.

As children mature, they continue to develop their ability to use language to communicate their thoughts, feelings, wants and needs. Until your child acquires those effective language skills (no matter their age), they will use other ways to get their ideas and feelings across. Often, those other ways include challenging behaviours.

Can you think of a time when you were trying to explain something that made perfect sense to you but your audience had no idea what you were talking about? Were you frustrated? Remember that your child might be still learning to communicate. Help them to use better words, so they don’t have to engage in challenging behaviour to get what they want.



References

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Additional resources

- Geneva Centre for Autism: <https://www.autism.net/resources/visual-gallery>
- ConnectABILITY www.connectABILITY.ca

Information

If you need more information, visit www.durham.ca/cdbs

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