

**All children are different.**

**All children matter.**



**All Behaviour is  
communication.**

**Managing Behaviour that  
Challenges**

## So what is behaviour?

Encouraging positive behaviour in children is one of the most important elements of what we can offer at Wallacetown EYC. Having the right tools at our disposal will help us to grow our children to develop and become more emotionally intelligent and able to cope with the challenges they may come across

One of the most important factors in supporting children is to have a consistent approach across the whole team.

Behaviour is how someone acts. It is what a person does to make something happen, to make something change or to keep things the same. Behaviour is a response to things that are happening:

- internally - thoughts and feelings
- externally - the environment, including other people.

Behaviour serves a purpose and has a reason, including:

- communication - through use of body language, facial expressions, gestures and silence
- function - to help meet a need, attract attention, gain an internal or sensory sensation, access an item or activity, or get away from something.

The key to understanding behaviour is to understand why it is occurring, what is being communicated or what is needed.

When thinking about behavior that challenges the area often referred to as temper tantrums is one to consider. Ask the question, what is a temper tantrum? How does it differ to other types of behaviour? If we consider that all behavior has a function and is communicating something to us then it doesn't. These short lived behaviours are a normal part of a child's development. Try to not interfere or negotiate with the child when the child is displaying the behaviour. If the child is having difficulty regulating their behavior at this point and as long as they are safe we need to give them the time and space that they need to calm. If the child is trying to hurt others or destroy property, move away from them and if possible move any object that they may be able to destroy. **This should always come before moving the child as this is more likely to escalate the situation.** Stay in close proximity so you know they are safe and make sure there are no dangerous objects in the area. Direct anyone else away from this area as well to avoid risk of injury.

Short lived tantrums can happen for a variety of reasons including that the child wants something, they are scared or anxious or they are asked to do something they don't want.

## Specific Behaviours

### Biting

Children can bite for a variety of reasons including exploring, when teething, to discover what will happen when they bite, for attention, independence, frustration, stress, etc.

#### **What can we do?**

- ABC of behaviour will help us to identify the What? When?, Who? And Where?
- If a child bites tell them that's not okay and it hurts
- Social Stories can help support
- Talk about biting at different times of the day and not always when the child bites, e.g. at snack you could say so what are our teeth for? Are they to bite the table? Are they to eat our snack? Are they to bite our friends or anyone else?
- Be firm and say NO in a clear voice
- If you see the child going to bite distract them to something else
- If biting is a sensory need try a chew buddy or something similar
- Do NOT try and pull a child away from biting

### Aggression and Hitting

First, it's important to understand that **children don't want to attack others**. They'd much rather have fun and feel safe and loved. They play well when they feel connected but when children lose their sense of connection, they feel tense, frightened, or isolated. In this "emotional emergency," they may lash out at other children. **Children don't intend to be mean**. In fact, acts of aggression aren't under the child's control.

For example, a child might come to nursery but are wondering what is happening at home, when will I see Dad or Mum. They may be afraid of something or have had such emotional turmoil in their life they are scared, upset, angry and do not know how to convey this.

When it feels safe enough to show their feelings, children who feel upset don't hurt anyone. They feel a bond with their parent or caregiver, and run to the nearest loved one for help. They cry, and release the knot of fear and grief they feel. The adult who listens and allows the child to "fall apart" gives the child a huge gift—enough caring and love to allow her to heal from the feelings that make life hard for her

**If a child doesn't feel safe, she may signal for help by becoming aggressive.**

The child who lashes out feels sad, frightened, or alone. She doesn't look frightened when she is about to bite, push, or hit. But her fears are at the heart of the problem. Fear robs a child of her ability to feel that she cares about others. Her trusting nature is crusted with feelings: "No one understands me; no one cares about me." If you watch carefully, you will see that this kind of feeling drains a child's face of flexibility and sparkle in the seconds before she lashes out.

Children get these feelings of isolation, no matter how loving and close we are. Some children are only occasionally frightened and aggressive. Other children have an abiding sense of fear and desperation that comes from circumstances beyond anyone's control. Children acquire fears from a difficult birth, medical treatments, family tensions, the unhappiness of others around them, and from the absence of loved ones. Any frightening time in a child's past can create a tendency toward aggression.

### **Framework for Supporting Behaviour**

If your child is wanting something and you don't want them to have it rather than just saying "no." use the "EECR Approach" Empathetic Statement, Explanation, Choice, Reminder.

#### **EECR Approach**

**EXAMPLE** – The child asks for more sweets. You have already told them that they can only have one piece a day, because you want them to eat food that is good for them (and sweets are not). They already had their sweet for the day, but come to you asking for more.

**Empathetic Statement** – "I understand you want more sweets because it tastes so good." (this helps your child feel understood).

**Explanation** – "But it is important for our minds/bodies to eat food that is good for us" (reiterating the rule or explaining the reason)

**Choice** -"If you are hungry, you can have an apple or yogurt." (making them feel valuable/giving them a sense of control)

**Reminder** – "You can have a sweet again tomorrow." (reminding them that they will enjoy some sweets again soon). This step would not apply if your child is trying to get to something that they can never have (e.g., something unsafe). If that is the case, still use empathy, explanation, and choice.

#### Checklist for Supporting Behaviour

Strategies to try	√/ x
First step is to make a warm connection with that child and build trust.	
Understand the function of the behaviour. You may want to do an ABC of behaviour.	
Try your best to catch the behaviour in the moment. This way you can see what is happening and support the child in the moment.	
If you can be close and try and intervene where possible. Remember the child is not in control of their behaviour so they need adult support	
When the child is starting to calm, connect, give the upset child eye contact, a warm voice, and kind physical contact. They need some sign that it's safe to show you their feelings. You can say things like: "I know you don't feel good," "I'm right here and I'll keep things safe for you," "It looks like things are hard right now," "Please tell me about it," "No one's mad at you," or, "I want to stay with you right now."	

<p>If you arrive on the scene too late and more than one child needs your help. Make things safe immediately. Put your hand on the toy soon to be thrown, or open the child's fingers to release the child's hair, etc.</p>	
<p>Don't blame, shame, or punish. These actions further frighten children, and further isolate them. They add to the load of hurt that makes children aggressive.</p>	
<p>Do what you can to lift your child's feelings of guilt. Understand that children who hurt others feel guilty and even more separate than before. Guilt erases a child's ability to look like they care. The "I don't care" look is deceiving. Unless they can cry and fight those feelings away, they will continue to have trouble with aggressive impulses, so your goal needs to be to connect with them. A child who feels connected can heal their fears. A child who doesn't feel connected can't.</p>	
<p>Make generous contact. It helps children connect if you tell them that you wish you had arrived soon enough to help them.</p>	
<p>If your child can cry or tantrum at this point, healing has begun. Listen. Sometimes, your presence breaks the crust of isolation and the child's bad feelings can pour out. They may feel anger towards you, or feel suddenly afraid of your touch and closeness. These fearful responses indicate that your child feels safe with you, and trusts you to handle their wildest, scariest feelings. Let their feelings pour out until they reach a state of calm. They'll decide when they've done enough</p>	
<p>Sometimes, a child who has hurt someone can't feel anything. The feelings of guilt button a child up tight. They don't feel safe at all. The best course of action is to make contact with the child by spending some moments perhaps 5 – 10 minutes paying attention and doing what they want to do. This isn't rewarding a child for "bad" behaviour. Instead, you are helping the child to reconnect.</p>	

