

CONTEMPORARY APPROACH TO BEHAVIOUR TEACHING AND LEARNING FOR CHILDREN ACROSS THE LEARNING YEARS

Choice Theory - developed by William Glasser M.D. - is a contemporary way of understanding why and how children behave the way they do. It is a biological theory of human behaviour quite the opposite of external control psychology (behaviour modification). Choice Theory maintains that everything we do is to satisfy powerful forces within ourselves and that nothing we do is caused by what happens outside ourselves. We are driven by our genes to satisfy five basic life needs – survival and safety, love and belonging, freedom and choice, enjoyment and fun, recognition and competence. According to William Glasser we choose our behaviours to satisfy these basic life needs, so choice not chance determines our destiny.

According to Choice Theory all our behaviour is our best attempt at the time to meet our five genetic needs and we always choose to do what is most satisfying to us at the time. Preventing misbehaviour is simply a matter of ensuring that choosing appropriate behaviour makes logical sense when viewed from a needs-satisfaction perspective.

Our behaviour is motivated by the difference between what we want at the time and what we have. We experience pleasure when we meet our needs and frustration when our needs are unsatisfied. The only individual we can control is ourselves. We may persuade and influence others, but we cannot control them. We will never be influential with others unless we have a strong relationship with them, a relationship based on trust, trustworthiness, respect and empowerment.

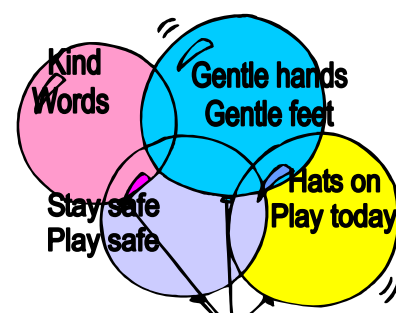
Behaviour management is to be based on protective, nurturing, encouraging and educational relationships between you and the children in your care (Rodd 1996).

Glasser maintains that behaviour is learnt and can be taught and it is this paradigm of behaviour teaching and learning that has application to all of us working with children. Behaviour expectations needs to be taught to children rather than told to children. Our challenge is to teach children behaviours that are appropriate to the teaching and learning environment, and to support them in learning to make safe and appropriate behaviour choices within this environment.

Mistakes in behaviour are viewed from a non-blame, non-coercive position. Social mistakes are regarded as necessary parts of learning and form the springboard for social coaching and scaffolding. We need to set children up to be master learners of behaviours rather than mystery learners wondering what the behaviour expectation is today – is it the same as yesterday? If kind words were the behaviour expectation yesterday then kind words is the expectation today.

Behaviour teaching and learning takes the mystery out of behaviour by explicitly teaching children what behaviour is okay and what behaviour is not okay for the group setting.

Often when children are living together in a social group we need to identify baseline behaviours, minimum level social behaviours needed to live successfully in a social group. These behaviours are so basic that they are needed for social harmony and productivity. Examples of baseline behaviours may include: Kind Words / Gentle Hands, Gentle Feet / Hats On, Play Today / Stay Safe, Play Safe. Naturally you would adapt behaviour expectations appropriate to your context and to the developmental and cultural needs of the children.

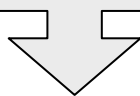


Once you have decided on the baseline behaviours for your group / center you need to develop a shared understanding among all staff of what the expectation looks and sounds like and what the children would be doing, feeling, thinking etc and not doing, feeling, thinking etc if they were demonstrating this expectation.

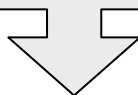
When the adults are clear about what the behaviour expectation means, the next step is to formulate a teaching and learning approach to teach these expectations to children. Direct teaching and opportunities to create new behaviours will form the foundation of this approach. Parameters of this approach include the following: What's not okay is not okay we must teach otherwise; What you teach is what you get, where you teach it is where you get it; Behaviour teaching and learning is planned within the social context where it belongs; Mistakes in behaviour signal points of teaching and learning; Consequences are major teachers of behaviour; The ability to generalize behaviours is valued rather than one setting skill mastery.

An excellent process to teach children social behaviours is one developed by Walker (1980) and adapted by McArdle (2005), McArdle and Carter (2006). An outline of this process using the behaviour expectation **Kind Words** follows:

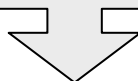
1. Introduce the behaviour expectation Kind Words to the children at a time when everyone is calm and relaxed. Talk about the purpose for saying Kind Words when talking with each other, why it is necessary to talk with each other using Kind Words, and what it means when we say the phrase Kind Words. You may use puppets, songs, and story book visuals as support material to introduce the Kind Word behaviour expectation.



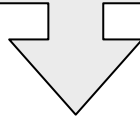
2. Discuss with the children what the behaviour expectation Kind Words looks, sounds, feels like – describe and define it from the perspective of the giver and the receiver. Invite the children to name what Kind Words would sound, look and feel like if they were and were not being used etc. You may also want to talk about what people may be thinking if they were saying Kind Words rather than unkind words. You may record children's response and at a later date use these responses to create a visual book titled 'Our Kind Words Story Book'.



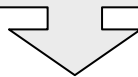
3. Model and Role-play the behaviour expectation Kind Words with the children. Adults and / or children can perform the role-plays. Nominate the exact social scenario that the children will role-play. If using Kind Words is a problem when the children are lining up together then this will be the role-play scenario that will be used.



4. Have a go practicing the behaviour expectation Kind Words in the social context. Make sure you promote generalization. Take your cue from the role play –if the role play focused on Kind Words during lining up then teach it prior to lining up and invite the children to now ‘Have a go’ practicing saying Kind Words when actually lining up. Behaviour specific feedback at this point is critical (e.g., ‘I liked the ways you used your kind words’ / ‘Saying kind words is a sign of being a friend’ / ‘Staying calm and using kind words wasn’t easy to do but you did it. Well done’). The ultimate goal of this social teaching process is achieving learning that endures.



5. Re-teach and re-practice the behaviour expectation Kind Words as necessary. This re-teaching emphasizes the fact that Kind Words is very important, so important that time will be set aside to set every child up to be successful in learning to use Kind Words. Ensure that you allow for individual differences in learning styles, skill levels and acquisition rates.



6. Provide social coaching and scaffolding to bridge the gap between what is known and what can be known. Some children will require no coaching, others may require limited coaching, and some children may benefit from intensive one on one and / or small group coaching.

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This teaching process is ongoing and needs to be consistently operating as part of your daily program. Regularly conduct behaviour expectation audits to determine:

- The necessity for and purpose of the expectation
- The appropriateness of the expectation – developmentally and culturally
- The teaching and re-teaching of the expectation
- The effectiveness of the expectation
- Staff support and implementation of the expectation
- Community commitment to and ownership of the expectation
- How reflective the expectation is of the principles, beliefs and values of the community
- The alignment of the expectation with the rights and responsibilities charter of the community
- Whether the expectation sets individuals up as master learners of behaviour

Refrain from making a ‘do as I say and not as I do’ social environment. This breeds ‘little ownership-lots of resentment’ between children and staff members. **WALK YOUR TALK.**

Part of the behaviour teaching process is the social consequence system - teaching children that by choosing behaviours they are choosing the consequences associated with these behaviours. The focus of this teaching is for the child to think about their behaviour choices. When the child has made a social mistake and chosen inappropriate behaviours, the child’s job is to (1) think about behaviours chosen and (2) reflect on more appropriate behaviours when faced with the same or similar situation. The adult’s role is to coach the child in these alternative behaviours as he/she re-enters back into the social group.

Every problem they face urges them to evaluate themselves and their efforts, to discover new concepts and to invent new strategies. Problem solving involves change – moving from one idea to another. By this process children usually invent a new solution to a problem (Thornton 1995).

According to Skiffington and Zeus (2003), this transfer of new knowledge, skills and capabilities is more likely to occur under the following conditions:

- o **Association:** When the individual can associate the new information with something they already know.
- o **Similarity:** When the information is similar to material the individual already knows and fits into logical framework.
- o **Degree of original learning:** If the amount of original learning and knowledge is high, it is more likely that the new learning will transfer.
- o **Critical attribute element:** When the information contains elements that are critical or beneficial to the individual, learning is more likely to transfer.
- o **Organizational culture:** New behaviour is more successfully learned if the organizational culture supports it.
- o **Opportunity:** There must be opportunities to perform the new learning.
- o **Minimal delay:** There is minimal delay between acquisition and actual use of the new behaviour.
- o **Support:** New learning is more successful if individuals receive support.

Consider the existence of these conditions within your early years context. Do they happen regularly intermittently, seldom or not at all? If we want children to develop responsibility for their behaviour choices it is imperative as early years educators that we provide instructional factors and environmental systems such as those outlined above.

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