

RESOURCE SHEET UNIT II: CHECKLIST FOR QUALITY INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

CONFRONTING THE CHALLENGE OF CHILDREN WITH BEHAVIOUR DIFFICULTIES

Every effort to positively respond to the needs of children with behaviour difficulties is important when early childhood educators are committed to the philosophy of inclusion. An over-reliance on practices such as Time-out to change behaviour can exclude some children from many group experiences and isolate them as the problem children. Sometimes, children with extreme behaviour difficulties are asked to leave programs because staff feel that they do not have sufficient resources and skills to respond effectively to the behaviour difficulties.

Children with behaviour difficulties (e.g. aggression, non-compliance) are at greatest risk for low self-esteem, school failure, poor social relationships and future delinquency. For some children, behaviour difficulties are the result of temporary stress: a new baby, divorce, cultural shock. For other children more long-term factors such as developmental abilities or family poverty can affect behaviour negatively. However, families and early childhood professionals who guide behaviour empathically and positively can significantly contribute to positive outcomes for these children. This is not an easy task but an essential one. A positive approach to confronting behaviour difficulties fosters acceptance of differences in children's coping strategies, teaches children new skills and supports inclusion for all children.

Redirection is one effective strategy that can be used.

Through observations of Reese's play, his teachers found that the free play period created anxiety for Reese, particularly when the room was busy. They noticed that Reese would frequently leave his activities and disrupt other children's play. In contrast, during more structured activities (games, group times), Reese remained focused and participated fully. His teachers, therefore, decided that they would offer more teacher-directed alternatives for Reese during free play. For example, when Reese began to wander, a teacher would invite him to choose card game to play with another child in a quiet area. Other strategies used were: inviting Reese to play at the water table with two other children and offering Reese story tapes using a headset with a friend. The teachers were careful to place him with his back to the room so that he received a lower

level of visual stimulation.

While children with behaviour difficulties need limits, they also need some control over their activities. Choices within limits will help prevent some difficulties and also allow children to learn from the course of action that they choose. Both redirection and providing choices for children protect their self-esteem and convey acceptance for a range of feelings.

Educators who view behaviour difficulties as an opportunity to help children learn new emotional/ social skills are most successful in changing behaviour. Some children are aggressive with other children and often, the cause of their actions is an underlying lack of appropriate social skills. There are a number of excellent curriculum packages that help educators teach social skills. (See resource list.) These resources are most successful when the concepts and skills are transferred and practised by adults and children within a natural context.

Taylor was playing alone with a train. Taylor watched Ahmed walk by and the teacher watched Taylor. Recently Taylor was throwing toys at children when he wanted to play with them. When Taylor approached Ahmed with a train car, the teacher moved to intervene. However, Taylor handed the train to Ahmed. The teacher interpreted Taylor's intentions as positive, crouched beside him and stated his intention, "Ahmed, play with me." She then explained, "Taylor brought you a train because he wants to play with you. Let's build a track together for the train." Later the teacher took a picture of Taylor and Ahmed sitting beside their long train track.

Some children's anger can be intense and destructive. Many factors can contribute to severe behaviour difficulties: family violence, child abuse, Fetal Alcohol Syndrome. Helping children channel their anger constructively and safely is a skill that every early childhood professional constantly refines. Staying with a child's anger can send a very powerful message to a child who is out-of-control that their anger will not drive away the important adults in their lives. Some children will test this relentlessly which can make working with these children emotionally draining. A positive team approach is critical.

When Lexie became angry, her behaviour quickly escalated from a slightly agitated state (kicking a table leg) to pushing over shelves and attacking children nearby. After the first incident, her teachers planned their response to her outbursts. They observed her first to determine what triggered her anger and what behaviours presented prior to her outbursts. Using this information, the staff become better able to predict and prevent many of her difficulties. However, there were still times when Lexie's anger became out of control. Acting as a team, the teachers quickly and calmly removed all children away and explained to them, Lexie needs some space right now because she is really angry. Marcia is helping her stay safe and feel better. Marcia's posture and demeanor conveyed confidence and acceptance. She moved slowly around Lexie and calmly removed any objects that posed a threat to safety. She waited for Lexie to calm down and offered her support when she was ready. After a short time, Lexie began to cry and accepted a hug from Marcia who then invited her to the playdough table. Once Lexie was relaxed, Maria opened up a discussion on problem-solving.

Many early childhood professionals are uncomfortable with intense anger. Training that assists them to identify the precursors to intense anger and learning about appropriate de-escalation strategies can help educators handle a range of feelings. There is considerable debate about the use and appropriateness of physical restraint for children whose anger is so out of control that it is destructive. Some behaviour models support the notion of restraint in some cases. Others suggest that for some children physical restraint may be of therapeutic value. Another school of thought maintains that intrusive methods such as physical restraint are unnecessary and de-escalation strategies should not include physical contact. Each early childhood team will need to explore their views and approach to helping children regain self-control and learn positive emotional and social skills. Seeking family input and identifying different cultural expectations for behavior will also shape a team's approach.

TRAINING SEMINARS

Preventing and Managing Aggressive Behavior

(PMAB)

Kim Stevens, Madame Vanier Children's Services
871 Trafalgar St., London, ON, N5Z 1E6
Tel: (519) 433-3101
Fax: (519) 433-1302

Working Effectively with Violent and Aggressive Students (WEVAS)

Contact Robert Spencler, W-160-1970 Ness Ave.,
Winnipeg, Manitoba, R3J 0Y7
Tel: (204) 945-6761
Fax: (204) 948-3229

SOCIAL SKILLS TEACHING RESOURCES

Making Friends: Early Childhood Social Interaction

consists of three videos and a guidebook on assessment, planning and implementation
Contact Anne Carr, Early Childhood
Care and Education, Capilano College.
Tel: (604) 983-7570 X-2210

Second Step Violence Prevention Curriculum

The Committee for Children
2203 Airport Way S., Suite 500
Seattle, WA, 98134-2027
Tel: 1-800-634-4449

Classwide Social Skills Program

Kindergarten/Early Childhood Version
Tel: 1-888-775-4557
e-mail: jhundert@vaxxine.com
Web Site: <http://vaxxine.com.socialskill>

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

Orr, L. & G. Cavallaro. (1997, Winter). Interventions for Children with Challenging Behaviours and Special Needs. **Interaction**. Vol. 10. (4). pp. 21-22.