

Helping parents/carers to manage behaviours at home

During this tricky time it may be that you are experiencing different behaviours from your child than usual. Below are a few ideas and tips from the Language and Communication Team (LCT) which you may feel you would like to try. As a parent/carer you may be doing some, or all of them already, however it can be helpful at times to have a new perspective or perhaps reassure you that what you are doing is okay.

Language tips

- When you are giving an instruction try to give them one at a time, in the right order, for example instead of **“after you have finished your cereal put your bowl in the sink”** say **“finish your cereal then put your bowl in the sink”**
- Keep your language simple and avoid using lots of words
- Keep the volume of your voice low and unemotional
- Try to avoid questions where your child could say yes or no. For example instead of **“would you like to empty the dishwasher?”** say **“please empty the dishwasher”**.
- Avoid any phrases which may confuse your child like **“I’ve told you a 100 times”** or **“This is a tip.”** Be clear and direct.
- Have the lasting word, not the last word! Say what you need to, turn and walk away; if your child continues to speak/argue continue to walk away.

Behaviours

- If your child is displaying a challenging behaviour try to think about why – be a detective. Ask yourself if something has changed. Have the boundaries moved? Could they be worrying about something? There will be a reason! We may never find out the reason but stopping to think about what it could be can help to keep you calm before you address it.
- If you can feel a situation escalating, try to walk away or swap with another adult if you can. Remember as their emotions grow, yours are growing too and sometimes it is better to remove yourself and say nothing or very little.
- Try to only focus on the initial behaviour, for example, if your child has refused to do something focus on this rather than what has followed, such as a door slamming or bad language.
- If your child walks away from you try not to follow them (unless you are concerned for their safety). Following them may only escalate the situation further.
- Acknowledge that anger/worry/upset is present and that it is okay to feel like that rather than dismiss it. If your child needs to physically release anger provide them with an outlet to do this such as:
 - Pillows or cushions in their bedroom to hit/kick

- A bag of things to break such as lollypop sticks, twigs or paper to rip
- Something outside that they can safely stamp on or hit
- A chalkboard where they can write anything they like using any language they like without judgement
- A punch bag

After

If you do need to talk to your child about something that has happened consider the following;

- What do you want to gain from it – who is it for?
- When do you do it? It can take time for the child’s brain to be ready to think again after experiencing a high level of emotion – are they ready?
- How do you do it? Think about where you are and who else is there. It needs to be in a place where your child feels comfortable, preferably with no siblings around.
- Try to think about your language. We presume young people can answer questions such as ‘why’ but many find them difficult. Instead say **“talk me through it”** or **“tell me...”**
- Alternatively draw out what happened, together, using stick people and speech bubbles. This can help your child think about other people’s perspectives and feelings and help them to do things differently next time.
- If your child does want to talk, you could try having the conversation whilst doing something else. The distraction helps to relax the intensity of the situation and can help to encourage them to share their feelings with you.
- Some young people prefer to write down how they are feeling. If your child does then ask them to send you a text or an email; this means they can say what they need to without being interrupted, it may also help you to reflect before you respond. Time helps diffuse situations greatly!
- Finally, ask yourself how important the word ‘sorry’ is in this situation.

Rewards

- If possible try to focus on the positives; your child will do something positive every day, even if it is tiny!

- If you reward something, don't take it away. For example, if they get a bar of chocolate in the morning but have a challenging afternoon they should still get the bar of chocolate. What they did in the morning is still valid.
- Avoid empty threats, if they need a consequence make sure you can see it through and avoid rewards which will impact on you and the rest of the family. Such as, taking away an X-box for a week may not be helpful for anyone at the moment.
- Rewards should be as instant as possible. However, there is lots of value in having longer term ones too. They could have points which add up to items they could 'cash in' when this is all over such as: cinema tickets, a coffee/hot chocolate, a day out, a new top/bag etc.

Schoolwork and friends

- You are their parent/carer, not their teacher! If they get stuck on their school work and they can't get help or don't want to ask, then get them to jot it down on a post it note, this means they will be able to move on.
- Learning is not just about school work; encourage them to cook, learn to iron or watch a documentary.
- Their technology will be hugely important to them, it is their way of staying in touch with their friends and, within reason, this is important for their language, social skills and their self-esteem.
- Keeping their minds and bodies healthy will help reduce anxiety and challenging behaviours. Exercising, a scene change from their room or doing something with another member of the family (even if it is short) may help.

Finally....

At the moment we are all experiencing something new and different and young people are included in this. Living in a small space all of the time, can be tricky. Older children still need to feel safe. Try not to expect from them what you feel they should be doing and try to let them experience what they need. Be kind to yourself, give yourself space where and when you can and get in touch with your child's school if you feel you need support or advice. (LCT can provide further support and advice if it is felt appropriate.)