**Play and Connect** 

**Responding to Challenging Behaviour: Top Ten Tips**

Children with fewer words rely on expressing needs and feelings with their bodies.

When upset this can become: screaming, throwing, biting, running. Sometimes this is called ‘challenging behaviour’.

Helping a child to manage big feelings safely will mean behaviour is more manageable for you both.

Parents and their children can both find this very stressful, so we put together some tips:

**1. Notice emotions to understand behaviour:** Pay attention to your child and their non-verbal communications by spending time each day with them on their level. You may begin to understand and notice ‘triggers’ (what happens before the challenging behaviour) earlier. You can even try to keep a diary to see if you can notice any patterns and what helps.

**2. Notice what is happening for you:** Are you feeling stressed, angry, confused? Notice and pause - what helps you regulate so that you are responsive rather than *reactive*? This can also help you to wonder about your child’s emotions.

**3. Emotional Regulation**: Children need parents to help them with their big emotions, as their brains are still growing. You can help them put words to their feelings too, name the emotions. Can you find what helps your child? Is it hugging, being taken to a quieter space? (Avoid giving unhealthy rewards as distractions to challenging behaviour.)

**4. Show as well as tell:** Make your behaviour clear and understandable, your children will copy and learn behaviours

**5. Offer positive choices:** Try offering 2 positive options your child CAN choose from. You may need to show objects to help them to understand.

**6. Use simple words:** that your child can begin to understand and recognise. (We sometimes say more words when stressed and this can be confusing).

**7.**  **Say what you WANT your child to do:** Say ‘Kind hands’ or ‘By my side’ rather than fixing on what you DON’T want them to do (don’t hit, don’t run off). You may need to show ‘kind hands’ with actions (gentle stroking action with hand).

**8. Routines:** Children are helped by having clear routines, and by knowing what comes ‘Now and Next’. You can build on this using objects, words, images and visual timetables.

**9. Boundaries and safety:** Be clear about rules (hold hands near road, eat at table). As children grow, knowing clear rules can also help them to feel safe.

**10. Keep challenges and changes simple:** Meet your child at their level – notice what your child can and can’t do at this stage and introduce new challenges gently step by step. Changes can be confusing so take time.

Importantly: Take care of yourself and seek the support you need. We know challenging behaviour can be really stressful. All children are different – different energy levels, likes and dislikes, different learning stages. At times you may compare and you might feel judged by others, what helps you to redirect your focus to the needs of your child and yourself?

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