
**The Development of Positive Relationships and the
Promotion of Socially Aware Behaviour with
Children and Young People in Residential
Childcare**

Learner Study Guide



Introduction



This study guide is designed to support the knowledge and understanding of required to promote positive behaviour and to respond appropriately to incidences of challenging behaviour.

You will gain an understanding of the principles for supporting the development of socially aware behaviour in children and young people, including theories of behaviour development and the importance of using own actions to model socially aware behaviour.

You will also gain an understanding of the use of physical intervention and restrain, including the legal context and key principles relating to physical intervention and restraint and ethical reasons why restraint should be a last resort.

Additional information

Key people are those who are important to a child or young person and who can make a difference to their wellbeing. Key people include family, friends, carers and others with whom the child or young person has an important relationship.

Others may include:

- team members
- other professionals.
- Consistent support requires agreed responses to be made by all those involved in the care of a child or young person.
- Activities should be selected to ensure they are stimulating to and achievable by the child or young person.
- Agreed interventions should be designed to minimise the impact of the behaviour on the child or young person and those around them.
- Physical intervention refers to methods of controlling children and young people that do not involve any use of force, for example offering a 'guiding hand' to lead away from a harmful situation, or to block the way to prevent a child or young person putting themselves in danger.
- Restraint is the use of, or threat to use, force, or the restriction of a child's liberty of movement (whether or not they resist), to prevent injury to any person or serious damage to property. From April 2015, a definition of restraint can be found in the Children's Homes Regulations.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/childrens-homes-regulations-including-quality-standards-guide>

The links between positive relationships and socially aware behaviour allows us to look at the research carried out which demonstrates the importance of these. The need for looked after children to be able to establish trusting, positive and effective relationships with care workers is paramount to change and acceptance

Care settings and care workers need to adopt and understand clearly defined positive reinforcement strategies. You need to understand the importance of creating an environment that promotes positive behaviour. This may include a clearer understanding of individual behaviour planning, modelling positive behaviour and responses to situations.

Having an overall positive culture in the setting allows distraction and diversion strategies to be understood and implemented by all team members. It is vitally important to involve service users in boundary setting and collaborative ground rule making. It is important for the team as a whole to be actively involved supporting children and young people's reflection on and managing of own behaviour to encourage acceptable social behaviour.

It is easy to only notice difficult behaviour, but by praising good behaviour it encourages the child/young person to do this more. This is an effective method of managing behaviour used by childcare professionals. The child needs to be aware of what they did well and when and should be told as it is happening, not later or after the event.

You should record behaviour in the Children's Information file to help you and other professionals understand it. There are many techniques for helping to manage children's behaviour but remember, children and young people respond best to people that they like and respect and regardless of which technique you use, a positive relationship is the key to helping them to behave positively.

As a child/young person gets older they need to understand the consequences of their behaviour and take some responsibility for it. You might find that giving rewards at both agreed and less specified times when you think that they are deserved can be the most effective way to encourage good behaviour. It is also useful to try and talk to a child when they are calm about a situation that may have happened, to not only try and understand it but agree how it may be different in the future.

A child/young person placed with you may be at a low point in their lives. They are vulnerable and may 'act out' their feelings. This may manifest itself in ways such as bed-wetting, stealing food or money, being rude or aggressive, destructive or running away.

You should talk to the child/young person to check out their reasons for the behaviour and discuss the situation with the child's social worker and your supervising social worker to agree how the behaviour can be best managed.

Sometimes the child or young person might not understand the reasons that things are going wrong for them and they might need your help to make sense of what is happening. Children who experienced emotional trauma may not be able to respond to reasoning or guidance in a positive way. Patience, acceptance and consistency by the carer is most important. Remember that children and young people often do things wrong because of their age and understanding and these things are hard to help or to iron out. Examples of this might be clumsiness, sleeping in and being grumpy. On the other hand, their experiences might leave them behaving badly and until you both recognise this, it will be hard to change.

All children need rules and boundaries but these should be focused on keeping them safe. Try not to burn your bridges with threats and sanctions - use these little and often, and when you feel they will be most effective.

Praise and positive responses often go a lot further than sanctions. Remember that body language and the tone of your voice can sometimes make things worse, e.g. if you raise your voice they may also.

Why a child or young person might actively seek out negative reinforcement through socially unacceptable behaviour!

This simply be down to "learned behaviour", when a child or young person joins you, they have suffered unknown trauma and circumstances that have led them to being looked after. To be able to understand negative reinforcement, you must establish a positive relationship and try identifying triggers and how to minimise triggers which causes this action. To try understand, and overcome this, care workers must ensure appropriate structure/planning of environment. Structure limited resources and activities to meet each child's individual needs and provide sense of security. Care workers should clearly understand the importance of consistency and the familiarity and routine in minimising risk of triggers.

Negative reinforcement can stem from a child experiencing no clear boundaries or effective communication in the home or previous settings. It could be through their needs not being met, or simply the attention gained by carrying out negative behaviour.

It is important to remember that as a looked after child, they will have experienced traumas which could include substance misuse, different forms of abuse. They may have learning difficulties or mental health problems. The majority of children who use negative reinforcement will have low self-esteem and aspirations, they may suffer from a lack of education or a lack of appropriate role models that could cause stress and anxiety

The importance of using own actions to model socially aware behaviour: This calls for all care workers to become a positive role model, supportive of each child and reinforcing behavioural expectations. You must always remember the importance of giving praise and positive attention at all times. Care workers must provide effective communication between them, the child, parents and other professionals involved in their care. This must begin by building trusting relationships where the child feels part of a community and can open up to you. It is also extremely important to establish these factors whilst still allowing each child to have privacy and space

Understanding the use of physical intervention and restraint:

The definition of Physical Intervention is “the use of force to restrict movement or mobility or the use of force to disengage from dangerous or harmful physical contact initiated by a child. Physical Interventions can include *Restraint*, Holding, Positive Touch and Presence”.

Restraint is one of four categories of Physical Intervention that may be used in exceptional circumstances to prevent likely injury to a child/adult or others or to prevent likely damage to property.

Restraint is defined as “the positive application of force with the intention of overpowering a child/adult. Practically, this means any measure or technique designed to completely restrict a child/adult's mobility or prevent a child from leaving”.

It is extremely important to remember that Looked-after children and young people have particular physical, emotional and behavioural needs related to their earlier experiences before they were looked after. These earlier experiences have an influence on brain development and attachment behaviour. The rates of emotional, behavioural and mental health difficulties are 4 to 5 times higher amongst looked-after children and young people than the wider population.

Conduct disorder is the most prevalent difficulty amongst looked-after children and young people. Aggressive and challenging behaviour associated with conduct disorder can impose a significant burden to carers, and children and young people with this disorder are also at risk of school exclusion. Looked-after children and young people are also more likely than their peers to experience depression and anxiety. These children may carry the burden internally, and it may go unnoticed or ignored by professionals.

It is extremely important to know when to restrain a child and young person

As a care worker dealing with looked after children, you will, or will have undertaken training in this area. Always remember:

Acts of physical restraint are acts of care and control with the sole purpose of making the young person and others safe. However if managed well over time young people may well get to a position where they are able to manage their own behaviour and take better control of the choices open to them.

No matter what method you have been trained in you may only physically restrain a child when it is the only practicable means of securing the welfare of that child/young person or others and that there are exceptional circumstances which lead you to believe that:

- A child will cause physical harm to themselves or others
- The child will run away and put themselves or others at serious risk
- Or a child will cause significant damage, which is likely to have a serious emotional effect or create physical danger.

When NOT to *restrain a child and young person*

Physical restraint must not be used when:

- You can restore safety in another practicable way e.g. through the use of recognised de-escalation techniques.
- You are not in control of yourself.
- You consider it unsafe to do so (e.g. the young person has a weapon)
- You know the young person has a medical condition that may be adversely affected by being restrained
- You are not confident based on all the circumstances that the young person can be restrained safely (e.g. the presence of the public or other young people who could be adversely effected).

The fact that a young person has had to be physically restrained shows that there are situations where the young person's behaviour is so unsafe as to place them or other people at risk.

An opportunity should be given to them to learn from the experience and to explore alternative ways of coping with difficult situations. The timing of a discussion about what has occurred is critical but the young person should be encouraged to discuss the incident.

Some children will want to be comforted in the period immediately after the event and as part of that may see the opportunity to discuss the event as helpful, others may welcome a period of calm but not be ready to talk and others may be angry and resentful and resistant to any discussion.

It is the worker/carer's responsibility to find the right time to talk with the child about how they can be helped to manage similar situations differently. Careful judgment is required and there should be sensitivity to the young person's needs, the process may require time but if you have to insist then the reasons why you are insisting should be shared with the young person so as to avoid anything which suggests the decision is about asserting power.

Consideration should be given as to who may be the best person to discuss the incident with the young person. It may be beneficial for this person to be the worker/carer who perhaps took the lead in the restraint in order that the discussion can continue the process of restoring the relationship. However, as with the timing of the discussion, sensitivity to the young person's needs and wishes is essential.

A constructive and meaningful discussion will contain the following elements:

The young person's view:

- Of the experience of being restrained
- As to why the worker/carer restrained them
- Of events leading up to the restraint or physical intervention
- Of the part played by others (if appropriate)
- Of what they were trying to achieve by their behaviour
- Of the process of regaining self-control

In addition the worker/carer should be aiming to

- Help the young person identify the link between thoughts feelings and behaviour
- Develop an action plan identifying what the young person and worker/carer will do if a similar situation arises in the future
- Identify action to repair where necessary relationships between the young person and their carers
- Provide support to deal with any difficult memories that restraint may have brought up.
- The period after the young person has been restrained is a time when he or she can reflect on how to deal with consequences, poor choices and repairing relationships.

In a residential setting it may be appropriate to consider issues arising from the restraint or physical intervention with the residents as a group as issues arising from a restraint may affect all of the young people in the unit not just the young person who experienced the RPI. Such group discussions can help young people and staff to learn together from the event. The period following an occurrence of any physical intervention or restraint provides an opportunity for learning for the child, worker/carer and the manager/supervisor of the setting.