What are challenging behaviours?

In the context of Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC), we define challenging behaviours as a child’s behaviour that does not align with an educator’s expectation.

Common challenging behaviours in ECEC include not following directions or rules, disrupting, or distracting others, having negative interactions with peers, exhibiting aggressive behaviours, withdrawing from peers, not participating in learning activities and expressing intense emotions.

How you view and respond to challenging behaviour in your ECEC setting will be influenced by your expectations, the environment, social context, and the immediate situation. Your prior experiences and understanding of the child will also influence the approach you take.

Why did we develop these resources?

ECEC educators have recently identified challenging behaviours as a key practice area for which they seek support.

We created these resources for ECEC educators to summarise the latest global research evidence on responding to challenging behaviours. We focussed on common, low to mid-level behaviours that can be de-escalated or redirected within the room to provide practical, low-cost, evidence-based strategies that can be implemented by an educator, or an educator team (teacher and assistant).

Where does the evidence come from?

The evidence in the Supporting Behaviour tip sheets comes from a systematic review of the best available Australian and international research that focuses on strategies that can be used directly by educators in ECEC to respond to challenging behaviours. Evidence for these strategies focuses on children aged 2 to 5 years and may not be suitable for other age groups.

The evidence comes from studies that did not include children with specific diagnoses (e.g., Autism Spectrum Disorder, ADHD). Selection of strategies suitable for children with specific diagnosis is best made in consultation with families and professional support services.

You can read more about which evidence was included in the review in the evidence report.

What is the evidence?

The research evidence shows us that there are a range of different effective strategies that can be used to respond to challenging behaviours in ECEC. These strategies can be helpful to:

- **Set the scene**: To prevent or plan for the potential of behaviours that challenge
- **Respond in the moment**: To respond to a behaviour that challenges
- **Re-set the scene**: To prevent further instances of a behaviour that challenges

A summary of strategies identified is shown in the figure below and explained in more detail in the Supporting Behaviour tip sheets and the Responding to Challenging Behaviour evidence report.

The evidence suggests that in selecting a strategy an educator should consider:

- The type of the behaviour
- The context in which the behaviour is occurring
- Knowledge and circumstances of each child

Some approaches will be more effective than others and a range of approaches may be needed. In applying these strategies it’s important to consider which strategy fits the child and circumstance, and to try strategies and critically reflect upon their effectiveness as you work with the child/children.
Supporting Behaviour Framework

The Supporting Behaviour Framework (below) provides a summary of the key evidence insights emerging from this review. This framework shows the range of evidence informed strategies that can be used by educators to effectively plan for, respond to and prevent challenging behaviour in ECEC.

Tools not rules... The behaviour support approaches identified in these tip sheets are not intended to be a formula or a ‘one-size fits all’ approach, rather they are possible tools that can inform decision making.