

Behaviour is communication

When children find it difficult or are unable to recognise and share their feelings, they use behaviours to communicate.



Sometimes children want to draw us near and at other times they want to distance us, or at times a bit of both! Working out what your child needs can be puzzling - what works one day may not the next.

Some reactive behaviours that can be especially difficult to respond to are:

- Hurting others: biting, nipping, hitting, kicking, and pushing
- Verbally aggressive: swearing, shouting, refusing
- Damaging property
- Risky conduct: running, climbing, self-harm

Children can lose sight of what is driving their behaviour and react without thinking. We can feel deskilled, frightened, helpless, anxious, numb, powerless and frustrated when we witness these behaviours. It is helpful to think about what your child might be feeling in those moments. It could be fear, disappointment, tiredness, worry, rage, misunderstood, or guilt.

Young people face many challenges in life, academic, peer and family expectations. This can impact on their behaviour and how they feel about themselves at that moment in time.

Their behaviour may be the only way that they feel they can communicate their needs to you, and it can help to reassure them if you're able to validate how they're feeling and their experience.

For example, it can be really frightening, unsettling or confusing when plans change and leave us feeling unsure about what is going to happen. Young people may need your help to understand these changes, and reassurance to help them feel safe and secure.

Responding to difficult behaviours sensitively

Relationships offer a way to connect and when these become strained or disconnected it can put pressure on you as parents/carers and your children.

Following episodes of challenging behaviours, it can be difficult to reconnect with your child, especially if they have hurt someone or damaged something.

Offering opportunity to reconnect is so important and allows for repair where there has been rupture.

Difficult behaviour may be unacceptable and challenging to manage but naming and noticing what might be going on for your child can be really helpful.

Finding ways to connect and share experiences can offer wonderful strengthening moments, e.g. a little hug as you walk past in the kitchen, a note under their pillow saying you love them, a stroll to the park or a game together.

Time is a precious gift and can allow conversation.

Helpful prompts to help when behaviour gets challenging

- Are you able to stop and imagine what it might be like to be your child in this moment?
- What would your child say if they could identify their feelings and articulate them?
- What do they need from you right now?

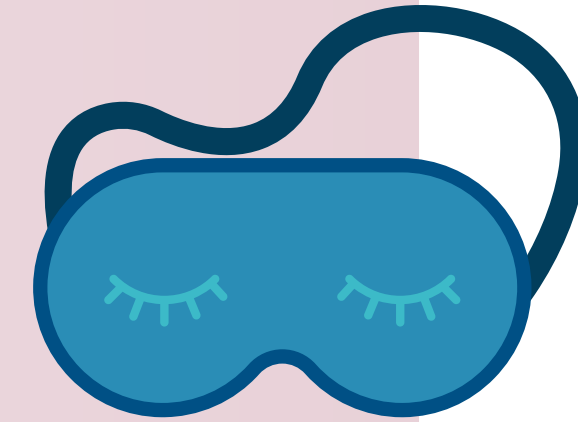
YOUR needs are important

Parenting/caring is no easy task; you are never 'off duty' so the ups and downs are normal. When children present us with challenging behaviours and attitudes it can feel overwhelming and exhausting. Parenting/caring from this place can be really testing and difficult.

You have needs too and when we are struggling it is important we practice some self-care. This may feel selfish, but it will benefit those around you.

Self-care ideas:

- Get some fresh air
- Sit down and have a warm/cold drink or a treat/snack
- Listen to music you enjoy or a podcast
- Meet a friend for a natter
- Colour and doodle your thoughts
- Have a bubble bath
- Move - stroll, do some star jumps or go for a jog



If you need support for yourself or are struggling with your own mental health, [MindWell Leeds](#) has information on mental health for adults, and where to go to get support in the city.

Stay hopeful

Repair is always possible after rupture and disconnect in a relationship. It's so important to take time to reflect rather than react.

Many thanks to Jo Frost from Impact North for providing the content for this resource.

