

Reaching Families

Empowering families of children with disabilities

Challenging behaviour fact sheet

What are behavioural problems?

What one parent sees as a problem behaviour may be seen as being totally acceptable to others, so it can be hard sometimes to agree on what is a behavioural problem. However, it is generally agreed that there is a problem when a child behaves in a different or unusual way that is very at odds with the way that other children of the same age behave, or when their behaviour puts themselves or others at risk.

Signs and symptoms

It could be that your child displays all, one or a combination of the following:

- Physically aggressive behaviour such as kicking, biting, hair-pulling or pinching.
- Verbally aggressive behaviour
- Self-harm, such as head-banging, scratching and biting.
- Being withdrawn and unusually quiet
- Vomiting
- Obsessive behaviour
- Repetitive behaviour such as rocking, repetitive speech or movements.
- Other issues such as smearing poo, damaging furniture or other objects.

Causes of behavioural problems

There can be many reasons for a child to develop behavioural problems. Often, if a child has a disability, behavioural problems can be a sign that somehow their needs are not being met. It is likely that they are having difficulty communicating their needs and feelings effectively and in a socially appropriate way. For most of these children, behavioural problems can be helped by looking for the reasons behind the behaviour, understanding why it is happening and by giving them the right support.

Ways to improve challenging behaviour

In the first instance, it could be useful to discuss your concerns with your child's health visitor, school nurse or school and seek their advice. You can then seek further information and support via the following channels:

- Gain support in the form of local and national agencies, some of which are listed below.
- Therapy – there are a huge variety of therapies available. Which method you use can depend upon the cause of the behaviour – ask for advice.
- The Challenging Behaviour Foundation works with families caring for children with severe learning disabilities. As well as information on their website, they can also have a

family linking scheme so that parents can speak to others who have had similar issues.

- The Scope website also has some useful advice about challenging behaviour. See: www.scope.org.uk/support/families/diagnosis/behaviour.

Ask about

- *Autism Sussex* – offers behaviour advice and support for people on the autistic spectrum. Go to: www.autismsussex.org.uk or call their helpline: 0845 450 0060, Monday to Friday, 8.30am to 5pm.
- *CAMHS (Children & Adolescent Mental Health Service)* – doctors and therapists who help children with mental health issues. Tel: 01243 622530 (Chichester), 01403 223200 (Crawley), 01342 324183, (East Grinstead), 01444 472670 (Haywards Heath), 01403 223200 (Horsham), 01903 286754 (Worthing).
- *Early Support* – joined up support from health, education, social services and the voluntary sector for children with disabilities aged from birth to the end of reception year at primary school. Tel: 01243 520800 (central referrals line).
- *Find it Out (formerly Connexions)* – targeted Youth Support for families. Find your local centre by going to www.yourspacewestsussex.co.uk and clicking on 'Find It out'.
- *Health visiting service* - support for parents of children under five. You can find your health visitor through your GP surgery, children and family centre, or through the following link: www.sussexcommunity.nhs.uk/services/servicedetails.htm?directoryID=16308
- *Integrated Services and CAF (Common Assessment Framework)* – allows agencies involved with a child or young person to deliver 'joined up' services via information sharing. For more see: www.everychildmatters.gov.uk or call: 01243 752045.
- *Learning Inclusion Team and Social & Communication Team* – specialist team of advisory teachers who support mainstream schools to better work with children with communication and behavioural difficulties. Ask your child's school for information.
- *Portage* – a home-based educational programme tailored to a child's individual needs. Available to children under 5 years. Chichester: 01243 536182, Crawley: 01293 613525, Horsham and Mid-Sussex: 01444 243150, Worthing: 01903 242558.
- *SureStart Children and Family Centre* – www.westsussex.gov.uk/living/children_and_families/children_and_family_centres.
- *Youth Offending Team* – works with young people and other organisations to prevent and reduce offending. Email: youthoffendingteam@westsussex.gov.uk or call 01293 643450 (Crawley) or 01903 839920 (Worthing).

Further reading and useful links

- *Making Sense of it All* – our handy parent/carer guide contains information and advice on local contact groups and much more. It is available to download or buy. For further information, visit our website: www.reachingfamilies.org.uk.
- *British Association of Counsellors and Psychotherapists (BACP)* – www.bacp.co.uk.
- *The Challenging Behaviour Foundation* – www.challengingbehaviour.org.uk.



This fact sheet has been written by parent carers for parent carers.

