



100 STRATEGIES

to Support Children's Behaviour and Emotional Wellbeing

A Practical Toolkit for the School Year



A **Speechmark** Book

CATH HUNTER

100 Strategies to Support Children's Behaviour and Emotional Wellbeing is accompanied by a number of printable online materials, designed to ensure this resource best supports your professional needs.

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100 Strategies to Support Children's Behaviour and Emotional Wellbeing

Children's mental health and emotional wellbeing are fundamental to their success in school and in later life. Full of practical ideas and insights, this interactive guide is designed to empower staff to make a difference to children's wellbeing and behaviour by using simple and effective strategies that can easily be implemented throughout the school day.

Taking staff on a journey through the school year, the book identifies issues that are relevant to children at certain times of the year, along with practical strategies to address those challenges. Each half term includes space for self-reflection and notes, with key questions to encourage practice evaluation. Based on the author's extensive experience and conversations with staff working in primary schools, this book:

- Provides school staff with an easy-to-use, accessible resource that promotes their understanding of children's emotional wellbeing and behaviour.
- Introduces reflective language, which is fast, effective and easy to implement with proven results in developing better understanding of children's wellbeing and increasing children's emotional vocabulary in schools.
- Explores the impact of a child's home life on their behaviour in school.
- Encourages staff to build up a personalised pool of resources to refer back to and use.
- Includes ideas for building insight into each child and collecting evidence of strategies which help with Education and Health Care Plans, review meetings, pupil progress and behaviour monitoring meetings with parents/other school staff.

Developing staff understanding and confidence in responding to and meeting children's emotional and mental health needs, this invaluable guide will equip teaching assistants, teachers, special educational needs coordinators (SENCOs) and senior staff to support children in school and empower them to make a difference to children's wellbeing and behaviour.

Cath Hunter is a therapeutic consultant, trainer, play therapist and author with over 40 years' experience of working with children and families. She has provided services to primary schools since 2004, including working with school staff to provide strategies and support for children's emotional wellbeing and behaviour.

‘The strategies in this book are practical and help staff respond in a more appropriate way. Over time the strategies become part of normal classroom practice which helps staff develop an environment of mutual respect where children feel safe and are able to express feelings in a more appropriate way’ – **Headteacher**

‘I would recommend this book to anyone working with children. It changed the way I approached children, enabling me to be more focused on their emotional needs’
– **Teaching Assistant**

‘Using this guide has changed my everyday practice. I am now more able to see the child instead of the behaviour’ – **SENCO**

‘Using reflective language had an immediate and positive impact on my relationships with the children’ – **Year 4 Teacher**

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A Practical Toolkit for the School Year

Cath Hunter

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About this book

This book is the result of hundreds of conversations over many years with teaching assistants, teachers, SENCOs and senior staff who are looking for ways to support children who are unsettled, not fully engaged in learning or whose behaviour is causing concern. I spend much of my week in one-to-one conversations and group training with staff who are passionate about helping the children with whom they work but are also stretched for time. Many of these conversations involve discussing possible reasons for children's behaviour and identifying how to support them.

I encourage staff to reflect on a child's behaviour and to be curious (not always easy) about what the child is doing, what is happening and why they may be behaving in a particular way. I also encourage school staff to explore what may be going on for them, what are they feeling and what are they bringing to the situation. This increased level of self-awareness can be invaluable when dealing with any child, but especially when confronted by challenging behaviour.

I have been very privileged to work alongside some incredible school staff who do a phenomenal job taking care of children on a regular basis. I encounter many school staff who at times feel overwhelmed by the emotional, behavioural and mental health needs of the children they are working with.

Over the years I have developed many strategies that are easy to implement, including the concept of reflective language. This involves using simple statements that enable a child to feel seen and heard, therefore having a powerful impact on their behaviour. This book introduces reflective language and many other strategies that have proved to be very effective in schools.

The book is for individuals who wish to develop their practice in this area, but it is also very appropriate for school teams who wish to evidence their work for EHC applications/plans and review meetings, pupil progress and behaviour monitoring meetings with parents/other school staff. This book can be used as part of a whole-school approach to supporting emotional well-being and behaviour by ensuring a consistent and cohesive approach across the staff team.

Cath Hunter

Therapeutic Family Interventions www.therapeuticfamilyinterventions.co.uk

Cath Hunter is a therapeutic consultant, trainer, play therapist and author with 40 years' experience of working with children and families. She has delivered services to primary schools since 2004.

Introduction

The aim of this book is to increase your awareness and understanding of what motivates children and how to support children's behaviour and learning. It does this by encouraging you to notice and be curious about the behaviours you see in school and by suggesting new strategies for you to try. Children's behaviour is their way of communicating, and as our understanding of what these behaviours mean increases, we become more confident responding to it. By increasing our awareness and thinking about the possible reasons behind a child's behaviour, we are able to develop a deeper understanding of behaviour and emotional wellbeing. This increased awareness may lead to us responding differently, resulting in positive changes in children's behaviour.

When we focus on and notice what a child is trying to tell us by their behaviour, we are able to respond to and meet that need, resulting in the child feeling seen and understood. This boosts our confidence as school staff, resulting in a more positive working environment for ourselves and the children whom we are working with.

Children are expected to manage a great deal during their school lives, including:

- Separating from their parents or carers
- Building and maintaining relationships with other children
- Managing their feelings
- Having resilience to manage getting things wrong
- Constantly trying new things
- Restarting relationships after being told off
- Managing change

How many children in school have the skills to be able to manage all this? Imagine every time you made a mistake all your colleagues knew about it. Imagine every time you went into the staff room, everything on the notice board had been changed around or moved. Imagine being asked to get on with something you don't know how to do. Although situations like this may happen in school, as adults you are able to talk about it and ask for support if you need it.

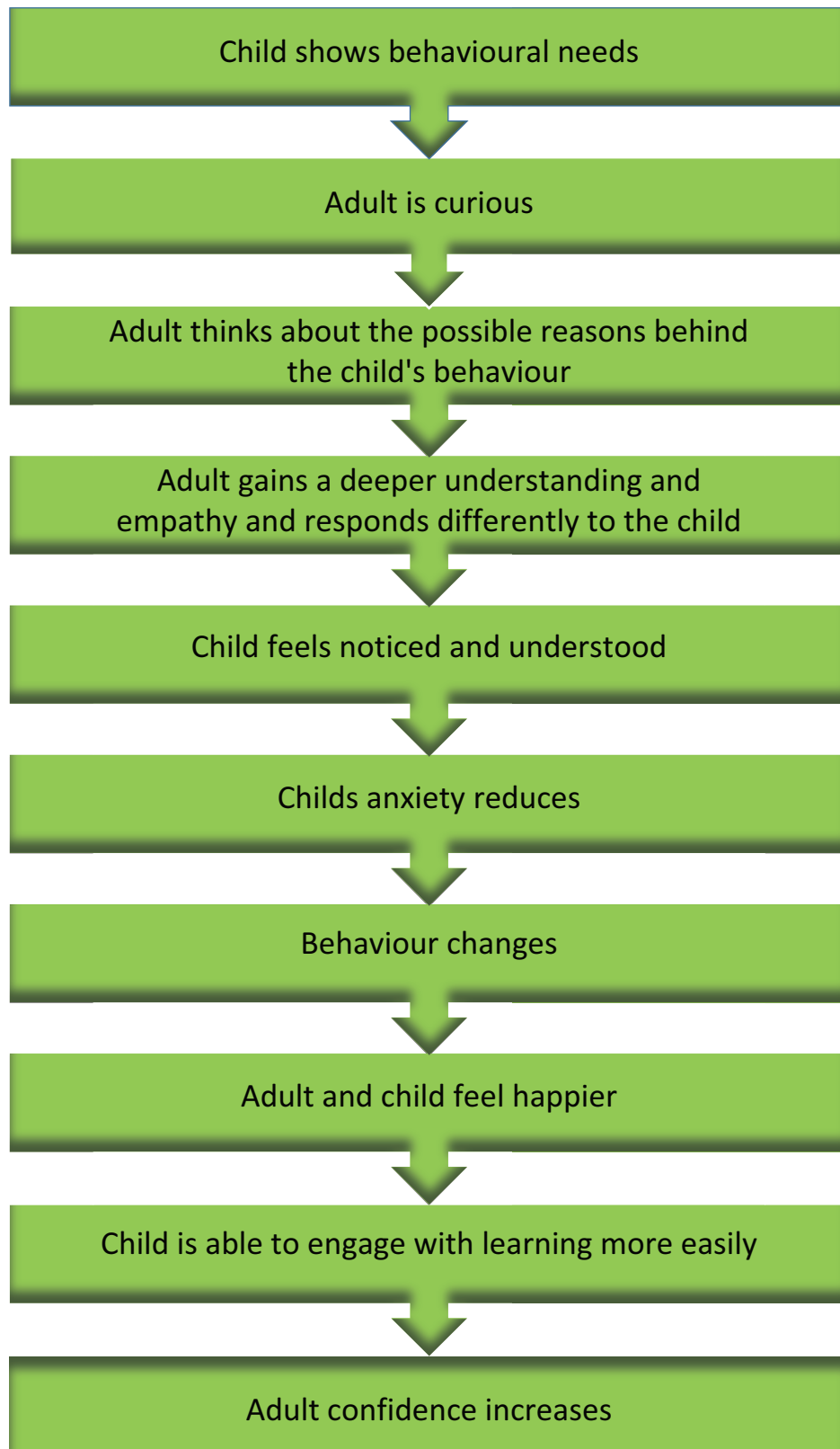


Figure 0.1 Supporting children's behaviour

This book will enable you to experiment with different ways of responding to children's behaviour and try different strategies, along with reflecting on what worked and what didn't and how you feel. This reflective aspect is an important part of the process as it will enable you to identify the changes that occur on a weekly basis.

The book begins by introducing the concept of reflective language, a tool that you are encouraged to experiment with throughout this year.

The book is divided into the six half terms that make up the school year, with each half term focusing on a different theme. Each section will provide an overview of the theme, identifying what the focus is and why. It will describe some of the behaviours you may see and signs to look for, along with exploring some of the possible reasons for the child's behaviour. It encourages you to focus on a different child each week, enabling you to develop a deeper insight into them and to perhaps notice behavioural responses you may not otherwise see. You may also choose to focus on a child for several weeks or the whole half term.

Each section also includes several strategies for you to implement with the child for the week, to support behavioural changes occurring. When using the profile checklist, you may find that only some rather than all of the behaviours apply to a child. If this is the case, I suggest you try some of the strategies and see if they have an impact. It is necessary to be aware that children who are neurodivergent may have different needs and therefore respond differently to some of the strategies I suggest. However, the main focus of this book is about understanding and responding to the individual needs of the child. By using the suggested strategies, you will gain a deeper understanding of the child and be better able to support them.

Each half term begins and ends with a reflection sheet. I encourage you to use this space in the way that suits you. You can write as little or as much as you choose. Experiment with using the book in the way that works best for you. Do it daily, weekly, on your own or with a colleague. There is no right or wrong way of using this tool but I hope that, when looking back over the weeks and half terms, you will notice how things have changed in a positive way.

Throughout the book, for ease, I refer to 'teacher' and 'class', but these strategies are relevant to all school staff, no matter what role you have in school. I encourage you to use this book as a way of developing and improving your relationships with the children you are working with and to enable you to have a more fulfilling relationship with them.

Wishing you an enjoyable year.



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What is this child trying to tell me?

Imagine you are a teacher in Year 2 and you had an argument with your partner before you left for work this morning, resulting in you arriving at school late and unprepared. How easy would you find it to settle in at work and perform well? What would you be thinking and feeling? What could you do about this? How could you communicate your feelings and get support? Now imagine you are seven years old and you had an argument with your mum before you left for school this morning, resulting in you arriving late to school without your homework. How easy would you find it to settle into class and engage with your learning? What would you be thinking and feeling? What could you do about this? How could you communicate your feelings and get support?

As adults, we are able to use language to talk about our thoughts and feelings, if we choose to, and can ask for support. We are able to rationalise experiences, know that we will survive them and have the benefit of life experiences to know that things usually pass and life doesn't stay challenging forever. How difficult are any of these for a seven-year-old? It is therefore not surprising that children communicate their feelings and need for support through their behaviour. Children do not want negative comments or attention for challenging behaviour, but some children may have learnt that any attention is better than no attention and therefore may evoke negative reactions from adults. Children who seek attention in the form of disapproval may be showing us they have low self-esteem and may believe that other people are unable to see the good in them. When children are happy and settled, they do not need to ensure that adults remember them; if a child does this, it is an indication that they need additional help and support, and we should respond to that need, rather than ignoring it and responding only to the inappropriate behaviour.

It can be hard for some children to tolerate their feelings and this can result in them trying to get rid of them rather than accepting and trying to understand and process them. For example, a child who is unable to manage feeling angry may hit another child or throw something as a way of trying to get rid of that feeling. When a child picks on or bullies another child, it may make them feel big and powerful and can be an opportunity for them to feel strong, albeit for a short amount of time. Children need help and support from adults to realise that it is natural to have feelings and that they can be helped to understand how to

What is this child trying to tell me?

recognise and express them. It can be useful to integrate positive messages about feelings throughout the school day, such as 'All feelings are useful as they can tell us if something is wrong.' This validates their experiences and normalises how children may be feeling. Some children have little resilience to cope with their feelings, and events that can happen during the course of a school day can feel too difficult for them to manage, such as losing a game or not being at the front of the line.



Figure 0.2 What is this behaviour telling us?

The above examples provide possible reasons why children have learnt particular behaviours as coping strategies to deal with their feelings. If a child was able to put those feelings into words, it would be easier for adults to empathise and support them.

Responding to behaviour

It's crucial that school staff try to interpret children's distress behaviour through a caring and compassionate lens and reflect on why they are doing whatever they are doing. What

is the child showing you through their behaviour? Are they showing you they feel safe and comfortable or are they showing you they feel unsafe and scared and can't sit still and relax? Inappropriate behaviour is a sign of an unmet need, difficulty coping or a lack of knowledge.

Hiding under the table = scared	Throwing things = angry	Fiddling with something = anxious	Hitting someone = frustrated
Following adult around = lonely	Criticising an other child = jealous	Saying they don't care = embarrassed	Copying another child's work = fear of failure

Figure 0.3 Understanding the feelings behind the behaviour

For school staff, it can be a huge challenge to look beyond the behaviour and attempt to understand what the child may be feeling. It can be easy to judge children for their behaviour as the following comments demonstrate:

- He's just attention seeking
- She's being manipulative
- He never stops talking
- She's so immature
- He never speaks
- She never listens

However, if staff are able to meet a child's need to be noticed and remembered in a positive and supportive way, they may reduce or even stop the behaviour. For example, 'I know it's really hard for you to listen carefully so I am going to give you something to remind you and help you to practise this.'

Strategies to help children feel safe in school

- Face – open and warm
- Tone of voice – varied and light rather than stern or monotone, never use sarcasm
- Body language – open and warm rather than folded arms
- Surrender – take responsibility, apologise, be a role model
- Relationship focused – commit to staying in the relationship and working through difficulties

What can you do?

As adults, the more understanding we can have of what a child may be trying to communicate to us through their behaviour, the greater the chance of the child being understood and being able to make sense of their thoughts and feelings. Children are often very alone with overwhelming thoughts and feelings and this can be a lonely and terrifying experience. Children communicate a range of different feelings through their behaviour and these can be expressed in many different ways; for example, if a child is scared, they may hide under the table or pretend they are not bothered. Children bring into the room what they are living through – what are the children bringing into your class? If a child is able to have their feelings accepted, acknowledged and validated without judgment or reprimand by an adult, they learn that all feelings are acceptable and this can impact on their behaviour in a positive way.

You can make a difference

- Use a calm, gentle and nurturing approach with children
- Focus on and ensure children are clear about the behavioural expectations of the school
- Provide frequent opportunities to enable children to feel good about themselves
- Spend extra time with children if and when you can
- Be reflective and curious about children's behaviour and what it may be telling us, rather than just reacting to it
- Provide regular positive messages to children
- Commit to making your school a happier place for everyone

What is reflective language and how does it help?

One of the biggest challenges facing primary school staff can be dealing with children's behaviour in a way that has a positive impact on them, is not detrimental to their self-esteem and enables them to make realistic changes. The use of reflective language which considers and explores the possible reasons behind the behaviour is a useful tool for any member of school staff. Reflective language is a subtle way of providing positive messages to children. It communicates to the child that you are seeing them, trying to understand them and acknowledging any feelings they may be experiencing. It enables adults to tentatively explore the child's experience without making judgements or assumptions about it. For example, 'It can feel frustrating when you put your hand up and I chose another child to answer.' It also provides an opportunity to build a connection and develop a relationship with a child, along with providing a commentary on their behaviour. For example, 'I can see you are trying hard to fit those pieces together.' As with anything you are doing for the first time, it may feel a bit strange at first; however, I encourage you to persevere and experiment with using it.

Reflective language is based on the understanding that all behaviour is a form of communication. When children show us their feelings through their behaviour, it is important that we not only try to understand what they may be feeling and trying to communicate to us, but also that we provide them with an emotional vocabulary to help them talk about their experiences. For example, if a child says they do not want to do something or behaves disruptively, they may be telling us they are scared or anxious. Reflective language provides children with an emotional vocabulary, which in turn can help them to start understanding and expressing how they feel.

Using reflective language clearly communicates to a child 'I see you, I hear you, I am trying to understand you', and thus enables them to feel seen, heard, valued and understood. For some children, this can be a relatively new experience and may result in increased self-worth and self-esteem. By using this with children, adults are providing a positive message to them, 'You are worth thinking about and trying to understand, and I am trying to help you to work out how you feel and support you with understanding and managing your feelings.' It can be beneficial to use reflective language rather than always reprimanding children