

Responding to Challenging Behaviour

Below are a few key points from a recent training seminar on 'Including the Hard to Include: Pupils with Behaviour Difficulties', plus some of my own observational comments which may be helpful to consider as ways of coping with difficult situations.

Remember the E in EBD – behavioural difficulties rarely come in isolation and are often a response to deep-rooted emotional problems that need to be addressed

Most adults respond instinctively to misbehaviour with an emotional, rather than a cognitive, response. Research suggests that most emotional, impulsive responses by adults are incorrect.

Our responses to emotionally charged high level challenging behaviour, if mistaken, can inadvertently sustain undesirable behaviours.

Self consistency theory (Burns, 1982) states that once a self concept is formed, good or bad, all human beings will go to great lengths to protect it, often leading to defensive behaviour.

Consider this – what is the self concept of the child with challenging behaviour in your class? What perceptions about self does that child hold? How can we begin to turn that around?

All behaviour is goal driven – behaviour is movement towards a goal and implies action is for a specific purpose.

There is a need to understand the underlying motives or purpose of behaviour in order to understand the child.



Identify the goal of the behaviour – attention seeking; power or control – and you can begin to respond appropriately through an increased awareness of the child's needs.

Reflect on personal responses to challenging behaviour and plan for how those could be different, and elicit a potentially different response in the child, the next time.

Personal relationships between teachers/teaching assistants and pupils have a strong impact on achievement.

When pupils believe that their teacher cares about them personally and makes deposits in their emotional bank account, motivation to learn increases.



Whatever the targets set, the support provided or the time allocated, all is without worth unless there is truly a desire, in all involved with a child, to make a difference to that child's life.

Try to separate out home life from school life where incidents outside of school threaten to destabilise relationships with pupils.

Separate out praise from encouragement – praise is a reward for completed achievement, tells pupils they have satisfied the demands of others, connects pupils' work with their personal worth, can be withheld, encourages external locus of control



Encouragement is an acknowledgement of effort, helps pupils evaluate their own performance, shows acceptance and respect, can be freely given, fosters internal locus of control.

Locus of control – internal or external? We always seek to encourage the child's internal locus of control and to raise their awareness of the choices they can make that can put them in charge of their lives.

Heather Stack – Director & SEN Consultant