Support children and young people’s positive behaviour: Unit TDA 2.9

Behaviour is the way in which we act, speak and treat other people and our environment. Children and young people whose early social and emotional development is positive are more likely to make friends, settle well into school and understand how to behave appropriately in different situations. They have strong self-esteem and a sense of self-worth, but also have a feeling of empathy for others. They understand what the boundaries are, and why they are necessary. Behaviour has a significant impact on current and later success for children and young people, in terms of their social skill development, education and employment.

Learning outcomes

By the end of this chapter you will:
1. Know the policies and procedures of the setting for promoting children and young people’s positive behaviour.
2. Be able to support positive behaviour.
3. Be able to respond to inappropriate behaviour.

The setting’s policies and procedures for promoting positive behaviour

Every setting should have a behaviour policy. This should be specific to the aims and needs of the setting and include guidelines for promoting positive behaviour of both children and adults involved with the setting. A behaviour policy will help all staff to learn how to promote positive behaviour, by explaining that children need to develop positive skills and attributes:

- self-respect and self-esteem
- consideration and empathy for others
- social skills such as negotiation and problem-solving.

Key term

Empathy – The ability to understand and share the feelings of another.

The policy should also include guidance in two important areas:
1. Promoting appropriate behaviour in the children and young people in the setting...
2 discouraging inappropriate behaviour in the setting.

Specific procedures for staff to follow which help in achieving these aims should also be included, such as:

- **Being a positive role model**: showing the children and young people what is appropriate behaviour in the setting, by setting a positive example in your own behaviour.
- **Showing respect** to children, young people and other adults: by the way you listen, your facial expression, your body language and by what you say.
- **Praising children and young people**: when they have shown positive and appropriate behaviour – for example, when they have been helpful to another child.
- **Organising the environment**: to make it easier for children and young people to understand why they need to be patient or to take turns.
- **Intervening calmly**: to stop children and young people hurting each other or behaving in an unsafe way.
- **Setting boundaries**: supporting children and young people in learning what sort of behaviour is acceptable and what is not.
- **Giving a simple explanation or alternative**: to the child who is finding it difficult to observe boundaries.

The policy should also detail the strategies that will definitely *never* be used in the setting and also explain why; for example:

- Adults will not hit or shake children or young people – this is against the law. It is a misuse of your adult strength and is contrary to the ground rules for children and young people’s behaviour.
- Adults will not use verbal humiliation or insults – this would undermine children and young people’s self-esteem and would be an example of inappropriate behaviour.

**In Practice**

**Behaviour policy**

Find out about the policy and procedures in your setting. Why is it important for settings to have a behaviour policy?

**Codes of conduct**

Each behaviour policy applies to a particular setting and so will vary according to the type of setting. The Early Years Foundation Stage requires that “children’s behaviour must be managed effectively and in a manner appropriate for their stage of development and particular individual needs”. Schools are also legally required to have policies and procedures in place to identify and prevent bullying. Codes of conduct generally form part of a setting’s behaviour policy. These relate to the behaviour of staff as well as to the behaviour of children and young people.

The **code of conduct** for staff in a children or young people’s setting may provide extra guidance for staff on dealing with inappropriate behaviour:

- keeping calm when dealing with inappropriate behaviour
- listening to both sides of the story when there is conflict and apologising if you have made a mistake
- being consistent when dealing with inappropriate behaviour
- making sure that you do not make any negative comments in front of the children or young people.

The main features of a code of conduct for children and young people deal with issues such
as fairness and taking turns, playing safely and not bullying. The code may be negotiated with older children and young people and will also describe use of the following measures to promote positive behaviour.

**Rewards and sanctions**
Most settings have ways of rewarding positive behaviour and of using sanctions to discourage inappropriate behaviour. The use of rewards and sanctions is discussed in the next section.

**Dealing with conflict and inappropriate behaviour**
Everyone working with children and young people needs to be clear about what is meant by inappropriate behaviour; this is why it is so important to have a behaviour policy.
Practitioners must follow the code of conduct by dealing with conflict in a fair and consistent way.

**Anti-bullying**
Bullying is a complex issue that mostly affects older children and young people. The setting’s policy should include guidance on how to prevent bullying.

**Attendance**
The importance of regular attendance is usually part of a school’s code of conduct, although not always in an early years setting.

**The importance of being fair and consistent**
It is important that everyone in the setting is both fair and consistent when dealing with children’s and young people’s behaviour. When you are fair and consistent in your response to inappropriate behaviour, the child’s sense of security and knowledge of right from wrong will be reinforced. The adult response to inappropriate behaviour should be the same, every time that behaviour occurs.

Consistency in applying the boundaries is important, especially in the work setting, where children and young people need to relate to several adults. They will check that the rules have not changed and that they still apply whichever adult is present. If you are supervising an activity, the children will expect you to apply the same rules as other staff. It undermines your own position if you allow unacceptable behaviour and another staff member has to discipline the children you are working with.

**Setting rules and boundaries**
If children and young people are to understand what is regarded as acceptable behaviour at home, in the work setting and in society, then they must be given very clear and consistent guidelines. Work settings will have a policy relating to behaviour and discipline, which all staff should follow and which is regularly reviewed.

**Rules**
The policy will explain the rules that are applied, and how children and young people will be helped to understand and learn to keep them. In most cases the rules are simple and reflect the concerns for safety and for children and young people to be considerate of others and their environment. They should be appropriate for the age and stage of development of the children or young people and for the particular needs of the work setting. Rules apply to the forms of behaviour that are encouraged, and cover physical, social and verbal aspects.

Rules – or targets – should be realistically set for the child or young person’s age and stage of development.
development. Examples of rules for a child aged four to five years are to:
- say ‘please’ and ‘thank you’
- share play equipment
- tidy up
- be quiet and listen for short periods (such as story or register time).

**Boundaries**
These are the limits within which behaviour is acceptable – they identify what may, and may not, be done or said. Children and young people need to understand the consequences of not acting within those boundaries. It is important that the boundaries are appropriate for the age and stage of development.

Examples of boundaries for young children are that they may:
- play outside – but must not tread on the flowerbeds
- watch television – but only until tea is ready
- use the dressing-up clothes – if they put them away when they have finished.

Examples of boundaries for older children and young people are that they may:
- use the internet – but only for agreed periods
- visit their friends’ houses – as long as they always let you know where they are

**How to support positive behaviour**
The ways in which children and young people behave will depend to a large extent on their developmental stage. Before looking at how to support positive behaviour, we need to understand what is expected behaviour at certain ages.

**Stages of behavioural development**
The following stages of behavioural development are, of course, linked only loosely to the ages shown. As with any normative measurements, they serve only as a rough guide to help understand children and young people’s behaviour and how best to respond to it. Much will depend upon children and young people’s experiences and the way in which they have been helped to develop effective relationships.

**Aged one to two years**
At this age, children:
- have developed their own personalities and are sociable with close family and friends
- still become shy and anxious when parents or carers are out of sight
- are developing their speech, and can attract attention by calling out or crying
- can become possessive over toys, but can often be distracted to something else
- are discovering that they are separate individuals
- are self-centred (see things from their own point of view)
- are gaining mobility, improving their ability to explore their surroundings – this results in conflicts, often regarding safety
- begin to understand the meaning of ‘No’, and firm boundaries can be set
- can be frustrated by their own limitations, but resist adult help (perhaps saying ‘me do it’).

**Aged two to three years**
Children now:
- are developing greater awareness of their separate identities
- are not yet able to share easily
- are developing their language abilities; they begin to communicate their needs and wishes more clearly and to understand ‘in a minute’
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- are aware of the feelings of others and can respond to them.

**Aged three to four years**

Children at this age:

- can still be distracted from the cause of their anger
- have tantrums (usually when parents or main carers are present) when frustrated – possibly caused by their efforts to become self-reliant (such as feeding or dressing themselves) or having ideas that the adult does not want them to carry out
- experience a range of feelings – being very affectionate and cooperative one minute and resistant the next
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**Figure 8.01** Children and young people need to know what behaviour is expected of them; they need boundaries

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**Figure 8.01** Children and young people need to know what behaviour is expected of them; they need boundaries
● are more able to express themselves through speech and, therefore, there is often a reduction in physical outbursts; however, they are still likely to hit back if provoked
● can be impulsive and will be less easily distracted
● become more sociable in their play and may have favourite friends
● can sometimes be reasoned with and are just becoming aware of the behaviour codes in different places or situations
● like and seek adult approval and appreciation of their efforts.

**Aged four to five years**

Children now:

● can behave appropriately at mealtimes and during other ‘routine’ activities and may begin to understand why ‘Please’ and ‘Thank you’ (or their equivalents) are important
● are able to share and take turns, but often need help
● are more aware of others’ feelings and will be concerned if someone is hurt
● are becoming more independent and self-assured, but still need adult comfort when ill or tired
● will respond to reason, can negotiate and be adaptable, but can still be distracted
● are sociable and becoming confident communicators able to make more sense of their environment; there will continue to be conflicts that they cannot resolve on their own and with which they will need adult help
● can sometimes be determined, may argue and show aggression.

**Aged five to six years**

Children at this age:

● understand that different rules apply in different places (such as at home, school, grandparents’ house) and can adapt their behaviour accordingly
● are developing control over their feelings – they argue with adults when they feel secure and need to feel there are firm boundaries in place
● will respond to reason and can negotiate, but are less easily distracted – anger can last longer and they need time to calm down
● are able to hide their feelings in some situations
● can cooperate in group play, but are not yet ready for team games
● may show off and boast (for example, when they celebrate an achievement)
● will continue to need adult support to resolve conflicts
● will share and take turns, and begin to have an understanding of what is ‘fair’ if given an explanation.

**Aged six to eight years**

Children now:

● can quickly adapt behaviour to suit the situation
● can play games with rules
● can argue their viewpoints
● are growing in confidence and becoming independent
● are developing some moral values and understanding of ‘right’ and ‘wrong’
● can be friendly and cooperative
● can control how they feel much of the time but there are still times when they want to do things their way and quarrels develop.

**Aged eight to 12 years**

Between these ages, children:

● enjoy playing and inventing games with rules
● tend to be cooperative and enjoy being given responsibility
● tend to be closely attached to parental figures
Factors affecting behaviour

It is well known that behaviour is commonly affected by certain factors. There are some factors that stem from the children and young people themselves:

- illness
- accident and injury
- tiredness.

Other factors result from their situations:

- arrival of a new baby
- moving house
- parental separation or divorce
- change of carer – either at home or in a setting
- loss or bereavement
- change of setting – such as transition from home to nursery or nursery to school.

Individual children and young people will respond to these situations differently but regression is common (usually temporary) when they revert to behaviour that is immature for them. Events that they do not understand will leave them confused, leading to frustration and aggressive outbursts, or they may blame themselves, which could result in withdrawn behaviour and the development of inappropriate habits through anxiety.

Generally, any factor that causes stress may result in the child:

- needing more comfort and attention
- being less sociable
- being unable to cope with tasks that they would normally manage
- being subject to mood swings
- being unable to concentrate (this includes listening to instructions) and less able to cope with challenging situations and difficulties.

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- make friends often with same-gender peers, usually based on proximity, common interests and hobbies; girls tend to have fewer, but emotionally closer, friends than boys.

Aged 12 to 19 years

Children and young people:

- often question rules at home and try to push the boundaries
- may show avoidance behaviours (such as truanting, bullying and behaving disruptively in class), often caused by low self-esteem; some may experience bullying themselves.

Linking behaviour to child development

When assessing children and young people’s behaviour it is important to bear these developmental stages in mind and to view the behaviour in the context of overall development. Here are two examples:

1. It is well known that tantrums are a common, even expected, feature of a two-year-old child’s behaviour. There is bound to be some cause for concern, however, if they are a regular feature of a six-year-old child’s behaviour. However, some adults have unrealistic expectations of children and young people and express surprise when inappropriate behaviour occurs.

2. A five-year-old child becomes fidgety and whines during a Christmas pantomime. The adults will view the occasion as a treat and may feel resentment that their child is complaining, but it is reasonable that a five-year-old should lose concentration, be unable to sit still for a lengthy period or understand all of what is going on.
The benefits of encouraging and rewarding positive behaviour

Positive behaviour management is about using positive rather than negative approaches to encourage children and young people to behave appropriately. Promoting positive behaviour involves:

- setting clear boundaries, which are applied in a calm and consistent way
- encouraging children and young people to make their own choices about behaviour – and to understand the negative consequences if they choose inappropriate behaviour
- setting ‘positive’ rules rather than ‘negative’ ones. Negative rules tend to begin with the word ‘Don’t’, and tell children and young people what they must not do, but do not guide them as to what they may or should do.

Skills and techniques for supporting and encouraging positive behaviour

In trying to understand behaviour, it is helpful to note whether there are particular incidents or situations that seem to trigger inappropriate behaviour. Some of these can be avoided altogether by minor changes in routine or approach, but others, such as siblings teasing each other, will occur frequently; children and young people therefore need to be given strategies and support to be able to cope with them effectively. It is important never to reject the child but only what the child has done (for example, ‘That was an unkind thing to say’ rather than ‘You are unkind’).

The A-B-C of behaviour

- **Antecedent**: what happens before, or leads up to, the observed behaviour.
- **Behaviour**: the observed behaviour – what the child says and how he or she acts (this is any behaviour, both positive and negative).
- **Consequence**: what happens following the observed behaviour.

Part of your role as a practitioner is to observe children and young people’s behaviour, whether or not you make a written record, so that you can contribute to discussions about a child’s behaviour and develop positive practice in managing inappropriate aspects. In your work setting you should try to see not only how other staff and parents deal with incidents, but also which methods seem to be effective with which children or young people.

Using rewards

There are different forms of reward:

- verbal praise (such as ‘Well done’)
- attention – this could be non-verbal (smile of approval, a nod)
- stars or points (for older children) leading to certificates or for group recognition
- sharing success by telling other staff and parents
- own choice of activity or story
- tangible rewards such as stickers.

Rewards work on the principle of positive reinforcement – based on the idea that if children and young people receive approval and/or a reward for behaving acceptably, they are likely to want to repeat that behaviour. If one child is praised (for example, for tidying up) others are often influenced to copy or join in so that they, too, will receive praise and attention. For young children, the reward must be immediate so that they understand the link between it and the positive behaviour. It is of little value to promise a treat or reward in the future. Similarly, star charts and collecting...
points are not appropriate for children younger than five years old.

There are problems associated with rewards in that some children and young people may behave in a particular way purely to receive the reward rather than from an understanding of the need to consider safety, others and their environment or enjoying what they have achieved for its own sake. The type of reward also needs to be considered; for example, is it desirable for children and young people to be given sweets as rewards? Some parents may have strong views about this.

Rewards might work in the short term, but do not always succeed in the long term. They might even undermine lifelong learning by encouraging children and young people to seek reward, rather than be disposed to learn because something is interesting.

Providing an effective role model
Children learn about positive behaviour – such as sharing and saying ‘thank you’ – by watching others. They can also learn about inappropriate behaviours – such as being unwilling to share and swearing – from watching adults. You need to act as a positive role model for children and young people. You can do this by modelling positive behaviour. Children will try to copy your behaviour, so you need to show positive behaviour at all times.

Involving children and young people in decision-making
Children and young people can be involved in helping to devise basic classroom rules, which can then – if wanted – be posted on the wall; some examples are given below.

Golden Rules for positive behaviour
Staff at a nursery drew up a short set of Golden Rules, after discussing them with the children:

- We take care of our things
- We share with each other
- We walk inside
- We listen when someone is talking
- We are kind to each other.

They illustrated the Rules with photos of children behaving appropriately and also showed the relevant Makaton symbols.

Case Study Using rewards
In primary school a new headteacher introduced the regular practice of listening to children read to her. This involved children being sent individually to her office where she would reward them with a jelly bear if they read well or tried hard. One mother was surprised, when talking to her daughter about the school day, that she was upset to have read to her class teacher instead of to the headteacher. The girl explained that everyone was asking to read to the headteacher and she was not chosen – so she missed out on a jelly bear!

The parent was alarmed, firstly that sweets were being given as a reward without parents knowing, and secondly that children were not rewarded by the experience itself and the headteacher’s appreciation of children’s efforts.
Inappropriate behaviour conflicts with the accepted values and beliefs of the setting and of society. Inappropriate behaviour may be demonstrated through speech, writing, non-verbal behaviour or physical abuse and includes:

- attention-seeking
- aggression (both physical and verbal) towards others
- self-destructive behaviour or self-harming.

### Attention-seeking

Children will do just about anything to get the attention they crave from parents and carers. This is often shown through disruptive (making noises, not responding to an instruction) or aggressive behaviour and needs managing as identified below. Sometimes children who are trying to please can be just as disruptive. Those who desperately want adults to notice them will call out, interrupt, ask questions and frequently push in front of other children to show something they have made or done.

#### Strategies for dealing with attention-seeking behaviour

Children who seek attention challenge patience but with some reminding about turn-taking, and clear expectation that they will do so, they can learn to wait for their turn. It is important to give attention when they have waited appropriately so that they are encouraged to do so again. Practitioners could try the following strategies:

- whenever possible ignoring attention-seeking behaviour, unless their attention is drawn to it (perhaps by another child) as the message sent then is that it is acceptable to behave in that way
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Case Study  A lack of consistency

Callum is in nursery class. He is an energetic, popular and sociable boy, aged two-and-a-half years. The room leader, Joanne, has a particular soft spot for Callum as she was a friend with his Mum before he started at the nursery. Lately, Callum has begun to disrupt the class by running around during quieter times and meal times. He has recently dropped his afternoon nap at Mum’s request, and is very noisy and boisterous when the other children are trying to sleep. Joanne is usually in the office during this naptime after lunch, and leaves Fiona in charge of the running of the room. Fiona adopts a firm line with Callum. She takes him aside, gets down to his level and tells him clearly why he cannot make noise and run around, and what behaviour she expects from him. She also takes the opportunity to go with him to find quiet games to play while the others are asleep. This works well for a little while, but usually Callum needs a few reminders before he accepts. Occasionally, as a treat, he is allowed to go and play outside with the pre-school children (if they have room for him) but Fiona will not allow this unless Callum is behaving well.

However, Fiona has noticed that when Callum is being disruptive and Joanne is in the room, she adopts a different approach. First Joanne will tell him to stop, but when he does not respond, she leaves the room – taking him with her to ‘help’ her run errands, saying to the other staff members that he is bored and that is why he is not behaving well. Fiona views this as rewarding inappropriate behaviour, and finds that after it has happened a few times, Callum becomes increasingly difficult to control, and becomes easily upset and tearful. He stops responding so positively to Fiona’s technique, and requires one-to-one attention at a time when staff members are trying to settle ten other children for their naps, as well as supply play for the few children who, like Callum, no longer have daytime naps.

1 What do the staff need to do to rectify this situation?
2 Why do you think that Callum is now becoming upset easily?
3 Do you think that Callum’s ‘treat’ of running errands is making him happy in the long run?
4 Why is it unfair on children when there is inconsistency in discipline techniques?

- giving attention and praise to another child who is behaving acceptably
- distracting the child’s attention; (Distraction is particularly appropriate with younger children) or removing him or her to another activity or group
- expressing disapproval – verbally and/or non-verbally through body language, facial expression (frowning) and shaking of the head
- using a sanction – withdrawal of a privilege (such as removing a toy or activity).

Physical aggression

This usually results from strong feelings that are difficult to control. Whatever the cause – and it may be provocation – the adult should deal with it calmly and ensure that the needs of all the children and young people involved are met. A
child who has lost control frightens herself and the other children and young people.

**Strategies for dealing with aggressive behaviour**

**Time out:** This involves the child who has been aggressive being taken to an identified place away from the incident – a corner or chair. ‘Time out’ allows for a calming-down period and for other children and young people to be reassured. This method can work but needs positive follow-up by a staff member to explain that the behaviour was unacceptable, explain why and suggest how the child might have behaved otherwise; for example, asked instead of snatched, or listened to the apology for the model being broken. (See pp.xx for more information on using Time Out as a sanction).

**How to respond when a child bites**

This is when a child biting is inappropriate. Try to think why the child has bitten. Ask the following questions to help you to understand why it has happened:

- When and where did it happen?
- Who with?
- What happened before?
- What happened afterwards?
- How do you think the child feels?

Many settings develop a ‘biting policy’ and produce a leaflet with guidelines to support both parents and practitioners. It is not when a baby bites down as a reflex action or a young child uses their mouth to explore new objects.

**Strategies for dealing with a child who bites**

- Comfort and take care of child who has been bitten, in a ‘low-key’ calm way. Tell the bitten child, ‘That must be sore, let’s get a cold cloth’.
- To the biter, say firmly, but gently, ‘It’s not OK to bite, because biting hurts. If you want to

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**Case Study**

Aidan’s behaviour

Aidan had recently started in the reception class and displayed inappropriate behaviour in many different ways and situations. On arrival in the playground in the mornings, with both his parents and younger sister, he would walk around poking and kicking other children. This caused anger among other parents, upset among the children, and ill feeling towards his parents who would shout at him before grabbing him, holding him by the hand and telling him off loudly. The staff discussed this with the parents and it was agreed that, in the short term, Aidan should be brought to school ten minutes later than everyone else. Every morning the father would deliver him to the classroom door with the instruction, ‘Behave’.

Aidan always said that he would; however, he did not really understand what ‘behave’ meant in terms of his own actions. His teacher made a point of reminding him, throughout the day, of what behaviour was expected and explained what that meant for him; for example, ‘When I ask you to “sit nicely”, this means sitting still without touching any other child or anything.’ It was also an opportunity to reinforce the rule for other children. Improvement was very gradual. Only one aspect of behaviour was dealt with at a time. He was given one-to-one support when available and observations were recorded to monitor progress and plan future strategies.

1. How did Aidan’s teacher help him to change his behaviour?
2. In pairs produce some simple rules for four to five-year-olds in a reception class that give clear guidance about what they should do – rather than what they should not do. For example, DO walk sensibly in the classroom (instead of DO NOT run in the classroom).
bite, you can bite a biscuit or a toy, but I can’t let you bite Martha’.

- Encourage the biter to ‘make amends’ in some way – to help get the cold cloth or a teddy for comfort.

**Progress check**

Managing the behaviour of a child who bites

- Try to offer positive attention and affection to the ‘biter’ throughout the day.
- Provide snacks and drinks regularly.
- Make sure there is more than one of a favourite toy so there is a smaller chance of the child becoming frustrated.
- Arrange the room to make space for play.
- Show the child how to negotiate and take turns.
- Be aware of any changes taking place at home, and help the child to deal with these by talking sensitively with them about it.

Temper tantrums

These are usually associated with two-year-olds but can occur in older children or young people. In fact, many people would not describe tantrums as inappropriate behaviour in toddlers. They may happen particularly when a child is ill or tired, but often build from a confrontational incident when he or she is asked to do something, or not to do something and a battle of wills begins! Temper tantrums often involve shouting and crying, refusal to cooperate and mounting anger – shown through kicking, hitting, screaming, stamping – and, on occasions, self-harm. In younger children tantrums can be over very quickly but in older ones can take longer to reach a peak and longer to calm down afterwards.

**Unacceptable language**

This includes swearing and name-calling that often result from children and young people repeating what they have themselves heard. Sometimes they are unaware that it is unacceptable in one setting but not another. In these cases they need to be told firmly not to say those words ‘here’ – you cannot legislate for language they may use at home or criticise their families. Some children and young people will deliberately use unacceptable language to shock or seek attention. In these cases you should state the rule calmly and firmly.

**Dealing with tantrums**

- **Try to avoid them** – if you can anticipate them, try distracting the child with a game or another activity.
- **Try to ignore them** – apart from safety concerns, try to give as little attention as possible during the tantrum.
- **Be consistent** – if children and young people think, from past experience, that the adult will not keep the boundary firmly, they will continue to tantrum; clear boundaries are essential.
- **A firm hug** may help the child feel secure and under control until the child calms down – this is useful in situations where you cannot walk away.
- **Talk about them** – this may help older children and young people to express their feelings calmly.
- **Provide experiences and activities** that the child finds interesting; this usually helps children and young people to become involved in positive ways.
- **Do not give in and let the boundary go** – this almost certainly leads to more rather than fewer tantrums because children and young people are confused by inconsistency.
Truancy
A truant is a child aged between 5 and 16 who fails to attend school and does not have a legitimate reason for being absent. Every year hundreds of thousands of UK students play truant. Some of the reasons that students engage in truancy include:
- Being bullied at school
- Problems in the family home
- Undiagnosed behavioural or emotional problems
- General dislike of school
- An inability to do coursework or to ask for help
- Peer pressure
- Exclusions that leave them with little interest in attending school

Children who miss school are missing out on social interaction, which can affect their ability to make friends. The instances of truancy may be limited to one or two individuals in a school or it can be attributed to a gang of pupils who have the same disliking for school. Sometimes the children or young people who are playing truant are placed in the care of a learning mentor who may be able to help them learn and to establish the underlying cause of truancy. Parents may have to sign up to a parenting contract. This written agreement is entered into by the parents of the child playing truant and also the local authority and school. The agreement is not a legal document, but it may help parents to understand and deal with any behavioural issues that their child may have.

Self-harming
‘Deliberate Self-Harm’ is a term used when someone intentionally injures or harms themselves. This can take a number of forms including:
- cutting or burning
- taking overdoses of tablets or medicines
- pulling out hair or eyelashes
- scratching, picking or tearing at skin, causing sores and scarring
- head-banging.

There are many reasons why a child or young person deliberately self-harms. Young people who are depressed, have an eating disorder, or other serious mental health problem are at greater risk, as are young people who take illegal drugs or excessive amounts of alcohol. Self-harm is often kept secret, but the young person may often appear withdrawn or irritable, and may refuse to wear short sleeves or to take off clothing for sports, because of scarring on their arms. Self-harming usually signals some emotional difficulty that needs expert intervention. Staff and parents need to discuss their concerns and agree a common approach based on the advice they are given.

The use of sanctions
A sanction is designed to discourage inappropriate behaviour. To be effective however, it must also protect the practitioner’s relationship with the child and safeguard the child’s self-esteem. Examples of sanctions to be used with young children include:
- A non-verbal signal: for example, a frown or shake of head can be very effective.
- A minute’s withdrawal (timed with a timer to ensure fairness) from the activity or group.
- Time out: It is important that ‘time out’ is used appropriately, and only when essential (see below).

When children misbehave, the adult responsible at the time should deal with it and, whenever possible, issue rebukes and sanctions in private. Children should always receive a warning before a sanction is imposed, to give them the chance to cooperate.
Support children and young people’s positive behaviour

Time out

Time out involves removing the child from whatever they are doing and insisting that he or she sits in a safe place and takes part in a quiet activity for a period of time. Unless this is done there is a danger that the chair (or area) becomes known to the children as the ‘naughty chair’ and staff begin to use it as a way of ‘grounding’ a child who is causing annoyance without really addressing the issues. Many adults do not like to use this approach for this reason. The supervising adult in these circumstances should:

- **ignore the child, offering no eye contact or conversation**: This gives the child time to calm down – to think and reflect on his or her behaviour.
- **time the Time Out**: The length of time out should ideally match the age of the child; for example, for a three-year-old child use three minutes.
- **invite the child to return**: The child should be invited to return after the Time Out, and to agree to behave appropriately if he or she wants to rejoin the wider group.
- **praise the child**: If the child then behaves appropriately in the next few minutes, the adult should offer approval and praise.

Examples of other sanctions

Sanctions often used in schools with young people include the following (from least severe to most severe):

- a verbal warning
- pupil moved to another seat
- punishment exercise
- pupil moved to another classroom
- detention
- referred to a senior member of staff
- excluded from class.

Key term

**Sanction** – A course of action that can be used if necessary to make people obey a rule or behave in a particular way.

Reflective practice: Rewards and sanctions

What kinds of reward systems have you observed in schools and nursery settings? How did the children respond to them? Were some rewards more effective than others? How did children respond to sanctions or to you threatening to use them?

Referring inappropriate behaviour to others

Sometimes the behaviour management strategies outlined above fail to be effective, or are only effective for a short period of time. If inappropriate behaviour is linked to the child or young person’s development, is temporary and capable of being managed within the setting, then there is no need to refer to a professional.

When to refer

Practitioners may need to refer the following types of inappropriate behaviour:

- behaviour that is inappropriate for the child’s stage of development: e.g. a child over four years old who continues biting, or an older child who hits other children or is physically aggressive in other ways
- Self-harming behaviour
- Bullying

There are other professionals who may be called upon to help all those involved. It is useful for senior practitioners to attend meetings which allow everyone to contribute information about a
child; these will help to create an overall view of progress, development and behaviour and it is here that recorded observations will be especially useful. It is important to follow correct procedures for reporting incidents.

Professionals who may become involved include the following:

- **Health visitors** work primarily with children up to five years and their families, checking for healthy growth and development.
- **Play therapists** have specialist training and work with children through play to help them feel emotionally secure.
- **Paediatricians** are doctors who specialise in the care of children and young people up to the age of 16, to check for normal development and diagnose difficulties.
- **Educational psychologists** assess children and young people who have special needs, and give advice, particularly for those with emotional and behavioural difficulties.

- **Child psychiatrists** work with children and young people and their families to help them to express their thoughts and feelings.

### Assessment practice

**Promoting children and young people’s positive behaviour**

Check that you know what the policies and procedures are for promoting positive behaviour in your work setting. Describe the boundaries and rules used in your setting to promote positive behaviour, and explain why staff should apply these consistently and fairly.

### Sharing experiences

Discuss how staff in your setting deal with inappropriate behaviour. Do you feel that the methods used are generally effective?