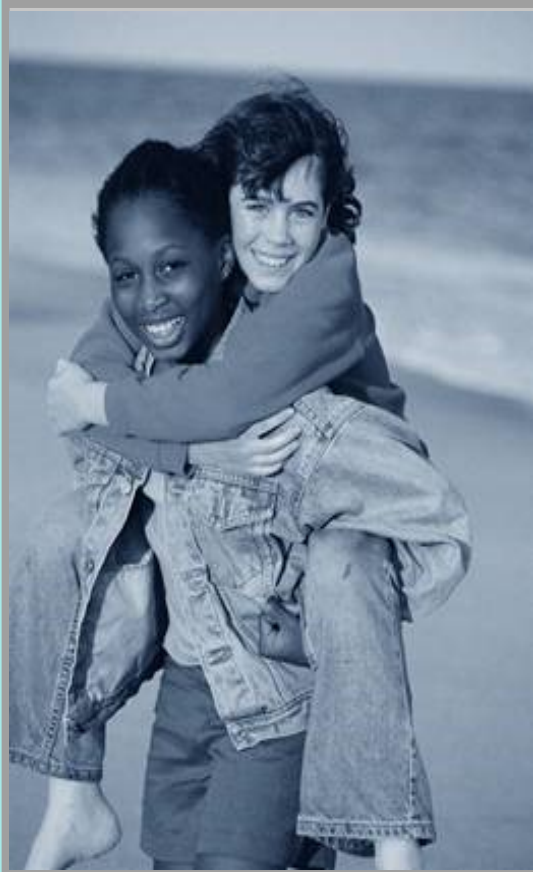


## Theme Week 2



Thinking of a child as  
“behaving badly” leads us  
to think of punishment

Thinking of a child as  
“struggling to handle  
something difficult”  
encourages us to support  
them through their distress



# Thinking about Challenging Behaviour

At this time, lots of children and young people are really unsettled, unsure and worried – just like lots of adults. Unlike lots of adults, they don't have the life experience and words, so what we get is '**show not tell**', of their emotions and behaviours.

# Behaviour as Communication in Unusual Times

We are currently in a situation that nobody has been in before. Firstly it's important to remember that we are only human and any emotion is OK!

It is understandable that adults and children alike may be finding this time challenging. Although we're all in this together, we aren't all affected in the same way. Some people will be experiencing financial challenges and job losses, whilst others will be finding more work or school pressures are leading to them feeling stressed, and many will be experiencing emotional challenges.

It is likely that as a result of this, many of us will be expressing our emotions through changes in our behaviour. We may be more short-tempered than usual, our sleep patterns and routines may be disrupted, or we may find that we're actually more relaxed at the moment and able to engage in more self-care activities than normal.

**Remember the most important thing is to be kind to yourself: changes in behaviour are normal.**



## Some Behaviours you may Notice in your Children (as a result of change / due to school closures)

Many of these are taken from parental reports during the current crisis

Changes in behaviour that may concern you.....	Changes in behaviour that you may be pleased to see.....
<p>Mood swings, low mood</p> <p>Going backwards in skills, e.g. toileting, dressing</p> <p>Being lethargic</p> <p>Change in sleep patterns (more or less)</p> <p>More meltdowns/tantrums</p> <p>Less resilience (get upset more easily)</p> <p>Crying more</p> <p>Anxiety (particularly around the virus)</p> <p>Changes in eating habits and appetite</p> <p>Changes in personal hygiene practices</p> <p>Less patience</p> <p>Opting out of social contact (even where this is available)</p> <p>Trying to control the controllable (diet, appearance etc)</p> <p>Not wanting to talk much</p> <p>Confused about their feelings or unable to say how they feel</p>	<p>Calmer</p> <p>Better bonds with brothers and sisters</p> <p>Happier</p> <p>Better able to talk about worries.</p> <p>More creative</p> <p>More able to sort things out for themselves</p> <p>More independent and able to amuse themselves</p> <p>More energy</p>





# Comfort, Stretch & Panic Zones

Another model which may explain the reason behind challenging behaviour is the Comfort/Stretch/Panic Model. We all have our own zones based on our own experiences and tolerances.



## The Comfort Zone

This is where our normal day to day routines take place. For young people this can be as simple as waking up in the morning, getting ready and going to school (something that isn't happening in the current climate!) The Comfort Zone is a comfortable and safe place. There are no surprises in the Comfort Zone. Very little learning or innovation takes place here though and it is easy to become unmotivated or bored. Think back to before the pandemic, did you find some of your children showed much more challenging behaviour during periods of uncertainty such as school holidays? If yes, this is because they were being taken out of their comfort zone. Children enjoy routine and when routine isn't in place it can cause some children to feel uneasy.

The Comfort Zone plays a crucial part for us and many of us will need to take time in our comfort zone from time to time to experience a sense of calmness.

## Panic Zone

The Panic Zone is otherwise known as the Stress Zone. This is where we become overly anxious and fearful and unable to experience new things due to putting energy into dealing with the anxiety. We all go into our Panic Zone now and again, when faced in a situation where we feel we can't deal with it. We may find young people go into panic when they read things on the news which scare them, or they think about going back to school.

The Panic Zone can be harmful to our health so sometimes taking a step back and doing some breathing exercises can allow us to feel less overwhelmed and hopefully return us

## The Stretch Zone

**Many of us will be in our Stretch Zone at the minute, children and adults alike.**

The Stretch Zone is what lies just outside the secure environment. This is where we experience new and different things and move away from our feeling of safety. It is a crucial element to allow us to learn and a great way to build resilience. When we are in our Stretch Zone, we are able to expand our Comfort Zone. We become more familiar with different experiences and it allows us to grow.

We are experiencing something we never have before and this is where a lot of uncertainty and fear lies. We may find that due to having no routine at the moment, we are experiencing high levels of challenge. It may be the case that we are presenting our feelings through irritability, sadness, anger etc. Some of us may be thriving in the Stretch Zone and enjoying new challenges.

**Remember, everyone's Comfort, Stretch and Panic Zones are individual to them**

# Beneath the Surface

You'll have heard of the phrase 'tip of the iceberg', meaning that there's lots underneath something we don't see. When we see people behaving in emotional ways, we generally think it is something to do with what has just happened. But there's usually more to it than that.

When someone is angry, for example, it's often because they are stressed about lots of things, frustrated they can't change things and don't know what else to do.

The picture here shows us that when we see something like your child being very angry and 'lashing out', there could be so much else going on underneath that which we can't see.

It's our job as parents and carers to try to figure out what is going on below the surface of the behaviour so we can change things and help our children to find better ways of coping.

It's a good idea to start to think what is a child telling us when they show us these sort of behaviours – without the words.



# Responding to Challenging Behaviour

- ◇ We can help our children, even when we are not feeling our best.
- ◇ We can take a moment, step back and think about what we have seen or noticed in them, and we can reflect.
- ◇ Having a list of questions, we ask ourselves and our children can help with this, so we have compiled some questions which may be useful in these situations.
- ◇ You may choose to use these questions in response to a specific situation (e.g. argument/conflict, a temper tantrum, episode of crying) or you may use them more generally to review how things are going or think about more general concerns.



- ◆ What's really important though – remember this should happen at a time your child is happy to talk and when they are calm (not in the middle of conflict or an argument).
- ◆ In the middle of an argument or conflict, it's best to stay calm, and say something like "I understand that you are feeling really wound up, and it's best we both take a bit of time to be calm and then I promise I will listen to you and we will work this out". ([This video](#) from IntraQuest provides some really useful skills for validating children's feelings: also summarised as a [document here](#))
- ◆ The questions are a helpful starting point. Using them with children will be different for different ages. Teenagers might like an adult style conversation or even 'be in charge' of the questions. Younger children might be helped by pictures.







# Responding to Challenging Behaviour



## 1st Step: What am I doing?

### **What has happened? (if a specific situation)**

Be specific and factual—this is what has happened not what I think/feel might have happened

### **What am I thinking about what's happened?**

It is particularly important to be aware of any negative thoughts, eg: 'They're trying to wind me up', 'I'm no good at home schooling'

### **How am I feeling?**

Anxious? Angry? Fed up? Need some help? Calm? Out of control? Out of ideas? Stressed?

### **How did I react / how am I reacting?**

#### **Do I think reactions are helping/hindering the problem/situation?**

Is this how I would normally react? Are my current thoughts and feelings affecting my responses?

### **Am I coping with the situation?**

Do I need some help? Who would normally help me?

### **How can I make things better? What do I need?**

What do I need to do to feel better?

## 2nd Step: What do I think they're doing?

### **What is the problem behaviour/situation?**

Again be factual and specific

### **What is my child probably thinking? (\*think about Iceberg)**

Are they likely to see the situation in the same way you do?

Do they understand your expectations?

Do they think they can control/change things with their behaviour?

### **What is my child probably feeling? (\*think about Iceberg)**

Ashamed? Down? Confused? Worried? Bored?

### **Can I think of a likely reason for their behaviour?**

Does it seem typical given the current situation/age?

Are other children experiencing similar difficulties?

Could you talk to other parents about their children?

Do they need attention/reassurance?

### **Does my child know how to communicate their feelings/thoughts? What can I do to help them?**

\*Look at rating scale in this pack

### **What could I realistically expect child to do differently?**

Think about their age and current skills

### **What could I think my child could do to make things better?**

How are they going to fix things—what help will they need to repair things and make it better?

Does your child truly feel sorry, if not they may need some help to understand feelings of regret. It's better to talk about putting things right and repair damage especially if there are things that were broken.

## 3rd Step: Talking it over (with your child)

### **What has happened? (if a specific situation)**

Encourage them to be specific and factual

### **What are you thinking?**

Younger children will find this tricky and may not be able to answer—don't worry if this is the case. Let them hear what you're thinking about it

### **What are you feeling?**

\*See picture cards and rating scales in this pack

### **IF A PROBLEM BEHAVIOUR**

#### **Did what you chose to do make things better?**

If not discuss what they could have chosen to do instead

#### **Did what you chose to do hurt anyone or damage anything?**

If not discuss what they could have chosen to do instead

### **[MORE GENERALLY] (\*Use rating scale in pack)**

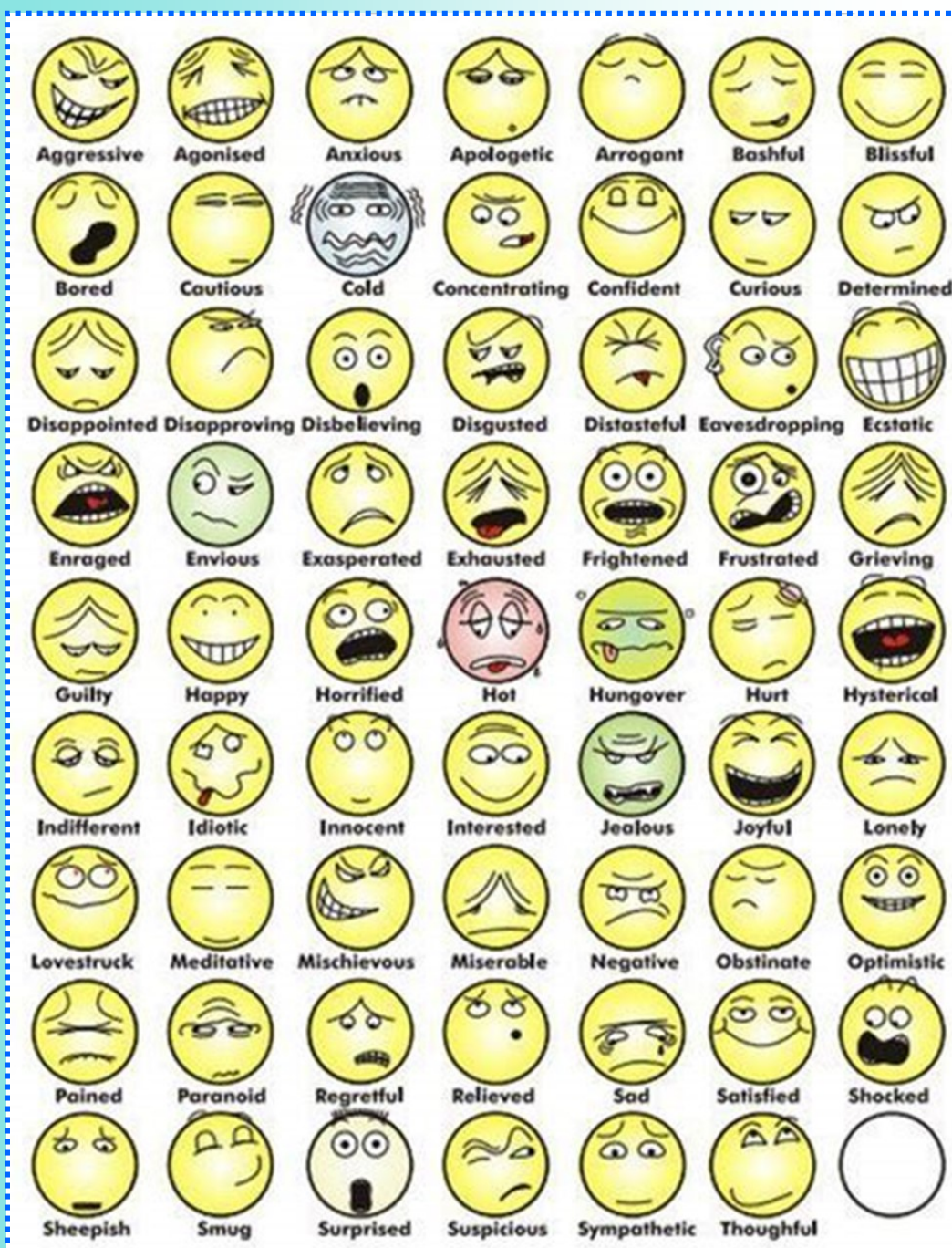
#### **What is going well?**

#### **What is not going so well?**

#### **What do you need to make things better? How could you put things right?**

If there has been a particular incident this is the time to talk about hurt feelings and think about what will help different people feel better—some people like a care, some like us to do helpful things for them etc. It is important that children have the opportunity to repair harm or upset caused.

# There are thousands of emotions....



Rate how you are feeling / rate your week



Try starting a conversation by asking your child to think about their week.

This may give you some sense of where they're at and open up ways to talk about how they're feeling. The pictures opposite and these scales might help.

Rate how you are feeling / rate your week





# Coping Strategies

In the current climate, coping strategies are more important than ever. Having minimal coping strategies can make us feel overwhelmed, irritable, angry. As a result, we find challenging behaviour becomes more prominent when there is a lack of coping strategies in place.

At the moment, we might need to think outside of the box for our coping strategies. Coping strategies that young people may have had in the past such as seeing their friends, going to a sports club or even going to school aren't available due to lockdown rules. This may be a reason why some young people may be portraying much more challenging behaviour.

It's important that we find new coping strategies. A programme we teach in primary schools Zippy/Apple/Passport has given us some great tips to finding a good coping strategy, and they're something everyone can use! Effective coping strategies must follow two rules; They must make you feel better and they mustn't hurt yourself or other people.



You may want to consult our previous document 'Healthy Lifestyles' for some ideas around coping strategies. You could also explore what coping strategies you or your child would normally use and then look for creative alternatives. i.e: Seeing friends at Mahdlo may be replaced by online sessions by Oldham Youth Service; football teams may be replaced by online challenge videos such as the 'keepie-up' challenge; going to the park to see friends may be replaced by video calls on parents' phones or Youth Sport Trust 60 Second Challenges.