

Using Re-direction to Support Positive Behaviour

Redirection is a technique that involves changing the focus of a child's attention from an undesirable behaviour to a more positive one. It interrupts and redirects a child's challenging behaviour and attempts to calm them down and avoid further conflict.

With redirecting, the caregiver is still in control, but the child feels like they are too. This helps the child feel more secure, making them less likely to continue the negative behaviour.

Redirecting behaviour can be used when the child is engaging in a behaviour that is:

- Inappropriate
- Harmful
- Disruptive
- Unsafe
- Destructive

Redirecting will look different based on the situation and the child's age. However, it acknowledges the child's feelings, gives them choices, and helps them find a more constructive way to express themselves.

Redirection techniques can defuse a tense moment, prevent the child's behaviour from escalating, and teach the child how to cope more positively.

How to redirect children's behaviour

By redirecting, caregivers can minimize disruptions and promote a positive learning environment. Try the below strategies to help redirect children from challenging behaviours to more positive ones.

- **Give them a choice** - Giving children a choice gives them a sense of value and also helps build their confidence. For example, if a child is hitting someone, offer them a choice of a cushion or soft toy to hit instead. Alternatively you may offer a drum or tambourine that allows them to use the same actions but for a more appropriate purpose..
- **Ignore the behaviour** - For children seeking attention, sometimes the best thing you can do is to ignore it. If the child is seeking attention, they will eventually stop if they are not getting the desired reaction. After ignoring them, give positive attention when the child behaves appropriately.

- **Use a distraction** - If you can't ignore the behaviour, distract the child with something else. For example, if a child is trying to take another child's toy, try offering them another toy to play with.
- **Redirect their energy** - If the child is bursting with energy, redirect them to alternative activity where they can burn some energy. For example, if they are running around inside, redirect them by taking them to a safer place to run around, such as outside or provide some 'heavy work' activities.

Redirecting behaviour examples

There are different types of redirection techniques that caregivers can use to reinforce positive behaviour. Below are some examples of both verbal and physical ways to redirect children's behaviour.

Verbal redirection examples

Here are some examples of statements to verbally redirect a challenging behaviour:

- *"I see you're feeling frustrated. Let's take a break and return to this in a few minutes."*
- *"It looks like you're having difficulty staying in your seat. Why don't we try taking a quick walk around the room before sitting down again?"*
- *"It looks like you're having a lot of fun with that toy. But now it's time for our friend to have a turn."*
- *"Throwing toys is not safe. Let's go and throw a ball around instead."*
- *"Let's use our inside voices to answer the question."*

Physical redirection examples

Here are some examples of how you might redirect a child's behaviour using physical redirection by offering an alternative behaviour to the child:

- If a child is running around the room, you might say, *"It's time to walk now."* Then, take their hand and help them walk.
- If a child is hitting a toy, you might say, *"Let's use gentle hands,"* and then demonstrate how to play with the toy gently.
- If a child is biting, you might say, *"Here, bite this instead,"* and offer them a teething ring to chew on.
- If a child is climbing on furniture, you might say, *"It's not safe to climb on furniture. Let's climb on the climbing frame."* This shows them an alternative behaviour that is more appropriate.

- If a child is throwing a tantrum, you might say, “*I can see you are upset/angry*”. and then help them find a quiet place to sit or lie down.

Pros and cons of redirecting behaviour

Even though redirecting behaviour can be a successful technique to support positive behaviour, there are pros and cons to using this approach. So it is important to consider both sides before deciding whether or not to use it in a specific situation.

Pros:

- **Prevents further escalation of the behaviour:** Some behaviour, if left unchecked, will escalate and become much more challenging to deal with. Redirecting the behaviour early on prevents this from happening.
- **Allows the child to avoid embarrassment:** Redirection can be used in public without embarrassing the child, which is often a concern with other behaviour management techniques such as scolding or sending a child to time-out.
- **Provides a teaching moment:** Redirecting shows the child a more appropriate way to behave. This is often more effective than simply telling the child what not to do because it provides them with a model to follow.
- **Is not a punishment:** Correcting a behaviour through redirection is often more effective than a negative consequence, such as sending a child to time-out or taking away a privilege. This technique helps to encourage a particular behaviour in a positive way.

Cons:

- **Does not address the root cause:** Redirecting behaviour does not always address the underlying cause of the behaviour. For example, if the child misbehaving because they are feeling frustrated, angry, or anxious, simply redirecting the behaviour will not address these emotions.
- **Can be challenging to do ‘in the moment’:** It requires a lot of patience and practice to effectively redirect a child's behaviour in the heat of the moment.
- **May be confusing for the child:** If the child is not used to this technique, they may not understand why their behaviour is being redirected. This may lead to frustration or confusion.
- **Does not always work:** Some children will not respond to this technique no matter how often it is used. In these cases, consider other behaviour management techniques.

It is helpful to remember:

Young children don't engage in "bad" behaviour for the sake of being troublemakers. Instead, behaviours such as hitting, shouting, and crying stem from the child having 'big' feelings but not yet having the 'tools' to express and manage those feelings.

Remember that challenging behaviour is not personal. The child is not doing it to spite you or to be difficult. They are still learning how to manage their emotions and navigate their feelings.

Punishment for problem behaviours is rarely going to get to the heart of the problem. Nor is it going to help a child learn how to change their behaviour. When you use redirection, you don't just tell them a problem behaviour is not acceptable - you also show them a positive alternative.