

Social behaviour and friendships: strategies for managing behaviour and developing social skills

Professor Sue Buckley and Gillian Bird
Down Syndrome Education International

The key to social inclusion

Children can only learn socially acceptable behaviour and social skills in a positive learning environment with positive role models



Supporting full social inclusion

- I want to draw attention to three aspects of social inclusion
- Building the child's self-esteem and confidence
- Supporting friendships
- Encouraging age-appropriate social behaviour and avoiding behaviour difficulties
- Full social inclusion is sometimes overlooked – and the child always 'different'

Building self-esteem and confidence

- Success builds self-esteem and confidence – success is not easy to achieve when child has a disability
- Learning needs to be fun and support success
- Child needs to be given responsibilities – not always being helped (taking messages, tidying, taking register, helping younger children, caring for pets, laying the table – same as other children)
- Child needs to be given choices – to feel a sense of control over his/her world

Friendships

- Reciprocal – shared interest and activities
- Acceptance, loyalty, commitment, genuineness, common interests, intimacy
- Friends
 - share experiences
 - do things together
 - take care of each other
 - like one another



Need for a range of friendships
Friends with a disability – for identity and adjustment in teenage years

Breaking down barriers to social inclusion

Limited spoken language for sharing lives and making friends

- – use communication supports
make books – my family, weekend trip, holiday, news - using photos, pictures, postcards so that child can share his/her life with other students despite limited language
- Conversation diary – events and activities to be shared as well as help to improve spoken language

Breaking down barriers to social inclusion

Limited social and play skills for age

Structure shared activities with mainstream peers at some play or break times –

- ensure that the activity is one the child with a disability can do competently and enjoys. Other children must play the game at that level to ensure the child is able to participate
- Modelling and scaffolding – by adults for the other children – adult role models matter
- Buddy systems, lunch time clubs

Friendships need active planning and support

- Parents need to take initiative out of school
- BUDDY SYSTEMS
- CIRCLES OF FRIENDS – need to extend beyond school
- PSE curriculum – an opportunity to discuss
- DRAMA, SPORT, LEISURE SKILLS will help – encourage a wide range of social activities
- Social skills and confidence are learned in social situations
- PARTICIPATION is the key

Why does behaviour matter?

A person's behaviour affects ...

- the way other people behave towards us
- happiness, opportunities and quality of life
- friendships and other relationships
- ability to learn and participate in the 'mainstream'
- likelihood of finding gainful employment
- likelihood of living independently



Behaviour issues – behaviour matters!

1. The majority of children with Down syndrome have good social understanding and empathy.
2. They understand how people feel and behave, they are quite capable of behaving in an age-appropriate and socially appropriate manner if that is what is expected of them at home and at school.
3. However, they can also use this good social understanding to be naughty – they know how to get the reaction they want from someone else – child or adult!

Research into incidence

1. Children with Down syndrome have similar levels of behaviour difficulties to typically developing children of same mental age
2. They have fewer difficult behaviours than others of same chronological age with similar level of learning difficulties (but not Down syndrome)
3. They will have more behaviour difficulties than same-age typically developing peers – mainly due to cognitive and speech and language delays. This matters for inclusion.

Research findings – some implications

- In the classroom, at home and in the community we want age-appropriate behaviour if the child is going to be fully included (not the behaviour of a younger child)
- Behaviour may improve more slowly as progress in communication is going more slowly, so behaviours which are developmentally OK (i.e. understandable) may become habits and/or become reinforced
- Some 'difficult' or 'attention seeking behaviours are common in primary age children

Research findings – some implications

- We need to teach new skills to help behaviour to move forward – the child may get 'stuck' developmentally
- Research shows that behaviour difficulties decrease with age and most teenagers and adults with Down syndrome have good social behaviour. However, while difficult behaviours last some are distressing at home and/or school – for example, running away, attention seeking or disruptive behaviours, non-compliance, sleeping problems, – and these are quite common in primary years.

Some children do not improve with age

- However, a small group – some 12-15% - have persistent behaviour difficulties, causing stress in the family and disrupting their educational and social opportunities.
- This is a serious issue and largely preventable.
- Some children with Down syndrome are not expected to behave well – it is easy to 'baby' them at home and at school i.e. not to expect or require age appropriate behaviour.

Children who are more vulnerable

1. A small group may have autistic difficulties or ADHD, and these conditions will have the same effect as they do for other children and should be treated accordingly.
2. A small group – some 10-12% have more severe cognitive delays than is typical and some of this group will have very limited communication skills.
3. Any child who is afraid, feels unable to cope with demands, fears failing, feels unwanted, senses negative emotions, cannot express distress

Prevention – have high expectations

- It is essential that everyone encourages and expects age –appropriate social behaviour – the ability to follow social rules and not disrupt family or classroom life
- e.g. eat meals with family, go to bed at fixed time, behave in acceptable manner in shops, restaurants, wear safety harness in car, wait turn, no running away, in school, can sit quietly at story time and in assembly, take turns, follow class rules, line up at bell – no running.

Prevention is better than cure

- Prevention – many difficulties can be prevented by settled daily routines for feeding and sleeping from the first year of life
- It is very important that parents establish sense of control from early and recognise importance of this.
- Later, many difficulties may be prevented by a change in routine and a change in adult behaviour at home or at school as the behaviours are predictable.

Changing difficult behaviours

- ADULT BEHAVIOUR MUST CHANGE IF YOU WANT CHILD BEHAVIOUR TO CHANGE.
- This may need a high level of support especially when problems have existed for a long time.
- Everyone concerned with the child must agree to act in a consistent manner or behaviour will not change.
- Time spent on planning how to change behaviour is essential and must involve everyone in contact with child reaching a consensus and working together.

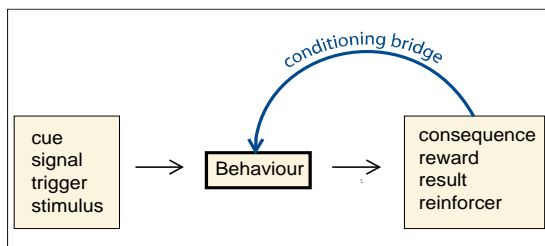
Understanding difficult behaviours

- MANAGEMENT – DIFFICULT BEHAVIOURS CONTINUE BECAUSE THEY ARE REINFORCED
- Children repeat difficult behaviours because of the reaction they get
- It may be the attention, it may be a sense of control
- It is great fun to make an adult react the way you want – a power game for a child who has little real power in their daily life (e.g. stopping class and making teacher react to you).

A behaviour modification approach

- We always use a behaviour modification approach – observe behaviour over at least a week and record accurately every difficult behaviour and what happens before and after the behaviour.
- This information often suggests a solution. We may be able to change a routine to prevent the behaviour occurring or we can see how the behaviour is being rewarded and change that.
- BEHAVIOUR CHANGE TAKES TIME AND CONSISTENCY – MOST PROGRAMMES FAIL DUE TO SABOTAGE OR STOPPING TOO SOON.

Understanding and changing behaviour



Functional analysis

Observe and analyse the child behaviour in order to identify:

- the type of behaviours which are happening
- the frequency with which these behaviours occur
- The circumstances in which these behaviours occur
- the consequences which follow these behaviours

Following the observations

A meeting of all involved with the child to discuss:

- Function(s) of behaviour
- Alternative/replacement behaviours
- Preventative/proactive strategies
- New responses to target behaviour
- How to measure progress
- Training needs
- Resources required
- Develop behaviour plan



General strategies for responding to difficult behaviours

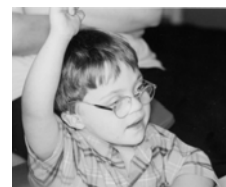
- Attention should be withdrawn both verbally and non-verbally ('emotional ignoring')
- Social interaction should be resumed, without reference to the inappropriate behaviour after 30 seconds (or so)
- Discussion of bad behaviour should be avoided completely – discussion gives room for negotiation, social interaction, displays of emotion are rewarding

General strategies for responding to difficult behaviours

- Calm, consistent responses and consequences
- Always consider consequences from child's perspective
- Provide opportunities for positive attention and praise as soon as possible
- Personal reward systems – need to do motivator assessment
- Social stories
- Clear visual communication systems
- Calm, uncluttered, quiet environments

Common mistakes

- Talking too much (explanation)
- Stopping too soon
- Inconsistency
- Inappropriate reinforcement – giving in
- Sabotage
- Babying
- Accommodating
- – e.g. not taking shopping



Positive planning is the key to change

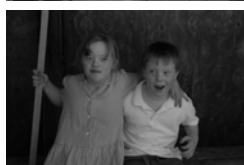
- Review the child's day – are they having a good time? Are we planning for fun and learning?
- Focus on teaching the behaviours you want – it is very important to model and encourage appropriate behaviour
- Keep child busy – especially at the times the difficult behaviour was happening
- Have a plan for how to react when difficult behaviour does occur – no emotion, no eye contact, no talking, calm but positive control

Behaviour matters long-term

- It is a person's behaviour, whether it be socially appropriate or unacceptable, that is the single most important factor which determines the way in which they are regarded
- And how their personal relationships develop, how they are helped or rejected, where they live and ultimately, how happy they are and how good their quality of life becomes.
- Most people with Down syndrome do not have behaviour difficulties
- Getting it right from the start is important

Key points: social development

- Increasing independence with age
- Increasing responsibilities with age
- Opportunities for social learning
- Opportunities for developing friendships
- Overview of development to adulthood useful
- Independence skills



Recommended reading

- Social development for individuals with Down syndrome – An overview by Sue Buckley, Gillian Bird and Ben Sacks (2002)
- Social development for infants with Down syndrome (0-5 years) (2008)
- Social development for children with Down syndrome (5-11 years) (2008)
- Social development for children with Down syndrome (11-16 years) (2008)
- Strategies for changing behaviour and developing social skills for individuals with Down syndrome