

# Including Children Affected by Migration



## Parent/Carer Primary group self-study sessions

Helping parents/carers to continue supporting the social and emotional learning of Children Affected by Migration

Developed by the Northampton Centre for Learning Behaviour

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## What Next?

### Notes for parents/carers on continuing to learn together

Now that you have completed the ICAM Parent/Carer Group Sessions, we hope that you will want to continue to meet and learn together. If you are going to do this, it will be important for you to agree how you will organise the sessions so that you learn as much as possible.

Eight sessions are planned with informative notes for you to read and suggested questions for you to discuss.

You need to decide as a group:

- when you will meet and for how long – a session could take an hour or an hour and a half.
- where you will meet
- how you will communicate with one another outside the sessions
- how you will make sure everyone has a copy of the notes for the session
- how you will organise the sessions
- what you want to learn
- how you will make sure that everyone is included
- where you will find any help that you need

Here are some ideas for you to consider:

#### **When will you meet and for how long?**

Groups generally find it easier to meet at a regular time e.g. once a week or once every two weeks.

You might find it helpful to agree to meet for a fixed number of times so that you know what commitment you have made. ICAM provides notes for eight sessions. You could agree to meet eight times and then decide whether you want to continue further on your own.

Each session could take an hour or an hour and a half depending on how you organise it and how much discussion you have.

At the end of each meeting you should remind one another of the time, place and topic for the next meeting.

#### **Where will you meet?**

You need an accessible meeting place where everyone can sit comfortably and where there is room for you to do some activities.

#### **How will you communicate with one another outside the sessions?**

You will need to arrange how to communicate with one another if there are any changes to your plans e.g. if the time of a meeting has to be changed, how will you let everyone know?

You may wish to be able to use text, email or letters. Or you could form an online group e.g. in Whatsapp or Facebook

#### **How will you make sure everyone has a copy of the notes for each session?**

There are three or four pages of notes on the topic for each of the eight session and everyone will need a copy.

You could ask the school for help to print these or you could share them electronically.

You could give them out at the session or decide that everyone should have them beforehand so that they can read them before the session.

You could make them into a booklet so that everyone has them all at the beginning.

### **How will you organise the sessions?**

It will be necessary for some parents/carers to lead each of the sessions. It is best if two or three members of the group do it together so that they share the responsibility.

You could take it in turns for two or three people to take the lead.

You could have a small committee who would be responsible for making sure the room is booked and ready, reminding everyone of when the meeting is and encouraging others to take a turn in sharing the leading of a session.

You will need to look again at your group rules and decide whether you want to add or change any to ensure that you work well together.

You will need to decide whether parents/carers will bring their children to the sessions and, if they do, what arrangements there will be to keep the children occupied.

### **What do you want to learn?**

There may be topics that you have touched on in the group sessions that you want to explore further. There will be other subjects that you did not cover that interest you.

Eight suggested sessions are provided here for you to consider. As a group you need to decide on your priorities.

### **How will you make sure that everyone is included?**

By now you will know one another and be used to working together. Everyone will have something to contribute to the group, some skills that will be useful.

You will have to think about how you can best help one another to learn and what each person can do to make the group work effectively. Some people may be good at talking to the whole group, others may be good at making people welcome, others may like making posters or pictures to remind you of what you have discussed, others may be good listeners who ask useful questions, others may have contacts in the area that will be useful when the group needs information or advice.

Some may need help to understand the language used in the notes for the sessions.

### **Where will you find any help that you need?**

You may need information or advice if you choose some additional topics and will need to think about where to get it.

Are there people (e.g. from the Health Centre ) who would come and talk to the group? Are there people at the school who could help you? Is there any reliable written information, online or in leaflets or booklets, available on the topic?

## Notes for session leaders

### Before the day

Make sure the room is available

If several of you are leading the session together, agree who will do what

Prepare what you are going to do and say in the session

Make sure everyone has a copy of the notes for the session – electronically or on paper - either beforehand or given out at the session.

Make sure everyone has a pen or pencil in case they want to make any notes.

Arrange any refreshments

### On the day

Arrive at least half an hour before the session is due to begin.

Check that the room is ready

- √ Is the furniture arranged how you want it?
- √ As far as possible, is the room at a suitable temperature and is the light bright enough but not too bright?
- √ Is there a flip chart or board with pens so that you can make any notes you want to make? This is not essential but could be useful.
- √ Have you got any resources that you need for the session? (e.g. a talking object for circle time.)
- √ Are any refreshments ready?

Greet everyone as they arrive and make them feel welcome.

### When leading the session:

1. Start on time.

Even if not everyone has arrived it is important to begin the session at the time the group had agreed. If you do not, the group will not get into the habit of arriving in time. It is not fair to keep the people who are punctual waiting for the others.

2. At your first session, look again at the rules that you agreed for your group working.

Decide whether there are any that you want to add or change now that you are working without your facilitator. Keep the rules and display them at each meeting so that you are all reminded of how you have agreed to work together.

3. Begin each session with circle time

This is an opportunity for people to share what they have been feeling, thinking and doing since the last session. Have they tried any of the Top Tips suggested in the notes for the previous session(s)? If so, what happened?

Seat everyone in a circle and use a 'talking object' e.g. a toy, or a stone, or a stick, or a flower. Only the person holding the object may speak.

You will have to set a time limit for the discussion because you need to have plenty of time left to focus on the topic you have chosen for that session.

4. Have a warm up activity

It is a good idea to do a quick activity at the beginning to involve everyone and to help them to focus on the group and settle to work on the session. This can be a game or a more serious activity related to the topic of the session. A list of some possible fun activities is given below.

5. Explain what the session is about and what you hope to learn together

You need to be clear about what you are trying to do in the session and to explain this to everyone

6. Try to make the session as active as possible

Try to think of activities that will help you to learn by trying out your ideas in practice.

When the group discusses an issue, have some discussion in pairs or small groups so that everyone has a chance to talk and then share their ideas with the whole group

7. Have a concluding discussion and/or circle time

Everyone needs time to reflect on what they have learned and decide what they will do at home to implement and practise their new skills, thoughts and ideas.

Ask:

'What difference will what we have learned today make to the way we behave at home?

What are we going to do?

How will we report back to one another next time we meet?'

8. Finish on time

It is important to finish promptly so that people can leave at the expected time. If you finish late, some people may have to rush away before the end.

9. Agree on/ remind everyone of the time place and topic of the next meeting and who will be leading it.

It is important, before you leave, to agree what you will do next and how you will do it. It is easiest to communicate arrangements when you are all together.

However, if some people were not able to come to this meeting, how will you make sure that they know about the next one? You need to have a system to tell everyone what is happening.

### **Focusing on solutions to problems**

Parents/carers find it helpful to share their problems and it is often comforting to find that other people have the same problem as you. **But it is much more helpful if you can find a solution to the problem.**

If the group is to learn together, it will be important to **focus on solutions, not just on problems.**

To do this, when you are discussing a problem, try to focus on the future, not on the past. Also focus on what the person can do, not on what he/she cannot do.

Explore possible changes and what the person needs to do to achieve these changes.

Ask questions about possible solutions. e.g.

What do you want to change?

How will you know that things have improved?

Are there any exceptions to the problem?

What is the main issue on which you want to concentrate?

For instance, if a parent/carer says her child won't wear the clothes she wants him to wear and they have an argument every morning when he is getting dressed, you could ask:

What do you want to change? What do you want the mornings to be like?

How will you know that things have improved? What differences will you see?

Are there any exceptions to the problem? Are there some things that he likes to wear?

What is the main issue on which you want to concentrate? What is the behaviour that you most want to change?

You can then think of some steps to solve the problem.

Other techniques that you might find helpful are:

### Scaling

Ask 'How bad is the problem?'

'On a scale of 0-10 where 0 is not a problem at all and 10 is a very bad problem, where would you place your problem?'

It is helpful to draw the scale and to mark the score for the problem.

<b>0</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>not a problem</b>										<b>a very bad problem</b>

Then ask

'Why is the score not one point higher?'

'What would you need to do to make the score one point lower?'

This is a useful way of thinking about some of the positive aspects of a situation and deciding on the first step towards improving it.

### The Miracle Question

Say 'Suppose that you go to bed tonight and when you wake up in the morning a miracle has happened and your problem has disappeared.

What will be different that will tell you that the miracle has happened?

What will you see yourself doing differently?

What will you see others doing differently?'

This is a useful way of thinking about what you are really trying to achieve. You can then think of ways of achieving it.

### **Possible Warm up Activities**

#### 1. Guess the rule

Ask for a volunteer who will leave the room. The person is told that, while he is gone, the group is going to decide on a rule and that when he returns he must try to guess what it is.

The person leaves the room. The group sits in a circle and agrees a 'rule'. This might be, for example:

all sitting with legs crossed (or heads down or arms folded)

saying 'cheese' before speaking

shaking hands every 30 seconds with the person sitting next to them

The volunteer is invited back into the room. He has a few minutes to try to find out the rule. If the volunteer guesses the rule correctly then he can choose a new rule that the group should follow for the next five minutes of the session.

#### 2. Counting

Sit or stand in a circle. The idea is for the group to count to twenty, one person saying one number at a time. Somebody is chosen to start the count. Anybody can say the next number - but if two or more people speak at the same time, counting must start again from the beginning.

#### 3. Pass the squeeze

Before you begin the session you need to ask one person to be your helper. Explain the activity to him/her but he must not tell anyone else.

Sit or stand in a circle and hold hands. Nobody must speak. Explain that you have a secret helper. When you say the game has begun, this person will, when he is ready, gently squeeze the hand of the person next to him/her who will then squeeze the hand of the person next to him/her and so on. They must pass the squeeze secretly so that no-one can tell where it is by looking. See whether you can pass the squeeze right round the circle. It is not as easy as it sounds. When the squeeze gets back to the helper he can say 'Finish'.

#### 4. Change

Sit in a circle with one person without a chair standing in the middle. That person is the caller and says e.g. 'Change if you are wearing something blue' and everyone who is wearing blue must stand up and go to another chair. The caller sits down quickly and the last person left without a chair becomes the caller and says e.g. 'Change if your name begins with A' or 'Change if you own a cat.' And so on.

#### 5. Clapping

Sit or stand in a circle. You start by clapping your hands once. The person next to you claps his hands and so on round the circle. The aim is to pass the clapping round the circle as fast as possible. Or you can clap a short rhythm and the next person joins in and so on round the circle until everyone is clapping together.

#### 6. Who is it?

Sit or stand in a circle. Ask everyone to close their eyes. Say that you will move round the circle and touch one person on the shoulder. The others then open their eyes and have to guess who you have touched.

You can vary the game by walking round and touching nobody. Or by touching everyone.

#### 7. Who am I?

You need a scarf to act as a blindfold for this activity.

Sit or stand in a circle. Ask for a volunteer and blindfold him/her with the scarf. Lead him/her round the circle until he says 'Stop.' The person nearest to him/her says 'Hello .....' naming the blindfolded person. He must reply 'Hello ...' naming the person who has spoken.

#### 8. I went to market

Sit in a circle. Everybody must think of an object. You say 'I went to the market and I bought a .....' (naming your object) e.g. 'I went to the market and I bought a spoon' The next person repeats what you said and adds his own object e.g. 'I went to the market and I bought a spoon and a goat' and so on round the circle until the list of objects is so long that nobody can remember them!



## Session 1: Helping your child to develop confidence

### Introduction

Children learn best and manage life's ups and downs when they feel good about themselves. This inner feeling of confidence is often referred to as having good self-esteem.

Having good self-esteem is NOT the same thing as being arrogant or boastful, nor does it imply that we think we are perfect as we are. It simply means that we accept ourselves as valuable and lovable people - even when we get things wrong, make mistakes or recognize parts of us that are not as we would like them to be.

We can help our children to develop inner confidence by making sure that they:

- a. Know that they are loved and valued for what they *are* (personality, characteristics, themselves) as well as for what they *do or achieve*.
- b. Have a strong sense of belonging (in the family, in a group of friends, in school).
- c. Know that they have some 'personal power'.

You may feel that your child has rather too much power, and sometimes feel powerless yourself in the face of it! The power that we are talking about here is a little different – it is the sort that ensures that children develop independence and self-discipline, rather than remaining dependent on us. It involves children making their own choices, doing things by themselves, being able to make mistakes and feeling that they can help others.

### Discuss

What you can do to help children develop inner confidence and

- a. Know they are loved
- b. Have a strong sense of belonging
- c. Have some 'personal power'

### Praise

Praise is probably our single most powerful tool for helping children to feel good and have confidence in themselves. Research shows that praise is a far, far better motivator than criticism.

### Discuss

Think about your own experiences – how do you feel when you are criticised (maybe by your boss, your partner, your children)? Do you think – 'Oh I'm so glad you've pointed that out, I will try extra hard next time to get it right' – or do you feel resentful, misunderstood, humiliated, hurt? Do you decide to change or do you become defensive, wanting to retaliate?

We know that our criticisms rarely change anything for the better. This is not to say that we should never use criticism, just that praise is usually more effective. And yet most of us are guilty of doing far more criticising than praising.

*At home the average child experiences about 1 positive comment to 8 negative comments!*

### Discuss

Why do we not use praise more?

The problem seems to be that we often get into a pattern of using criticism rather than praise which can be difficult to break – perhaps we are worried that our children will get big-headed or become boastful if we praise them too much, or think that they shouldn't be praised simply for doing what they should do anyway. Perhaps we ourselves didn't receive much praise and find that it feels false or uncomfortable to give it.

These worries are groundless. Children who are praised often and genuinely for their efforts and abilities learn to value themselves and become more confident individuals, learning more quickly to depend on their own judgments than those who are not praised.

Giving praise is not something that comes naturally to many of us, and we need to be careful about how we do it.

### **Discuss**

Have you ever been on the receiving end of praise that actually made you feel bad?

Your children might show some surprise if they are not used to being praised. Some children also find it really hard to accept praise, and may seem embarrassed or even angry when you praise them.

If your child responds in this way you may need to make sure praise is given in private. Some children find it easier to accept non-verbal praise – a nod or a pat on the back. Others find it easier to accept 'overheard' praise – this is when you praise your child when talking to someone else, making sure that they can overhear you.

### **Criticism**

As parents/carers, it is our job to help our children to get better at doing things, to stay within safe limits and to make choices that are good for them, and because of this there will always be times when we need to tell them that we don't like what they are doing or saying, and to guide them towards other options.

We tend to find it easier to criticise, drawing attention to what they do wrong rather than what they do right, but as we know, criticism seldom results in change.

### **Discuss**

How can we give effective criticism without arousing feelings of resentment, defensiveness, and retaliation?

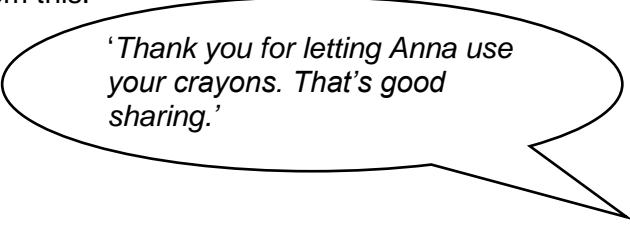
### **Activity**

Make a list of all the things that you love or like about your child – their qualities, character, things they do that make you laugh etc.

## TOP TIPS 1 : How to help your child to feel confident

### Helping your child to know that they are loved and valued for what they are

- Tell your child (often) that you love them and why.
- Point out their strengths at every opportunity – draw attention to their skills and qualities – they will learn about themselves from this.



*'Thank you for letting Anna use your crayons. That's good sharing.'*

- Have a regular, planned 'Golden Time' with each child at least once a week. This is a special time just for you and your child to enjoy together - it might be watching a TV programme, cooking, fishing, going to the park – all that matters is that it is a positive time.
- Use praise whenever you can. Aim to give 8 times more praise than criticism! Use words, hugs, smiles, a pat on the back, a wink, a little note etc.
- Use praise for *doing* and praise for *being*. To develop self-esteem children need to be praised for what they are (praise which doesn't depend on them doing anything particular) as well as what they do: 'I'm so glad you're here'; 'it's more fun watching television with you'; 'your smile lifts my heart'.
- Remember, some children prefer praise given in private, or in non-verbal ways.
- Model how to accept praise – respond with a simple 'thank-you' and a smile when someone gives you a compliment. Don't rush to return the compliment, or belittle it. This takes practice!

### Helping your child to feel that they belong

- Let your child be part of family arrangements, having a say in the 'family rules' for example (see Session 2 Agreeing family rules that work), or planning where to go for a day out.
- Try to give them a space that is their own – part of a bedroom if they don't have their own, a little bit of garden to look after etc. Let them make it personal to them, choosing the paint or duvet cover.
- Have a 'special plate' at dinner – award it to someone in the family each day, or once a week saying why you think they deserve it.

### Helping your child develop a sense of personal power

- Provide opportunities for your child to make choices for themselves when it is sensible and possible. Of course some things must remain non-negotiable, but reconsider every so often the choices you can give them e.g. what clothes to wear, who to play with, whether to do their homework before or after tea; what snacks to put in their lunch-box, what haircut they want.
- Draw attention to all the things that they can do by themselves – notice little improvements.
- Help children to see how their actions, skills or qualities have contributed to a result. For example when they are on the winning side in a football match rather than saying 'That was a lucky goal' or 'The other team was rubbish' point out what they did to help the team to win.
- Give them responsibilities at home. These might be tidying their toys away, or doing the washing up. You can't start this one too early!

- Don't regularly do anything for your child that they are capable of doing for themselves (except as a treat or when they are in particular need of Tender Loving Care!)
- Think about what you want them to be able to do independently in a year's time and start working towards it in little steps.
- Allow them to make their own decisions when possible. Although we may sometimes think they have made a wrong decision, they need to experience the consequences of their choices in order to develop independence.
- Allow them to learn from their mistakes - if they choose not to wear a coat in the cold don't give them yours when they complain!
- When your child is confronted with a problem, try not to rush in to help or take over. If they are becoming frustrated, rather than doing the job for them, or telling them what to do, give them some information about how to go about it. Say e.g. 'What helps me sometimes is to....'

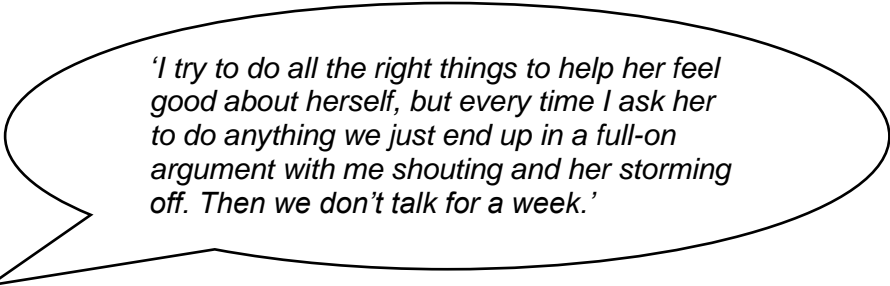
## Session 2: Making the rules (and sticking to them!)

### Introduction

In Session 1, we looked at ways to help our children to develop confidence, through helping them to feel good about themselves, praising them, enabling them to make decisions and choices and showing them they are loved and cared for.

Sometimes however, it seems as if all the good work we have done is eclipsed in a flash when we ask our child to do something *yet again* and they ignore us, refuse outright or respond by shouting rudely at us. We lose our temper, we shout, and before we know it we are involved in a full-scale battle.

The problem of the double-edged relationship between us and our children is that on the one hand we want to be a friend to our child, loving them, protecting them, encouraging them and having fun with them, while on the other we need to guide and discipline them. We therefore have to get them to do things that they would rather not do, stop them from doing what they do want to do, say 'No' to them. We also have to tell them off and punish them when they do something wrong.



*'I try to do all the right things to help her feel good about herself, but every time I ask her to do anything we just end up in a full-on argument with me shouting and her storming off. Then we don't talk for a week.'*

### Discuss

Is the only way to avoid the arguments and the tantrums to let children do exactly what they want?

### How do we achieve a good balance?

Although we will all have days when it seems easier to let children do exactly what they want, we know that this is a recipe for disaster in the long-term. The problem is that, although they will push against the limits we set for them, all children need to know that somebody is in charge – it is frightening to have no boundaries. Children brought up in homes where there are no clear limits, or where they are not told what the limits are until after they have crossed them, often feel unsafe and uncared for. What children will grow up learning from us, if we avoid confrontation by ignoring bad behaviour, is that they can do what they want to, regardless of other people's feelings or rights.

### Discuss

Should we use our power as adults to *make* children do as they are told by threatening them with dire punishments if they don't.

There are many problems with this approach (which we may be familiar with from our own upbringings).

Firstly, while we may feel good that we are clearly in charge, and while our children may do what we say because they fear us, the chances are that they will only behave as we want them to while we are actually present – and we won't be there all the time.

This approach to discipline stops children from developing *self-discipline*, which is what they will need if they are to be happy and successful at school and beyond – we want our children to do the 'right thing' by themselves. If they have always depended on us to tell them what to do they have no opportunity to learn how to do this.

The second problem is that, as our children grow older and bigger, there will come a point where they just won't be frightened of us anymore!

The third problem, and perhaps the greatest one, is the damage it does to the relationship between parent/carer and child. When children are forced to do something, rather than cooperating because they understand why they should (even if they don't want to), strong feelings of resentment, anger, frustration, even humiliation, are aroused - feelings that corrode and destroy loving relationships. What children learn from us is that the way to get what they want is to use force, fear and bullying.

## Positive behaviour management

Positive behaviour management offers a way of making sure that we are in charge, of enabling us to guide our children without getting angry (most of the time) and without (most of) the arguments and bad feelings that result. It helps children to learn self-discipline and make choices (whether we are there or not) that take into account the rights and feelings of other people.

Positive behaviour management involves:

- Agreeing a set of family rules together – if children are involved in helping to make the rules and understand the reasons for them they are more likely to keep them.
- Agreeing rewards for sticking to the rules, as well as the consequences for not doing so. Consequences work best when they take place as soon as possible after the behaviour. They don't have to be severe, but they must be consistent, happening each and every time they are earned.
- Rewarding children with your attention and praise when they are doing the right thing (rather than just paying attention when they are causing us a problem). This is called 'catching children being good'.
- Using simple techniques to maximize the chances of your child co-operating with you.
- Following up behaviour that you have agreed is unacceptable with a fair and agreed consequence.

Positive behaviour management works because:

- The rules and consequences have been agreed in advance, which makes it less likely that we will threaten, or use, random or unfair or unrealistic punishments (e.g. if we happen to be in a bad mood or find that one of our children annoys us more than another).
- The heat is taken out of the conflict situation because we have a plan and we are less likely to lose control.
- Arguments and tantrums are reduced because children have been involved in agreeing the rules and understand the reasons for them, and know that the consequences are fair.
- Children learn that they are responsible for their own behaviour, and this helps them to learn self-discipline.
- We tend to get more good behaviour because we get more of what we pay attention to – and in this case children are rewarded with our praise and attention when they are getting it right.

Give it a go...it takes a little bit of time and practice (especially catching them being good) but you will save hours in the long run as children learn that you mean what you say, as well as making your relationship with your child more enjoyable and less stressful.

### Discuss

Where would you place yourself on this continuum?

**No limits.....Positive Behaviour Management.....Frightening them into behaving**

## TOP TIPS 2: Using Positive Behaviour Management

### Agreeing the rules

- Agree five rules to make your home a safe and happy place for everyone
- Involve everybody in drawing up the rules
- Make it clear that the rules apply to everyone – adults must keep them as well!
- Use 'Do's' rather than 'Don'ts' so that the rules tell you what you should do, rather than just what you shouldn't do.
- Get everyone to sign the rules and put them up in the house.

### Agreeing rewards and consequences

- Agree a selection of rewards for keeping to the rules. Ask your children what rewards they would like.
- Agree (in advance) what the consequence will be if people break the rules.

Rule	Consequence if we get it wrong.....
Speak politely to everybody	Time out (2 minutes)
Put one toy away before getting another one out	Tidying job (5 minutes)
Come home at the agreed time	No TV next evening
Pay for borrowed things that are lost or broken	No pocket money until paid for

### Catching them being good

- Pay attention to them when they are getting it right (instead of only when they are doing something wrong).

### If they are getting it wrong or break the rules

- Don't be too strong immediately – go for a light touch solution first.
- Make sure you have their attention. Use your child's name, then pause...
- Tell them what you need them to do – not what you don't want.
- Use 'thank-you' rather than please after you have told your child what you want them to do.

*'Ahmed. Put your feet on the floor. Thank you.'*

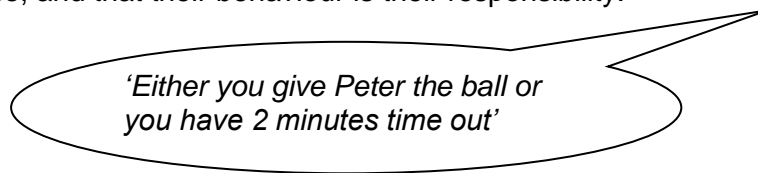
- Remind your child of the rules you have agreed using as few words as possible as early as possible.
- Try to distract or divert your child.

*'Can you show me how you do that? Samira. Come here and help me'*

- Try a **'When-then'** sentence. **'When** you put the stick down, **then** you can go back to play with Simone'.
- Use 'take-up time'. Allow a few seconds after you have made a request – turn away to give your child a few seconds to do as you have asked. Children hate losing face. So avoid a confrontation.

### Giving the consequence

- You might give a final warning (some families use a yellow card for a warning, a red one for a consequence – like in football!)
- To give the consequence, make sure they are on their own (not in front of an audience) and give them the consequence Do it with confidence keeping your voice low and your face straight.
- When giving a consequence, make it a choice - this makes it clear that they are choosing the consequence, and that their behaviour is their responsibility.



- Separate the person from the behaviour. Instead of 'You're an idiot' ; 'Why are you so stupid?' use the phrase 'I don't like it when you do this because...'

### Afterwards

- Give your child a clean slate when they have completed the consequence.
- When you are both calm, you could talk to your child about what happened and how they think they could get it right the next time.

### Discuss

Thinking about these tips, what might you do to move more to the middle of this continuum?

**No limits.....Positive Behaviour Management.....Frightening them into behaving**



## Session 3: The importance of listening to your child

### Introduction

When asked what they most want in their relationship with their children, the majority of parents/carers will say that they want their children to be able to talk to them – not just about the little things. Yet, as children get older they often seem to stop talking to us, and as they grow into teens this lack of communication becomes even more pronounced.

### How can we encourage our children to talk to us?

Experts suggest that children don't talk to us about their problems or worries because we don't always do or say the things that help them, and that sometimes what we do makes them actually feel worse.

Of course, none of us would want to have this effect, so where are we going wrong?

When our children do talk to us, we tend to respond in ways which don't encourage children to open up to us – we just don't LISTEN!

Instead, we tend to respond by e.g.

- telling them what to do (Well, obviously you need to...)
- lecturing ('When I was your age...')
- judging them ('You're not being very mature about this are you?')
- moralising ('It wouldn't have happened if you hadn't....I don't think you should have....')
- minimising their worries ('It's not that bad').

These are, of course, natural parental responses – we want our children to become better people, we want to help them solve their problems – and these are the ways that we know how to make things better. The problem is, however, that these 'natural' responses do not help our children to feel better or to solve whatever it is that is worrying them.

### Discuss

Think for a moment about your own adult friends. How do you feel when your friends respond to you by telling you what to do, lecturing, judging, moralising or minimising. Do they help you to think about or solve the problem, or do they make you feel inadequate or defensive?

Then think about those people who you would choose to go to with a problem. The chances are that we would choose someone who was a good listener.

The good listener leaves us with a feeling of being understood and helped. The strange thing is that when we are asked what it is these people actually do or say that makes them 'good listeners', we often find it difficult to say. Often they don't seem to say very much at all.

However, when we are asked what it is like *not* to be listened to, there is no such problem – we can easily identify the partner who doesn't look at us when they are speaking, the friend who jumps in and offers advice when we go to her with a problem, the colleague who makes us feel ridiculous for feeling what we feel ('Surely that can't have upset you...'). These people often leave us feeling frustrated, misunderstood, inadequate and defensive, and far from being helped with a problem, we actually go away feeling worse than before. The chances are we won't go back to these people when we have another problem.

In our adult relationships then, the people we talk to, open up to, and find helpful are those who have mastered the skill of 'good listening'. The experts tell us that good listening is also the magic ingredient in ensuring good communication with our children.

## Good listening

The good news is that these experts have identified exactly what we can do to be good listeners, and encourage our children to talk to us when they have a worry or a problem. They have identified what we need to do to ensure that our children feel safe talking to us (knowing that they won't be made to feel stupid or belittled) and to make it more likely that they find the experience helpful in solving their worries or problems.

As with all skills, we need to know when to use good listening (usually when your child brings a problem or worry to you) and we need to practise using the techniques and ideas. It takes time for new ways of doing or saying things to feel natural and we will often get it wrong, but it *is* worth persevering. Getting it right means that our children will not only feel able to talk to us as they grow older, but will learn to be good listeners themselves, with all the social rewards that this brings.

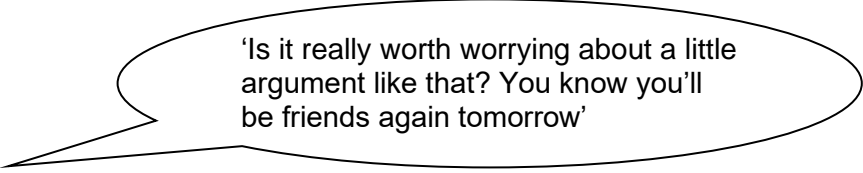
### Discuss

Take it in turns to say one thing that is effective in getting your child to talk to you.

Then say one thing that doesn't help to get your child to talk.

### TOP TIPS 3: The importance of listening to your child

- Think about whether you need to do 'ordinary' or 'good' listening. Good listening takes time and your full attention – use it when something is important to them.
- If you can't do good listening there and then, tell your child that you do want to listen, explain why you can't right now, and agree a 'talk-time' as soon as possible.
- Get comfortable and let them know you are interested in what they want to say and have time to listen – look at them and use open body-language. (Some children find it uncomfortable to talk face to face like this, and prefer to talk when you are doing something else, e.g. cooking or going for a walk).
- Give your child your full attention - if you are thinking how you should really be doing something else the message will be clear to your child! Don't fidget, look at your watch, take a phone-call, look through a magazine etc.
- The most important thing about listening is listening! Try not to interrupt.
- Encourage your child to keep talking until they have said what they want (nodding, saying 'mmm', 'I see', etc.). Leave time for your child to say whatever they like- don't be afraid of silences.
- Don't belittle the worry – however small it may seem to you, it is real and difficult for them.



'Is it really worth worrying about a little argument like that? You know you'll be friends again tomorrow'

- Remember that your job is not to make things better, it is to help your child to try to work out what to do for themselves, so try to resist the temptation to respond too quickly with questions, opinions or advice.
- Listen to how your child feels (they may not tell you in words – look for clues in tone of voice and body-language). Let your child know that you understand how they are feeling e.g. 'You sound really upset about that'. It is the recognition of our feelings that we often need most from a listener.
- Accept your child's feelings (even if you don't like what they say). Remember that all feelings are OK, although not all behaviours are.
- It helps your child to feel understood if you occasionally check back with them what they are telling you – not just the facts, but the feelings behind the facts too. One way to do this is to repeat what they have said in your own words
- Use open questions. These are questions which can't be answered with a yes or no, but encourage the child to talk more: 'Can you tell me more about that?' 'How did you feel then?', 'What do you think might happen?'
- Rather than dismissing your child's unrealistic wish for a solution, 'If only Mr. X would leave the school,' you can let them know that you would give your child their wish if it was possible ' If I had a magic wand I would make sure that you always had the kindest, nicest teacher in the whole world.'
- Don't overdo it – look for signs that your child has had enough and stop. Remember that the problem doesn't have to be solved there and then

## Session 4: Resolving conflict

### Introduction

Conflict is a natural part of friendships and family relationships. Although it is so much a part of our lives (particularly as parents/carers!) we have often had few opportunities to learn how to manage it.

Depending on personality and experiences, the natural ways in which children approach conflict are: by shouting and becoming aggressive to the other person (which tends to make things worse) or by withdrawing and letting the other person not take responsibility for something that might not be fair. Children quickly learn to rely upon adults to sort out their disagreements, and while this often provides a short-term solution, the problem is that he or she does not get any better at learning to sort out arguments and conflicts for themselves.

The advantages of children learning to manage conflict independently are that they will not always be dependent on adults; that they will grow to believe that they have some control over the way things turn out; and that they are unlikely to grow up either depending on aggression to get their own way, or passively accepting unfairness.

### Peaceful Problem Solving

A good framework for sorting out arguments is 'Peaceful Problem-Solving'. This helps us to sort out arguments fairly and calmly using a series of simple steps.

#### Peaceful Problem Solving

<b>Step 1</b>	Being calm
<b>Step 2</b>	Taking it in turns to talk about the problem and say what each person would like to happen; listening to and trying to understand the other person's side of the story; thinking of ways to solve the problem that are OK for both sides
<b>Step 3</b>	Agreeing an idea and trying it out
<b>Step 4</b>	Checking that the idea is working for both sides

#### Step 1: Calm down!

The time for using peaceful problem solving is when we are calm and really want to sort the problem out, and not just blame the other person. When we are angry we are often more interested in wanting to hurt the person we are cross with than in wanting to solve the problem. We find it difficult to think about the situation from somebody else's point of view, and don't care very much about their feelings (after all, they have hurt ours). The first step in peaceful problem-solving is therefore to calm down.

#### Step 2: Take it in turns to talk about what went wrong and what you would like to happen

This is the point at which much can go wrong, and many skills come into play! Arguments often escalate and feelings get out of control when people don't feel that they are being listened to. You talked about some ways to make sure your child feels listened to in Session 3. Knowing that you are trying to understand things from their point of view can go a long way to defusing a difficult situation.

The words we use and the way we say things (including the messages that our bodies and faces transmit) can make all the difference to the outcome. There are tips on being 'assertive' rather than aggressive in Session 7.

'Magic Messages' are really useful for discussing the problem – they involve saying what you feel and why, using the formula: 'I feel...when.... because...'. Using this sort of language helps to avoid inflammatory 'you' messages such as 'You make me so mad...', 'This is all your fault', 'You are always...' - messages that blame and accuse, inevitably arousing strong defensive feelings in the other person.

#### Step 3: Think together about ways that the problem could be solved.

Solutions to conflict rarely work when they are imposed by one side on the other. Those that work are those that are agreed together, and work in the interests of both parties, even if each side doesn't get exactly what they want. The starting point for thinking together about ways to solve the problem is to ask 'What do we both want to happen?' 'What do we each want the outcome to be?'

Each solution should be talked through with the question in mind being:  
'Is it fair for both of us?'

Choose a win-win solution and try it out. A win-win situation is one in which both sides gain something and neither feels that they have lost out. If the conflict has been over who chooses what to watch on TV, the outcome might be that one person chooses one evening, the other the next. One skill that children learn through this is that of compromise, that it is not always possible to get exactly what they want and that other people have needs too.

#### **Step 4: Checking that the idea is working for both sides**

It is important that children learn from their experiences, so some time after the idea has been tried out, check with them whether it worked and what they would do differently if they did it again.

#### **Discuss**

Think of an argument you have had with your child. Think about how it might have turned out differently if you had tried to use the steps of 'Peaceful Problem Solving'.

### **30-second check list: Peaceful-problem solving**

#### **Step 1.**

- ✓ Make sure we are both calm enough to talk about the problem. (See Session 8 for ways to calm down)
- ✓ Make sure we both really want to solve it rather than just argue with the other person or prove we are right

#### **Step 2.**

- ✓ Take it in turns to talk about what went wrong
- ✓ When it is your turn to talk:
  - Use your assertiveness skills (See Session 7 for more on this)
  - Use the 'Magic Message' so that you don't shout and make things worse
  - Say what you would like to happen
- ✓ When it is the other person's turn to talk:
  - Listen to the other person – don't interrupt
  - Try to see the situation from their point of view
  - Think about what they would like to happen.
- ✓ Think of ideas for solving the problem together
- ✓ Choose one idea to try out

#### **Step 3**

- ✓ Try out your idea

#### **Step 4**

- ✓ Check whether the idea worked for both of you.
- ✓ Do you need to change anything?

#### **Discuss**

How might you use this checklist at home with your child?

## TOP TIPS 4: Resolving conflict

- Talk through the steps of 'Peaceful Problem Solving' together (when you are both calm!).
- Be a good role model – use the process yourself when you have disagreements or arguments with your child or with other people.
- Use 'Magic Messages' ('I feel....when you....because....') – not inflammatory 'YOU! Messages' (You are thoughtless/lazy/unkind etc.)
- Always be ready to apologise when you are in the wrong - if you can't, they won't learn to either.
- Make a list together of the things people do and say that make conflict situations worse. Display it and refer to it when arguments develop.
- Use puppets and imaginative play – set up situations where the toys argue. Do not solve the problem for them – let your child come up with their ideas.
- Listen to your child when they talk about conflicts that they are experiencing. Don't be too quick to respond with a solution.
- Model the language of Peaceful Problem Solving 'I wonder what would make both people happy?', 'How can we make this better?'
- Watch people having arguments on TV with the sound turned off. Watch the characters' body-language and what they do to make situations better or worse. Talk about what they could have done to make things better.
- Look at problem pages from teenage magazines with older children. Try to think about how you would respond to the problem before reading the answers given.
- Encourage your child to see situations from different points of view. Draw attention to characters' differing points of view when watching films or reading stories together. Use questions to encourage your child to think about how other people might see a situation 'What do you think x would make of that ?' or 'How do you think y feels about that?'
- Talk about difficult situations you experience, and try to include in your discussion how you think the other person or people involved might feel or see the situation.
- When your child has a conflict situation with a friend, do listen and recognize their feelings e.g. of unfairness or anger. When they are calm, encourage them to think about what the other person might be feeling and thinking. Encourage them to use Peaceful Problem-Solving.

## Study Session 5: Helping your child to take responsibility.

### Introduction

Some people never take any responsibility for what happens to them. Whether it's getting into trouble for hitting another child, playing badly in a football match, doing badly in a test, they will always put it down to something outside themselves - it's the other child's fault for making them angry, the teacher's fault for not explaining things properly, the coach's fault for shouting at the wrong time, the weather – anything rather than their own fault!

It works the other way too - some people never take credit for what they do well. When things go well for them they will pass it off as good luck or other things outside their control.

The problem with both of these attitudes is that if we believe that we don't have any influence over the outcome (good or bad), we won't see any reason to try to work towards goals or to change things ourselves.

These attitudes are not very helpful for learning and achieving. Think about two children who both pass a test in class. One thinks: 'I did well because I worked really hard / I did all that practice'. The other thinks, 'I was lucky in the test – I passed because the teacher likes me/they were easy questions'.

The first child's thoughts are helpful, because they encourage the child to

- have pride in themselves and their abilities (confidence)
- repeat the things that they did that led to success (that is to learn from the experience).

The second child's belief that they only did well because of things outside of their control means the opposite

- they do not develop pride or confidence in themselves (or knowledge about themselves)
- they do not learn how to do it again
- they will be more likely to trust to luck than to practise for the next test

### Taking responsibility

We can help children to develop the ability to take responsibility and credit by teaching them to recognize the ways in which they themselves have helped to bring about a result. If they do well in a football match, we might ask them what **they** did that helped (not what other people did!)

We can also help them to recognize when they are not taking responsibility, when they are using excuses. We can do this by modeling, and by gently questioning children about all the things that brought about a particular outcome, 'What else do you think made the match such a disaster for you?'. Of course the time to do this is not when they are upset and disappointed, but when they are calm and able to be a little more detached about the situation.

There are valid reasons for our plans going wrong on occasions and sometimes it is best to rethink them. But very often the 'reasons' we come up with for failing to implement our plans are not reasons but excuses. Instead of taking responsibility for taking that first step, we blame circumstances, other people or bad luck for stopping us from doing so.

The truth is that while we cannot control circumstances we always have a choice about how to respond and it is our responses that will determine the outcome. We are responsible for the way we choose to behave, how hard we work, how much effort we put in to practising a sport. Luck sometimes plays a part - you might win the lottery, but you do have to buy a ticket!

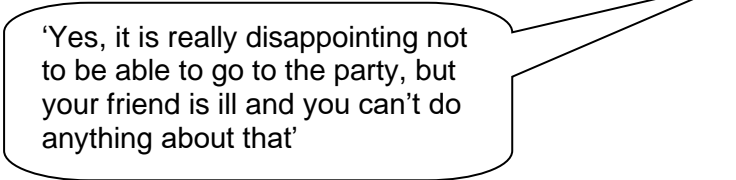
### Discuss

Think about a time you have done well at something. Why did you do well? What did you do to make yourself successful? Are you taking credit for your achievements?

How you might help your child to take responsibility and credit?

## TOP TIPS 5: Helping your child to take responsibility

- Model taking credit for your hard work, qualities and skills when these have played a part in bringing about a good outcome.
- Help children to recognize what they have done to make something turn out well by pointing it out to them, or asking them what they did to get a good result.
- Model taking responsibility yourself when things don't turn out well
- Help children to distinguish between what they can and can't influence



'Yes, it is really disappointing not to be able to go to the party, but your friend is ill and you can't do anything about that'

- A fun activity is to make a 'book of excuses' and list all the reasons family members say when things don't go their way. You can then decide together whether these are real reasons or excuses – if they are excuses they go in the book!
- Gently challenge your child's thinking (when they are calm) whenever they say things like, 'It wasn't my fault. They made me do it'. Say 'Is there anything that you could have done differently?', or 'You don't always do what they say – what's different about the times when they can't make you...'
- Usually situations arise for lots of reasons – a day trip going wrong for example - and we tend to pick one – 'It was Dad's fault because he was in a bad mood'. Try to use the 'contributing factors' approach, where you look at the situation and list everything that contributed – (the bad weather, the traffic, the baby being sick, the children shouting at the baby when she was sick, mum being irritable with dad because he'd forgotten the sandwiches....).



## Session 6: Helping your child to achieve their goals: Developing motivation, persistence and resilience

### Introduction

Every success story begins with a dream. We see ourselves winning that TV show, being slim, getting that perfect job, becoming famous or successfully completing that marathon. Sadly, every dream does not end in a success story!

The fact is that achieving our ambitions and goals depends on a number of skills and qualities. These include being able to motivate ourselves and having a good plan (which breaks down the goal into manageable targets), sticking at it (persistence) and bouncing back when things go wrong (resilience).

### Motivation

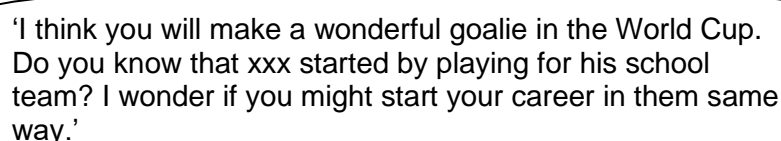
There are three different types of motivation. Young children tend to do what they do because of '**intrinsic motivation**' (jumping in puddles feels GOOD!). We are intrinsically motivated when we do something because it is in itself enjoyable for us (we eat chocolate because it tastes good; we listen to music, watch comedy, or hug our children because it gives us pleasure).

As children get older they are often motivated by the promise of a reward e.g. sweets or a trip to the park or the threat of a negative consequence e.g. adults' anger or disapproval. This is called '**external motivation**'.

As children move up through the school, they become able to motivate themselves, without the need for external rewards or threats – they learn to set their own rewards and do things because they enjoy the pleasure of achieving their goals. This is called 'internal' or '**self-motivation**'. It involves something called 'delayed gratification' – being able to put up with current circumstances because it will bring us a reward in the future.

One of the most important contributions we can make to our children's future success is to help them to develop self-motivation.

To help our children, we need to support them in choosing goals that they are likely to succeed at. To begin with they may have unrealistic goals, as their experience of what is involved is limited. But we can support them by acknowledging and enthusing over their ideas while gently steering them towards a more realistic goal. Another way that we can help our children to make goals realistic, is to help them to break them down into small steps.



'I think you will make a wonderful goalie in the World Cup. Do you know that xxx started by playing for his school team? I wonder if you might start your career in them same way.'

### Discuss

How realistic are your children's goals? How could you help them to think of small steps towards their goals that they could achieve now?

### Persistence and resilience

The problem with achieving a goal is that it involves hard work. Persistence is that ability which enables us to keep going and see something through to the end.

Achieving a goal rarely involves a simple step by step progression. In reality we will suffer setbacks and disappointments. If we look to those who achieve in their chosen field, we see that they have usually experienced exactly the same setbacks as the rest of us – but rather than using these as a reason to

give up or abandon their goal, they have dealt with the disappointments, learnt from them and demonstrated resilience. Michael Jordan, believed to be the greatest basketball player of all time, said:

*'I've missed more than 9000 shots in my career. I've lost almost 300 games. Twenty-six times I've been trusted to take the game-winning shot and missed. I've failed over and over again in my life. And that is why I succeed.'*

Sometimes, despite all our hard work we will fail. Our choice then is to give up, or to try finding a different way to achieve what we want. Thomas Edison said about the many failures he experienced before discovering a light-bulb that worked:

*'I have not failed. I've just found 10,000 ways that won't work.'*

Although partly to do with our different temperaments, the quality of resilience is not inborn – it is learnt.

The most important three things we can do to support our children in developing persistence and resilience are:

- To create an atmosphere in which they feel safe and are encouraged to try new things – where mistakes and failure are accepted, and regarded as useful experiences from which to learn. In homes where mistakes are ridiculed or punished, children are unlikely to learn to take a risk or to try something new – they will stick with what they know they can do.
- To help children to accept and overcome the feelings that setbacks and disappointments give rise. We need in particular to acknowledge their feelings when things go wrong – ideas for helping children to express their feelings are given in Session 9.
- To help them to overcome their frustration and disappointment, and to remain optimistic and think positively.

The Top Tips offer some help in developing a plan with your child and helping them to stick to it when they come across challenges.

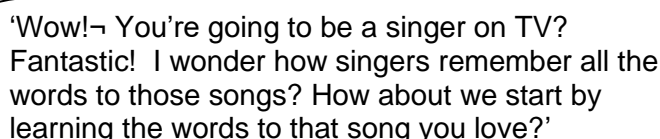
### **Discuss**

Take it in turns to talk about something difficult that you have achieved and say three things that helped you to overcome obstacles and keep going.

## TOP TIPS 6: Helping your child to achieve their goals

### Setting goals

- Make time to talk to your children about their dreams. Show belief in their (eventual) ability to achieve them.
- Let your child choose their own goals – their motivation will be higher and they are more likely to stick with them.
- Help them to choose realistic goals by helping them to break down ‘dreams’ into goals they can achieve.



‘Wow!→ You’re going to be a singer on TV?  
Fantastic! I wonder how singers remember all the words to those songs? How about we start by learning the words to that song you love?’

- Talk to them about their favorite stars and role-models. Look for magazine articles, podcasts, interviews or websites about them and talk to your child about how they got to where they are now. Was it easy? Did they have to work hard? Did they believe in themselves?
- When they have a goal, help them plan (but don’t take over). Good questions to talk about (depending on the age of your child) include:
  - What do you want to be able to do?
  - What will be good about it when you can do it?
  - What little steps might you take to get there?
  - What might get in the way of you succeeding?
  - How can you plan to get around these obstacles?
  - How will you celebrate when you achieve your goal (and along the way)?

### Developing persistence and resilience

- Set a period of time with them to work on something – just a little bit more each time (but remember it is hard to concentrate when we are tired or stressed - so be flexible). Use a timer or stopwatch so they can see their progress. Reward success with praise and maybe on a chart that shows their progress.
- Help your child to learn to resist distractions. Provide an area with few distractions (it doesn’t need to be very big).
- Praise them when they manage to carry on and finish what they are doing, whatever it is.
- Help your child to wait for what they want (control their impulses and delay gratification).
- Model controlling impulses ‘I really want to do that, but I know if I do I will feel bad and won’t be able to finish this work’. Let them know that YOU know how hard it can be to do it
- Point out the consequences of giving in to impulses (in a matter of fact way, while giving a choice). Make the choices explicit for them – ‘Well, you could do that now, and that would mean you would be late for meeting Clara, or you could choose to do that later, when you have finished your dinner, and that would mean...’
- Help your child to feel safe to try new things. Encourage them and let them know that it doesn’t matter if they get it wrong. Praise them for trying and model accepting your own mistakes.

- Help your child to keep going when they feel bored or frustrated - remind them of the benefit, encourage them to do five minutes and see how they feel, or to take a break and go back to it.
- Help your child to see mistakes as something to learn from. Model learning from your mistakes.
- Help your child to accept and move on from feelings of disappointment, frustration etc. See Session 7.

## Session 7: Helping your child to be assertive (not aggressive or passive)

### Introduction

#### Discuss

How do you respond when a friend is constantly asking you to pick up her daughter from nursery without ever returning the favour? When your boss asks you to stay late for the third day in a row? When your partner is late for dinner yet again? What about when you have to do something that you find difficult – maybe taking something back to a shop, or tackling your child's teacher about treating her unfairly? Do you tend to avoid the issue, putting it off as long as you can and then coming away feeling that you haven't said what you wanted? Or do you get angry?

Our responses to these types of situations will vary, but generally they fall into three categories – passive, aggressive, and assertive.

#### Passive behaviour

Passive behaviours include ignoring a problem, giving in (saying Yes when we really want to say No), hesitating, apologising, stalling. The problem with passivity is that it often leaves us with feelings of resentment and disappointment with ourselves. When we are passive we let the other person 'win' while we lose out.

#### Aggressive behaviour

Aggressive behaviour is when we shout, make demands, threaten or frighten the other person. Sometimes aggressive behaviour 'works', in that we get what we want, so we might consider ourselves the winner, but this will be at the expense of the other person, the 'loser'. The problem with aggressive behaviour is that the 'loser' is likely to become defensive and more entrenched in the opposite position and when forced into a corner will seek retaliation at the earliest opportunity!

#### Assertive behaviour

Assertive behaviour is behaviour which allows us to be honest and confident, to stand up for ourselves, say what we mean and mean what we say without hurting other people's feelings. It offers a different way of dealing with difficult situations and problems – unlike aggressive or passive behaviours it aims to find the best outcome for both people, a 'win-win' solution. It involves respecting the other person's needs and feelings, but not at the expense of your own.

In order to make an assertive response we need to be calm and to use words, body language and a tone of voice that give the same message. If we say 'No' while smiling and nodding, the message that is actually heard will be a strong 'Yes'. We need to use:

- the right words  
*'That won't be possible today...'*, *'What I would like is...'*, *'The problem for me is..'*
- body language that supports what we are saying  
*eye-contact, head up, shoulders back.....*
- a tone of voice that says we mean business  
*low pitched, loud enough, confident....*

Learning to be assertive involves believing that our rights and needs really are as important as those of other people; learning some skills, and practising these in real situations.

## TOP TIPS 7: Being assertive

### Learn to be assertive yourself ....

- Being assertive takes practice. Set yourself little targets towards becoming more assertive. Plan and practise what you want the outcome to be and the words to use – in front of the mirror, in front of a friend...
- When in a difficult situation, tell yourself your rights and feelings are just as important as anybody else's.
- Use calming down strategies like taking a deep breath or counting to ten in your head.
- If you are saying 'No' – give the real reason, don't make up lots of excuses.
- Make sure your body language and tone of voice are giving the same message as your words.
- With young children make sure you have their attention before you speak to them – tap them lightly on the shoulder to get them to look at you.
- Ignore the impulse to shout. Use the 'Magic Message' formula – 'I feel...when you...because...'.  
• Talk about the specific behaviour, rather than attacking the person.
- Acknowledge what the other person says but repeat yourself as necessary...
- Don't forget you can always respond to a request with 'I'll need some time to think about that'
- Avoid using 'You always....' or 'You never...'. As soon as we use these phrases we are into an argument that is actually unrelated to the current situation. What we want is for the other person to do something differently, yet when we use these phrases the conversation changes its focus: 'Well, what about last Tuesday when I...'. It is rarely true that someone 'never' or 'always' does something, and this is an argument that they will win!

### ... and help your child to be assertive.

- Model assertiveness!
- Teach children that they have rights – in the family, at school, in the wider community. Emphasize the responsibility to respect other people's rights alongside their own.
- Make it OK and normal to think differently from each other – we can disagree with other people without having an bad argument. Model listening to, and valuing, everyone's opinions, views and ideas.
- With young children use dolls to play-act different ways of dealing with a situation – aggressive, passive or assertive. With older children use TV programmes, podcasts, films or magazine articles to talk about how a situation could have been dealt with differently.

#### Discuss

Read and discuss the Top Tips so that you are ready to try them at home. Which of them will be most useful for you?

#### Activity

Try acting out a situation in which you need to be assertive with your child – perhaps to tell them that they have to turn the TV off, or cannot have sweets when you are out shopping.

Remember learning to be more assertive takes practice!

## Session 8: Managing anger (theirs and yours)

### Introduction

While we often get better as we get older at managing other feelings, such as fear, disappointment and sadness, anger often remains the one that we continue to struggle with. Anger can seem to come from nowhere, catching us unawares taking control of our words and actions. How many of us have not regretted something that we have done or said in anger?

If we are to help our children to deal effectively with anger, we need to model this and deal with our own anger in the ways that we are asking of them.

### Understanding anger

A first step in learning to control this most difficult emotion is to understand a little about the 'anger process'.

The 'anger process' can be likened to a firework:

- The match represents the 'triggers' that make us begin to feel angry
- The fuse represents the build-up of anger - once the match lights the fuse, our bodies and emotions begin to prepare for a fight or flight response (we want to punch somebody or run away) – there is an escalation of emotion. Our fuse will vary in length according to circumstances - how tired we are, our mood and whether there has been a build up of irritations. This is why we can get very angry one day about not being able to find a sock, while on another day we remain calm and in control even when the bus doesn't come and we miss an important appointment.
- When the burning fuse sets light to the firework it explodes, just as we do when we lose our temper.

#### Discuss

You will probably be able to relate to this process – think of a time when you became really, really angry (don't worry nobody else needs to know – these times are rarely our proudest moments). Can you remember the 'trigger', the build-up of anger – those scary feelings and uncharacteristic thoughts – and then the 'explosion'. Do you remember how you responded to someone brave enough to say something to you at this point? If they said you would be punished if you didn't calm down, would you have been able to do it?

In fact the answer to the last question is probably 'No'. When we are angry our ability to reason is cut off temporarily – you may find that you cannot even remember what you did or said when you were angry.

Following the 'explosion' of anger, it takes our body a long time to calm down, for our heart rate and breathing to return to normal, our muscles to relax and our thoughts and feelings to become less angry. Research shows that for some people this recovery period might be a matter of minutes, for others it can take several hours. During this time we are likely to get angry more quickly than normal - if you are angry with a car-driver who has behaved badly, the next car to come along doesn't have to do much to enrage us!

All of this is important for us to know, because knowing what is happening can help us to try to avoid letting our own anger get out of control, and also because it helps us to deal more effectively with angry children.

#### Discuss

What has helped you to calm down when you were getting angry? Once the fuse is lit you need to calm down before the explosion occurs. Have you managed to do that in the past? If so, how?

## TOP TIPS 8 : Managing Anger

### Managing your own anger....

- Identify your triggers, the matches that light your fuse, and try to avoid them when possible – e.g. if the mess in the children’s bedrooms makes you angry when you come home, avoid them until you have had a chance to relax.
- Recognise the signs that the fuse is lit – that anger is building up - pay attention to your body.
- Remember to try to calm down as soon as the fuse is lit – once the firework explodes it is too late. Keep practising something that helps you calm down e.g.

Count to ten (or fifty),

Breathe deeply,

Repeat to yourself ‘I can deal with this’ or some other positive phrase,

Where possible, do something completely different – a distraction

Do some vigorous exercise -it really can change the way you feel

Say ‘I feel really scared/ cross/ upset, I need a minute to calm down’ and take time-out

- Think calming thoughts. Angry thoughts make angry feelings more intense. So if you breathe deeply five times, while thinking angry thoughts – ‘How dare they?’; ‘This has happened once too often’; ‘That’s it I’ve had enough’ - the result will be that you feel even angrier! The important thing is to find something that gives you time to reclaim control of your reason and to use the time to think more positively.
- Think about the consequences of getting angry. While it might feel great to act on our anger in the short-term, words spoken and actions taken in anger often cause us additional problems. Ask yourself - is it worth it?
- Lengthen your fuse – de-stress! When we find ourselves exploding regularly over minor incidents, it is important that we think about what is causing us to feel stress and try to reduce the stress in our lives.
- If you do lose your temper, accept that everybody does it sometimes. It lets our children know we are human just like them. It also gives us more understanding and empathy for our children when they lose their tempers. It is very important to apologise - this sends the message that it is normal to make mistakes and provides your children with a model that they will use in their own relationships.

### ...and responding to your child’s anger

- Help them to recognize their own triggers and find ways to avoid them.
- Help them to get to know the first signs of mounting anger before they lose control.
- Remind them of their calming down tricks
- If they have reached the ‘explosion’ point, don’t try to reason with them or threaten them– they probably won’t even hear you. Make sure they are safe (if necessary holding them firmly until they begin to calm down)
- DON’T get drawn into their anger and become angry yourself. Try to remain calm. There will be time to talk later, when you are both calm.
- Allow them time-out, not as a punishment, but as an opportunity for them to calm-down and for them to avoid further instances of anger (remember that these are more likely in the time following an anger outburst).



## Session 9: Helping your child manage their feelings

### Introduction

Feelings affect how we think, and drive much of what we do, and many of the choices we make. When we are feeling irritable and negative, our thoughts will reflect this. For example, a friend ignores us on the street – if we are feeling irritable and negative we may think...

*'I wonder why she's ignoring me. Maybe she's decided she doesn't like me', or, 'I must have done something to upset her'.*

If however we are feeling good and optimistic our thoughts are likely to be different...

*'I wonder why she didn't say hello – she must be thinking about something else, or maybe she didn't see me'*

Much of our behaviour is directly driven by our emotions (and the thoughts that these give rise to),

*'She ignored me in the street. She's so rude. I won't speak to her again.'*

*'I wonder if she's OK – I'll visit later and see if everything is alright.'*

Just as feelings influence our thoughts and behaviour, so our thoughts can also influence our feelings. In Session 8 we discussed how angry thoughts can intensify angry feelings, just as calming thoughts can help to extinguish them.

Changing our thoughts is the key to managing and taking control of our emotions.

### Feelings, thoughts and behaviour

It is important that children learn to label and talk about their feelings – to accept that whatever they are feeling is OK (although a clear distinction is drawn between having a feeling e.g. of anger, and acting on it e.g. hitting someone – while all feelings are OK, not all behaviour is!).

It is important to talk about 'comfortable' or 'uncomfortable' feelings rather than 'good' and 'bad' feelings, as when children believe that certain feelings are bad, they tend to not want to admit to having them, and from there it is a small step for them to think of themselves as 'bad' people for having them.

It is also important that they explore different things that they can do to manage their feelings – especially the uncomfortable ones such as worry, sadness, jealousy, guilt and so on. They need to know that feelings change when we think differently about situations (this is sometimes called 'reframing' situations), when they do something different (distracting themselves), when they relax or take some exercise. You will know yourself how differently you feel about things when you let time pass by doing something unconnected with the problem.

As parents/carers we naturally tend to want to make the uncomfortable feelings go away, but sometimes our instinctive reactions don't actually help our children. Children worry that we will not understand or take them seriously, that we will judge them, laugh at them or tell them what to do. Unfortunately, with the best intentions, these are often exactly the things we do! In fact, the most important thing that we can do as parents/carers to help our children deal with their feelings is to listen to them, accept their feelings and help them to feel OK about sharing their feelings, worries or thoughts. Sometimes listening will be enough to reassure our children and help them to move on. If it is not, it might be helpful to use the 'Managing Feeling Checklist' below.

## Managing Feelings Check-List

- **Identify what you are feeling – give your feelings labels.** Remember that we often have several feelings at once, some of them conflicting.
- **Accept that this is what you are feeling and that it is OK to feel like this.** Tell yourself: 'It's OK to feel like this, anybody would in this situation'; 'I won't feel like this forever'; 'I probably won't even remember this in a month's time'; 'What's the worst thing that can happen?'; 'Everybody makes mistakes/ has to deal with embarrassment/ feels jealousy sometimes'
- **Try to work out what is causing you to feel like this** even if you don't feel good about it (feeling anger or even hatred towards our child for example). When we know the cause, the feeling is much easier to deal with.
- **Consider if there is something you can do to directly deal with the feeling.** e.g. if you are feeling guilty because you let a friend down, would it help to ring him/her and explain, apologise, try to make amends?
- **Try 'reframing' the situation that is giving rise to the feeling** by thinking differently and more positively about it e.g. if you can't go out because you have too much to do in the house, think about the benefits of getting your work done or what would happen if you didn't do it.
- **When feelings or worries seem overwhelming use a strategy to distract yourself – do something different.** You might try some relaxation or do some vigorous exercise.
- **Remember - sleep can help.** Strong feelings and worries are so much harder to deal with when we are tired and stressed.

### Discuss

How might this checklist help your child?

## TOP TIPS 9: Helping your child manage their feelings

- Create an atmosphere in the house where it's OK to talk about all feelings. e.g. don't say 'Don't be upset' or 'You shouldn't be scared of that' .
- Be a role-model. Talk about your feelings and how you manage them e.g. 'I'm getting cross now because this isn't going right, I think I need to do something different for a little while' .
- Teach children to name their feelings. Help them to become 'feelings detectives' by focusing on how they and other people look and what their bodies do (inside and out) when they have a particular feeling. Look at pictures of people together and guess how they are feeling. Talk about how characters in books or on TV are feeling and why. Play games with toys or puppets where different situations give rise to different feelings.
- Children often express their uncomfortable feelings through their behaviour. e.g. if they are nervous of going to a new school, they may 'tell' you through attention seeking or angry behaviour. Look for the feelings behind the behaviour.
- Focus on the feelings – if you want to help your child deal with their feelings don't get sidetracked into discussing behaviour issues at the same time and start telling them off. The behaviour can be dealt with at a different time.
- The best way to help your child to deal with their feelings is to simply listen. Follow the Top Tips for listening to your child (Session 3) to encourage your child to talk about their feelings. Most importantly accept their feelings (even if you don't like them) - don't belittle, deny or judge them, and resist the urge to make everything alright by responding too quickly with advice.
- Adapt the 'Managing Feelings Checklist' to your child's age and personality. Help them to come up with a plan or a way to distract themselves that works for them – when we have a plan things are much more manageable.

## Session 10: Helping your child to deal with loss and grief

### Introduction

When your child has suffered a loss or bereavement, it can be difficult to know what to do for the best, and to understand how the child may be feeling or thinking. It is useful to know some common responses to bereavement, and how children of different ages might understand the concept of death.

### Children's understanding of death

**Up to 3 years:** Children cannot understand that death is forever. They may believe that something that they did caused the person to go away, or repeatedly search for the dead person. They may also regress, reverting back to behaviour from an earlier age.

**3-7 years:** Children may show signs of 'magical thinking' – e.g. they might believe that they can make the dead person come back by promising to be good or perform some action (a six year old spent days trying to make a time machine when her father was killed in an accident)

They may replay the death in play and through artwork.

Children of this age are likely to feel fearful, in particular that other members of the family or they themselves might die. They may also suffer from separation anxiety, for example developing a fear of going to school.

**8-12 years:** Children will begin to understand the permanence of death, recognizing it as irreversible. They may alternate rapidly between periods of grief, crying, sadness, anger etc. with periods of apparent 'normality' - being able to play, laugh and joke. At this stage they need practical, concrete information.

### Common responses to bereavement

Although children might understand death and behave differently from adults following bereavement, the depth and intensity of their feelings will be no less great, and their needs will be similar to those of adults.

The generally recognized stages of grief (which is a normal response to a bereavement, and necessary for us to work through in order to come to terms with the changes it leads to) are outlined below. As a rough guide, the grieving process takes at least two years for adults (and there is no reason to think it is any different for children), although many things will influence how hard and long the journey will be for an individual. Each stage is often revisited many times, and progress is far from linear –grief lasts as long as it lasts for an individual and there are no short-cuts and no right or wrong way to grieve. The stages are likely to include:

- **Shock and disbelief** - This can involve numbness, where people appear calm and matter of fact immediately following the news of the bereavement. This is often thought of as being the mind's defense against an impossibly painful situation. It can also involve apathy or anger.
- **Denial** - In denial the bereaved person acts as if the person is still there – refusing to acknowledge that he/she has died. This is not to be confused with children asking when the person is coming back – in young children this is not a result of denial, but of a lack of understanding about the finality of death.
- **Growing awareness** - A whole range of uncontrollable feelings are likely to begin at this point. There may be yearning, anger, guilt, sadness, despair, pain and severe distress. People might go over the situation in detail time after time, search constantly for a reason, focus their anger on someone specific (often the dead person themselves) or idealise the person who has died. As

the reality of the loss sinks in, feelings are likely to include sadness, hopelessness and depression.

- **Acceptance** Gradually (after, on average, at least two years), the person may begin to accept the loss, with memories becoming less painful and more of a comfort.

**Discuss**

How your own children reacted to any bereavement suffered. Did their responses fit in with the stages discussed above?

You might like to share one thing that helped them at a sad time.

## TOP TIPS 10: Helping children to deal with loss and grief

### Generally:

- Try to help children to understand that death is a natural part of life – grow flowers and watch their growth and death cycles. Bring the cycle of life into everyday conversations - dead leaves in the autumn and new life in the spring.
- Read books together that touch on loss and death, and talk about the feelings of the characters and what they do to help themselves
- Keep a pet if possible and be ready to support your child when it becomes ill or dies. Explain that medicine can sometimes make things better, but that sometimes it can't.

### When a loss or bereavement happens:

- Don't avoid talking about the loss – recognize that it has happened.
- Use concrete language – say the person has died and do not use euphemisms.
- Be clear about what death means – that it is different to sleeping, that the person cannot feel or think anymore, that they are not coming back.
- Let the child know that nobody is to blame (including themselves) and that nothing they can do will bring back the dead person.
- Generally it helps children to say goodbye if they can attend the funeral. It can be even better if they can help to plan it, suggesting music, poems or readings etc. Explain exactly what will happen at the funeral, and make sure that your child knows that it is fine to ask any question at all.
- Don't feel that you should try to find something positive about the loss, e.g. by saying 'Maybe it was for the best'.
- Show that it is OK for your child to laugh and enjoy themselves still - don't be surprised by the speed at which children can move from desperate sadness to 'normality' and back again – this is normal.
- Be prepared for the different ways that grief might express itself. The most important thing you can do at any stage is to be available to listen. If children revert to behaviour more typical of a younger age, don't worry, they will move on when they are ready.
- Use 'good listening' (see Session 3) to let them know that their feelings matter to you. Don't judge or be shocked by the feelings that they express. Show your acceptance of them and their feelings by hugs and cuddles.
- Let them ask questions or go over things as many times as they want or need to – don't change the subject.
- Set up a special place – a comfortable space for younger children with blankets and cuddly toys, or a quiet place for older children, perhaps with photos of the loved one, special possessions, a blanket to hide under, poetry or other books etc.
- Help them to find ways to deal with their feelings that are not destructive to them or others. e.g. if they have overwhelming anger and feel like breaking things, help them to express the feeling and accept it as normal – explain that feelings of helplessness can often lead to anger. Talk about how they can safely get rid of the feeling – maybe punching a cushion or running ten times around the garden – remind them that while all feelings are OK, not all behaviours are.
- Don't be afraid to share your own feelings – it is alright for them to see you cry and hear you talk about how you miss the person too. It helps to know that they are not alone.

- Try to keep to your routines as much as possible. Routines such as eating, going to school, watching certain programmes etc. can provide the stability and predictability that children need when everything else seems uncertain and insecure.
- Let them take as long as they need to grieve – never try to rush them or make them feel bad because they ‘should be over it by now’ or are ‘doing it wrong’. Everybody grieves in their own way.
- If you are worried that they have become ‘stuck’ (e.g. in denial) or that their grief is seriously interfering with important aspects of life (eating, going to school) seek help from the family doctor, school nurse, or one of the helplines or internet sites dealing with bereavement.
- Share memories, photos, anecdotes etc. and talk about the person who has died – their special qualities and humanness (including the things that drove you mad about them!). This may be too painful at first but, as time goes on, these memories will become a source of pleasure and comfort.
- It can help children enormously to find ways to celebrate the person who has died. Talk to your child about what you/they could do, maybe putting together a scrapbook about the person, planting a tree or making something such as a bird-house in their memory. They might like to write a letter to the person who has died, explaining how they feel about them. Again, help-lines and websites can be a very useful source of ideas.
- Make sure that you, as an adult, are receiving the support that you need too. If you are overwhelmed by your own grief, you will not be able to support your child. Contact a support group and make use of any offers of help from family, friends and neighbours.

## Session 11: Helping your child manage change

### Introduction

Change can be welcome, unwelcome, chosen or imposed, big or small, expected or unexpected, and your child will have experienced many different types of change by the time they start school. Whatever their nature, changes arouse a range of feelings – excitement, anticipation, anxiety, worry, and sometimes resentment and anger (particularly when a change is imposed on us).

Most changes, even those we have chosen and welcome (e.g. moving to a better house), will involve some feeling of loss (saying goodbye to our old house, our favourite haunts, our friends). There are many situations that leave us (and our children) with a sense of loss, if we understand loss to mean giving up something familiar for something new and unfamiliar. These include divorce, unemployment, moving to a new country and illness. For children the arrival of a new sibling, a mum going back to work, friends moving away, or going into foster care will all involve a sense of loss. People's reactions to these situations will often therefore follow a similar pattern to the stages of grief discussed in Session 10. Even when feelings of loss are not present, change will often arouse feelings of wariness and discomfort.

### Why is change difficult?

In Session 1, the idea of 'inner confidence' was introduced. Inner confidence is what helps to see us to navigate the joys and challenges of life – when our inner confidence is shaken we find it more difficult to cope, we feel stressed and look at life through a negative lens. Change is one thing that can easily shake our inner confidence.

If we move to a new country, our feelings of safety (both physical and emotional), belonging and feeling valued are all likely to feel threatened by the move – everything is unfamiliar and we do not have people who know us well and value us.

Taking active steps to maintain children's feelings of inner confidence and self-worth at times of change is doubly important when they have been through or are going through times of change.

### Discuss

A change that has happened to you and share three things that helped you to cope with it.



## TOP TIPS 11 : Helping your child manage change

### General

- Try to adopt and model a positive attitude to change yourself. Talk about it in terms of the world being an exciting place, full of new opportunities, and challenges to look forward to.
- Help children to see change as a normal part of life – show them photos and talk about what they can do now that they couldn't do before, how their favourite toys, programmes, clothes etc. change over time. Point out the magic of changes in nature (caterpillars changing into butterflies and cygnets into swans; how the changing seasons help life to continue).
- Help children to develop positive attitudes to change by supporting them in making choices and changes for themselves. They might be allowed to choose how to decorate their room or have their own piece of the garden to design and look after.
- Use play, puppets, books, programmes and other people's experiences to talk about changes in people's lives (e.g. moving to a different town, starting a new school) and how they might feel, what they might do to cope with the changes.

### Dealing with an imposed or unwelcome change

- Tell children in plenty of time about any change that is coming up that will affect them – be honest and factual explain at the child's level why it has to happen.
- Answer their questions honestly and don't be worried about saying 'I don't know yet' or 'we will have to find that out.'
- Be clear about the differences between changes that your child can affect, and those that they can't – those that are for adults to decide. However, once a child understands that there is nothing they can do to alter the decision, it will help them to have some say in HOW the change happens.
- Try to give them as much control as possible over the way the change happens – e.g. if you are moving house, let them choose their bedroom and how it will be decorated. Even a small amount of control can help children to feel more positive and deal more effectively with changes to their lives.
- Listen to their thoughts and feelings about the change, both immediately and whenever they raise the issue (perhaps many times). See Session 3.
- Help children to talk about their feelings as much as they need to – see Session 9 for ideas about how to do this. Remember that they may go through a period rather like grieving when faced with a major change – see Session 10.
- Talk about all the things that will stay the same when the change happens – these will be important sources of predictability and stability.
- Work extra hard at maintaining your child's feelings of inner confidence, as these take a knock when change happens (see Session 1).
- Remember the importance of 'closure' – saying goodbye to the old is important before we can accept and adapt to the new. e.g. if you are moving to a new house, help children to find ways to say goodbye to friends and reassure them about the many ways they can stay in contact.

### Helping children to develop strategies to deal with change

- Remind children of times that they have dealt with difficult changes in the past, and talk to them about what helped them to do that.

- Acknowledge any negative thoughts and unpleasant feelings that children have about an upcoming change, but try to find examples of when previous changes have had unexpected positive outcomes (e.g, 'Remember that you didn't want to go to high school, but if you hadn't you wouldn't have met Duane').
- Help children to identify the strategies they have for dealing with strong feelings, (e.g. 'reframing' the situation, distracting themselves, using relaxation or exercise, using positive thinking – see Session 9)
- Use toys or puppets with younger children to 'act out' the coming change, and let your child think of how the toy or puppet might deal with the situation.
- Remind them that it is normal to feel wary and uncomfortable at times of change – this can help to reduce worry and anxiety.

## Session 12: Dealing with Bullying

### Introduction

Bullying has three characteristics:

- it is ongoing (it is not a one-off incident or fight – it goes on for a while and is repeated, sometimes in different ways)
- it is deliberate (it deliberately seeks to hurt, humiliate or harm others physically or emotionally)
- it is unequal (it involves a power imbalance – e.g. an older or larger child bullying a younger or smaller one, a group against an individual)

Bullying is not:

- an argument with a friend
- a friend 'being nasty' over something specific
- a one-off fight or argument.

### Discuss

Do you agree with this description of what is, and what is not, bullying?

### Types of bullying

There are many different forms of bullying e.g.

- violence or threats of physical harm;
- forcing children to do what they do not want to,
- racist, homophobic or sexually offensive name-calling
- excluding somebody (deliberately leaving someone out).

Rumour spreading has always been a form of bullying, and its power has increased greatly in recent years with children having access to social media and cyber bullying is a huge issue.

One type of bullying is not necessarily worse than another type. Sometimes a look across the classroom before playtime can be as devastating as being attacked in the playground, as it is the fear and anticipation that do the damage as much as the acts themselves. It is this constant fear that makes bullying so damaging to the target.

In the top tips which follow there are some ideas for dealing with bullying generally, and:

- Finding out if your child is being bullied
- How to respond to your child if you find out they are being bullied
- Further steps to take

### Discuss

What strategies do you know that help in a bullying situation. Have you used any of them? If so, how did they help?

## TOP TIPS 12 : Bullying

### General

- Encourage your children from an early age to know that everyone is equal and deserving of respect.
- Be a good role-model in the way you talk about and treat others.
- Demonstrate empathy for others – talk about how other people might feel in different situations – real-life, TV programmes, books, films and cartoons, play situations etc.
- Talk openly about what bullying is (the definition is given above)
- Make it safe for children to talk about bullying – if you regularly use ‘good listening’ it is more likely that they will feel OK about talking to you about it (See Session 3).
- Take the time to teach your children the ‘Cyber-bullying guidelines’ below: If your child receives bullying communications, report the bullying as you would any other forms of bullying.

### Cyber bullying guidelines

Always respect others. Remember that, online, you can't see impact of what you do – what you think of as a joke might be devastating for someone else. Always ask permission before you use a picture which will be shared with others.

Think before you send a message either about yourself or about other people. What you say can be made very public very quickly

Treat your password like your toothbrush – don't let anyone else use it!

If you receive unpleasant communications, block the person sending them and always report someone who is behaving badly

Don't retaliate or reply to a bullying message.

Always save the evidence of bullying – whether they are messages, pictures or online communications.

Make sure you tell an adult as soon as possible. This might be a parent/carer, your service provider, or someone at school.

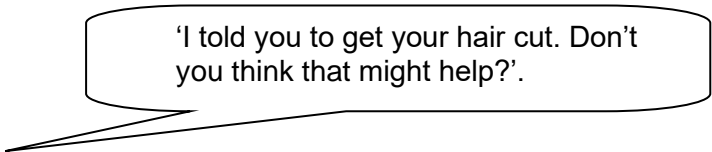
### Finding out if your child is being bullied

- Remember that your child may not tell you that he or she is being bullied. If you suspect it is happening, look out for signs of distress – behaviour changes, withdrawal, not wanting to go to school, lots of stomach-aches, headaches or non-specific illness. Sometimes these ailments will be real, and sometimes they may be made-up – the aim for the child in each case is to not have to go to school, and whether the illness is real or not, the worry certainly is, so it needs to be taken seriously.
- Help your child to talk to you (see Session 3). Make sure that your child knows you are there if they want to talk, and be alert to possible ‘openers’ – it is unlikely that your child will come right out and say that they are being bullied. Books and TV plots can provide possible ways to discuss bullying in a less personal way, and with younger children toys and puppets can provide a good opening to helping them to express their worries and feelings.
- Bullying destroys our feelings of self-worth, so if you think your child is being bullied (whether or not they will tell you) you will need to work doubly hard to foster their feelings of being valued,

belonging and having personal power (see Session 1). Friendships are also important, so try to encourage your child to keep up with friends (but don't push too hard as previous best-friends can be responsible for the bullying).

### How to respond to your child if you find out they are being bullied

- Use your best listening skills (see Session 3), acknowledge your child's feelings and encourage them to talk about their worries.
- Don't belittle what they are going through – however minor the incidents seem to you, the feelings are very real for them. Remind children of how they can manage the feelings that they might be having (see Session 9).
- Don't over-react – every child needs to know that you will support them, but getting angry and threatening to visit the school or parent/carer of the other child will terrify your child further. Work hard to keep calm in order to come up with the best solution – you cannot do this when you are angry!
- Praise your child for telling you and reassure them that they have done the right thing in letting you know what is happening.
- Try to avoid focussing on how the bully should be punished.
- Try to avoid implying that your child should change themselves. This reinforces their idea that they are somehow to blame for the bullying.



'I told you to get your hair cut. Don't you think that might help?'

- Don't be too quick to respond with advice or try to immediately solve the problem for them. Listen to their ideas, and unless they are likely to end up in serious danger or trouble, make it clear that you will support them in trying their ideas out.
- Don't encourage your child to go against school rules - however tempting – explain that there are different rules in different places and there are many ways to sort out the problem.
- If your child feels in danger, you will need to make sure that they have a plan for keeping safe – options to explore may involve finding ways of avoiding the children doing the bullying, staying with a group of friends, knowing where to go for help etc.
- With older children encourage your child to think about what they would like to happen and ask how you can help. Don't rush this step – you will need to wait until the time is right for your child (or until things get to a point where you feel that as an adult you **MUST** take action) – this might mean agreeing to 'seeing how things go' for a couple of days (however much you want to immediately deal with the problem your way).
- Teach your child to make a protective 'fog' around themselves

#### **A useful technique – Making a protective 'fog'**

When people insult us, it is tempting to insult back. If we do this though, often the person using bullying behaviour will come back with even more insults and make things worse. There are other responses to insults – we don't have to 'bite back' and let the things people say hurt us.

Remember that the person bullying is often saying things about you because of something that is wrong in their life. Or they may enjoy the fact that they can make you angry, especially in front of an audience. What people who bully like most is the feeling of power they get from creating a response.

Instead of arguing with them, you can:

- Imagine a great 'fog' around you which swallows up insults so they cannot get to you.
- Remind yourself that the person bullying has said this to many other people – what they say tells us more about them than about you.
- The person bullying wants to see your reaction – take away the satisfaction.
- Use a normal, bored-sounding voice.
- Say something neutral e.g.
  - 'You could be right'
  - 'Maybe'
  - 'Yes that's true, I do wear glasses'.
- Make sure your body language, tone of voice and the words you use all give the same message:  
**'I'm really not bothered by anything you say or do'.**
- Keep on doing it. It won't work first time.

### Further steps to take

If the bullying carries on after your child has tried out their own strategies, and any that you agree together, you could take the following steps:

- Make sure you collect any evidence, e.g. keep a diary of who did what, exactly what they said or did, how often it happened, when and where; keep any text messages, emails, website comments or posting.
- Alert the school. Make sure you talk to your child before you do this but be clear that this is what you must do. Agree with your child when the best time is for you to go – maybe when the children have gone home, as they will worry that this will make things worse.
- When you talk to the school, stay calm and give specific details from the diary you have kept (names, dates and places). Ask what they will do about it and also what they would advise you to do. Remember that you are partners and both want the best for your child, so do your best not to fall out with the school – this never makes things better!
- Make a plan with the school and make an appointment to review it within two weeks.