

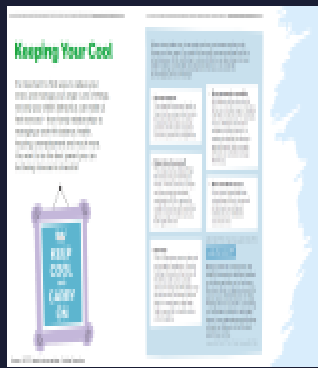
Structure & Routines

Many children have a need to control activity and interaction around them. To help deal with this insecurity and anxiety, we have to decrease the uncertainty in their lives.

Children need to learn that being good feels good. They do this by having lots of chances to do well and getting rewarded for it. You can help with this by giving rewards for the behaviours that you want to see in your children.

One recognised method of identifying actions that lead to challenging behaviour is the 'Assault Cycle'. Learning and understanding the phases of the cycle will help you to identify the patterns of assessing, observing and acting upon a child's response appropriately. As the child becomes increasingly stressed about a perceived threat, the intensity of their emotions escalate. Their reaction and response to the threat is cyclical in nature, since each is associated with behavioural, physical and psychological responses.

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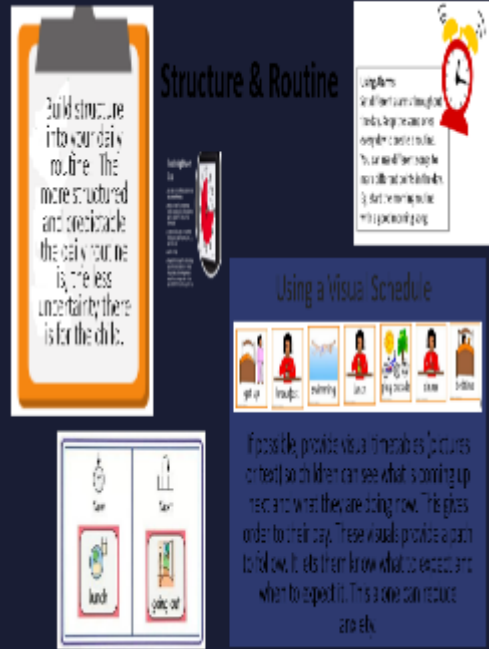


Boundaries

PREDICTABILITY

When the world is unpredictable and confusing there is a lot of uncertainty which can lead to anxiety.

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Structure & Routines

How can I set boundaries?

All children need love, guidance and to have rules and boundaries. Rules and boundaries help families to understand how to behave towards each other, and what's OK and not OK. But the best way to go about this will vary based on your child's age and stage of development. All children are different and develop and reach milestones at different rates.



Top tips...

for all ages

- Keep guidance simple and consistent.
- If your child is behaving in a way you don't want them to, clearly explain what you want them to do instead.
- Be available and make time so your child will come to you when they feel something is wrong or they are upset.
- Keep talking and listening to your child even if at times it feels like a challenge. Start listening from a very early age and set a pattern for life.
- Review family rules as your child gets older and recognise the different needs of children living at home. For example, you shouldn't expect the same from your 12 year-old as you would from your four year-old.
- Get support from friends and try any good ideas they have found helpful.
- If you are struggling and things are getting out of hand, get advice from your GP, a health visitor, or your child's teacher.

for babies – toddlers

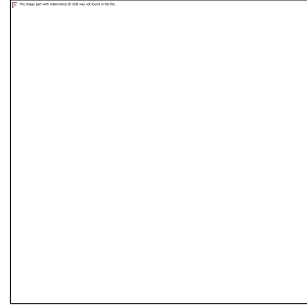
- Introduce boundaries from an early age.
- Sympathise with how your child may be feeling – for example, saying "I know you are frustrated", if your child is struggling to do something.
- Share your own feelings if you find it helps to relieve your stress – for example, "I know you're tired but I'm tired too".
- Try to avoid using orders and ultimatums.

for school age – teenagers

- Be willing and give your child chances to show they can be trusted.
- Avoid criticism wherever possible. If your child has done something wrong, explain that it is the action and not them that you're unhappy with.
- Try to avoid getting trapped in petty arguments, there are rarely any winners!
- Consider ways to negotiate or offer choices as your child gets older.

Structure & Routine

Build structure into your daily routine: The more structured and predictable the daily routine is, the less uncertainty there is for the child.



Using Alarms

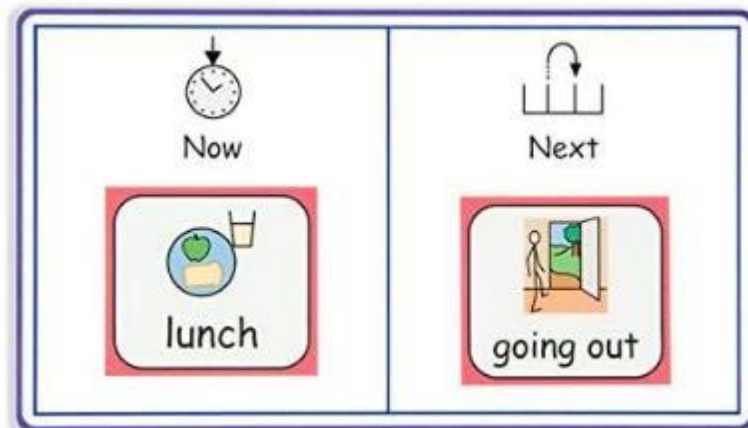
Set different alarms throughout the day. Keep the same ones every day to create a routine. You can use different songs to mark different points in the day. Eg. start the morning routine with a good morning song.



Using a Visual Schedule



If possible, provide visual timetables (pictures or text) so children can see what is coming up next and what they are doing now. This gives order to their day. These visuals provide a path to follow. It lets them know what to expect and when to expect it. This alone can reduce anxiety.



Transitioning between Tasks

1. Some children can have difficulty switching their brain activity between different tasks.
2. They do much better if they have warnings or reminders when one activity is ending and another is beginning, especially if the current activity is a favourite activity.
3. To ease transition difficulties try to ensure that the child always knows what will be coming up next, e.g. watch TV, then bath.
4. Use timers if it helps.
5. This way their brain is prepared for what is coming up next, and the reminders help bridge the transition. This is particularly useful for limiting time spent on devices – there are some apps available that allow you to control this from your phone, e.g. screen time.



Keeping Your Cool

It's important to find ways to relieve your stress and manage your anger. Lots of things, not only your child's behaviour, can make us feel stressed – from family relationships to managing a work-life balance, health, housing, unemployment and much more. You want to be the best parent you can but being stressed is stressful!



When stress takes over, it can make you lose your temper and say or do things you later regret. You might find yourself saying something hurtful or smacking your child; and living in a stressful home can also impact on your child's feelings and healthy development. But you can avoid this by managing stress and anger.

- **Accept support**

This may be from your family, a friend or by using online forums. Knowing that there are other parents in the same situation can be a great encouragement.

- **Make time for yourself**

This may involve doing things like exercising or listening to music. Treats can be as simple as a long soak in the bath, watching a DVD or going for a walk. If you live with a partner, agree a way to make sure you both get time off.

- **Get help**

This is a positive step to take and not a sign of weakness. If you're feeling stressed and anxious all the time seek some outside advice. A range of difficulties may get in the way of being a parent and it's important to get help. Talk to your GP or health visitor, or the helpline.

- **Be as prepared as possible**

All children will be stressful at times so consider ways of dealing with this in advance. For example, if your child gets bored and irritable on long journeys, or waiting for things like doctor's appointments, take a couple of books or activities to keep them busy.

- **Don't overlook success**

If you have coped well with something difficult, be proud of what you've achieved. Celebrate your children's successes too.

Look after yourself

Being a parent is so important, and while it's common to feel less needed as children get older, or to feel more like a taxi driver or cleaner, you are the person your child will look to for help. Finding time for yourself is something you shouldn't overlook or feel guilty about. It may take planning but having a break can help you to be the best parent you can be.

Materials created by Hampshire Primary Behaviour Support Service