



# Exploring Challenging Behaviours

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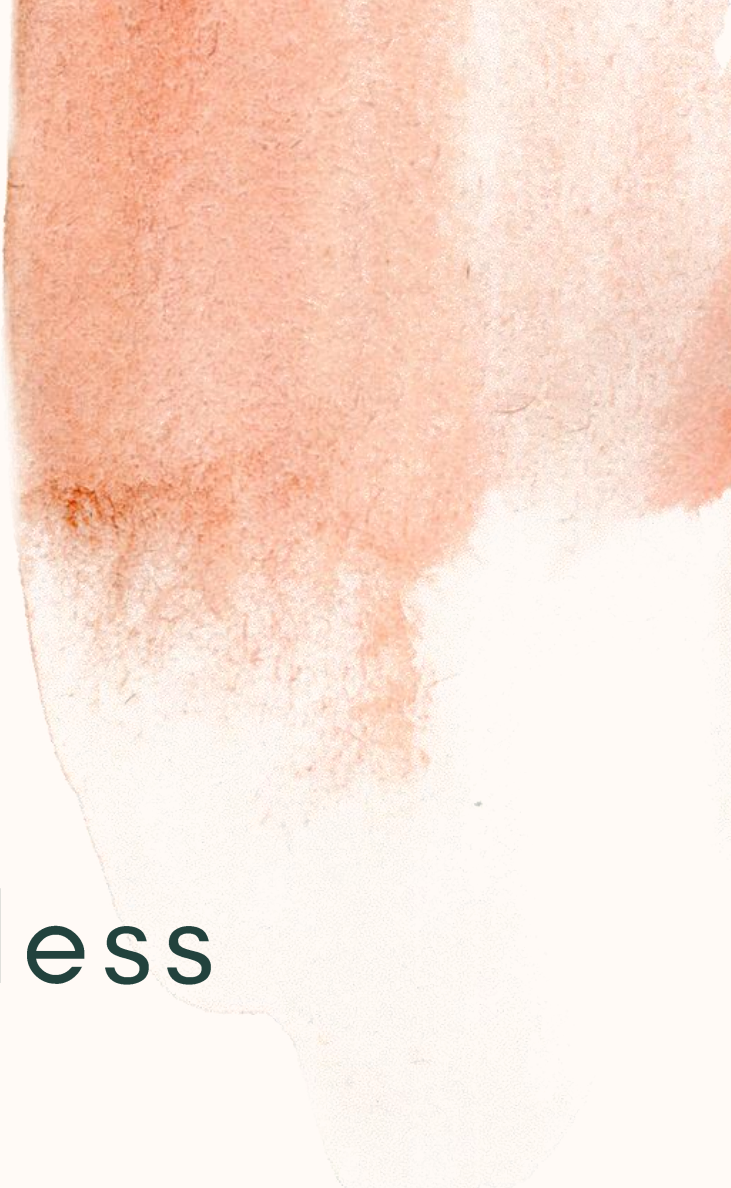


# Acknowledgement of Country

**The FCAV and PCA Families acknowledge the unceded sovereignty of the Wurundjeri people of the Kulin Nation. We acknowledge the continued connection to Country - including lands, cultural knowledges and their peoples - and pay our respect to Elders past and present. We are the united voice and advocate for all foster carers, permanent carers, and adoptive families across Victoria, and we aim to continually develop our knowledge and act with respect to First Nations sovereignty.**



BACKGROUND ARTWORK  
CREATED BY FIRST  
NATIONS DESIGN AGENCY  
ISCARIOT MEDIA



# Housekeeping

1. Confidentiality
2. Cameras on, if comfortable
3. Mics on mute unless speaking
4. Respecting the voice, opinions, and experiences of others

# About Us



**JAKE IARIA**

Carer Assistance Program Therapeutic  
Practitioners



**TONYA BAVARO**

Aim of Today's  
Session



# The Behaviours



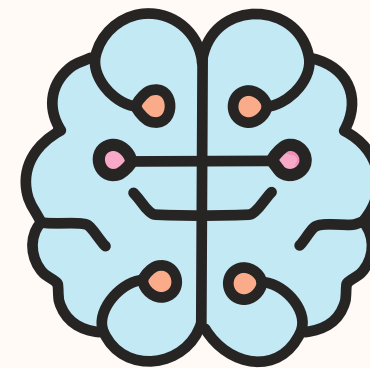
## Physical Behaviours

- Hitting, kicking, biting, spitting
- Damage to self, others, or objects
- Intimidation



## Emotional Behaviours

- "Defiance"
- "Disrespect"
- "Manipulation"
- Difficulty in managing big emotions



## Psychological Behaviours

- "Manipulation"
- Lying
- Stealing
- "Hoarding" food
- Developmental regression (toileting, baby voice)



## At-Risk Behaviours

- Substance / alcohol use
- Vaping
- Absconding
- Criminal activity
- Unsafe sexual activity

# Why Can They Happen?



## Trauma

Trauma can result in structural changes to the brain - that is, how the brain is 'wired'. Young people can develop a "sensitised" stress response system. This means their stress response is **much** more likely to be switched on, and they may be **hyperaware** of their surroundings to manage their safety.

This is a survival response.



## Skill Deficits

Young people who have experienced trauma may have noticeable deficits in the skills they need to manage set expectations. This includes things like emotional regulation, problem-solving - anything that goes beyond their skill set may cause frustration and 'outbursts'.



## Additional Factors

Children with neurodevelopmental disorders such as ADHD or Autism may encounter further challenges in managing behaviour. Structural differences in the brain means they may be disadvantaged in managing behaviours, emotions, transitions, time management, and more.

# Grief in Kids



## **Puddle Jumping**

Children struggle with long term, intense, negative emotions - you might notice they experience **really intense** emotions, rapidly shifting between anger/sadness and normal play (which can give us a little bit of whiplash!).

This is a developmentally appropriate coping mechanism.



# Window of Tolerance

## Window of Tolerance

When people are within their window of tolerance, they are in a psychological space that allows them to perform daily activities without their emotions and thoughts overwhelming or interfering with their functioning.



### HYPERAROUSAL

#### FIGHT / FLIGHT RESPONSE

- Attacking or confronting
- Becoming angry or irritable
- Hurling insults
- Engaging in blame
- Difficulty in trusting other people
- Running away or hiding
- Quitting
- Being in denial
- Experiencing anxiety
- Sabotaging oneself



### HYPORAROUSAL

- Surrendering or becoming compliant
- Feeling empty or numb, like you are shutting down
- Experiencing detachment
- Rationalizing or justifying behaviors or situations



# When Your Child Hits

## WHEN YOUR CHILD HITS -



## WHAT IS REALLY GOING ON

It's upsetting, stressful and sometimes embarrassing when your child hits.

But hitting is communication - not a character flaw.

It's often a sign your child is struggling to regulate big emotions.

### Emotional Flooding

Young children (and many older ones too!) can become quickly overwhelmed by emotions like frustration, fear or disappointment.

When they don't yet have the skills to express those feelings with words - their body acts them out.



# When Your Child Hits

## It's Not About 'Bad Behaviour'


Hitting is not usually a calculated choice. It's a stress response – the brain goes into fight, flight, or freeze, and the thinking part of the brain goes offline. This is about regulation, not rebellion.

## What Helps in the Moment?

- Stay calm and steady (you're their anchor!)
- Keep everyone safe without shaming
- Use few words – try “I won't let you hit” or “Let's take space”
- Wait until they're regulated to talk things through

## Teach After the Storm

Once your child is calm, that's your teaching moment.

- You can help them reflect:
- “What were you feeling?”
  - “What could we do next time?”
  - Offer simple scripts: “I can say ‘I'm mad!’ instead of hitting.”
- 



# When Your Child Hits

## Build Regulation Skills Daily

- Use calm-down tools (like breathing, movement, fidget toys)
- Practise naming feelings
- Play games that teach impulse control

These help strengthen the pause between feeling and acting.

## Look Beneath the Behaviour

Ask yourself:

- Are they tired, hungry, thirsty or overstimulated?
- Are they feeling disconnected, anxious, or powerless?

Meeting underlying needs makes hitting less likely.


## A Compassionate Reminder

Your child is not bad - they're learning.

And you are not failing - you are guiding them through one of the hardest skills to learn: emotional regulation.

With time, safety and support, things will improve.

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# THE COKE BOTTLE ANALOGY

## THE COKE BOTTLE WE CARRY ALL DAY

Imagine a bottle of Coke being gently shaken again and again. Nothing spills at first. From the outside, it looks fine. This is what many children – and adults – do all day. They hold it together. They follow rules, mask feelings, meet expectations. Each small stress adds another shake. By the time the school day or workday ends, that bottle is already under pressure, even if no one can see it yet.

## WHY THE EXPLOSION HAPPENS AT HOME

Home is where the lid finally comes off. Not because a child or parent is misbehaving, but because home feels safe enough to stop holding it all in. The explosion might look like tears, shouting, withdrawal, anger, or overwhelm. It's not about what just happened. It's about everything that happened before – the fizz that had nowhere else to go.

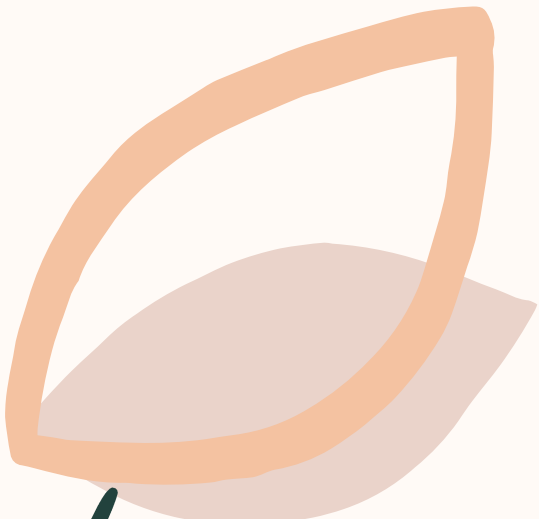
## WHY 'JUST CALM DOWN' DOESN'T WORK

You can't calm a shaken bottle by shouting at it. Telling someone to calm down when they're already overflowing ignores the pressure inside. Logic doesn't reduce fizz. Consequences don't remove triggers. What helps is slowing things down, reducing demands, offering connection, and allowing the fizz to settle before expecting anything else.

## HOW WE HELP THE FIZZ ESCAPE SAFELY

Children need regular chances to release pressure before the explosion. So do adults. Movement, quiet time, food, play, co-regulation, laughter, rest, sensory breaks, being listened to without fixing. When we help the fizz escape little by little, the bottle doesn't explode. Regulation isn't about control – it's about giving emotions somewhere safe to go.

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The Coke  
Bottle  
Analogy

# Trauma-Informed Responses



## **Remain Calm**

Your young person will be relying on you to co-regulate - if you escalate, they'll escalate higher! But, can be easier said than done.

## **Avoid Punitive Punishments**

Children who receive harsh punishments may feel rejected and retraumatised, worsening behaviour over time.

## **Validate their Emotions**

It is important to affirm to the child what they're feeling is OK - even if their behaviours may not be.

## **Practical Safety**

Ensuring that any objects a child might use to harm themselves, or someone else, are safely stored out of reach.

## **Explore What Regulates Them**

Some children prefer deep pressure (big hugs, 'wall presses'), others movement (running around the yard), others grounding.

# Trauma-Informed Responses



## **Offer Options**

Children will feel safer and more regulated if they feel in control. Two options you provide can be very helpful to give a sense of agency.

## **Language Used**

Children pick up on the language used about them; if they are called attention-seeking or manipulative, they may begin acting in ways that 'confirm' this.

## **Wait Until Calm to Talk**

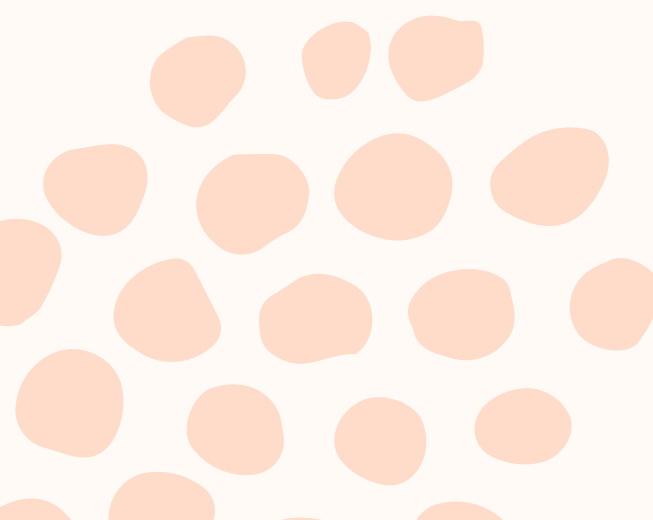
Wait until the child has calmed fully to discuss what happened. When they are dysregulated, they won't be in a space to listen or learn.

## **Offer Alternative Communication**

When dysregulated, young people may really struggle articulating their feelings. Use simple gestures (e.g., thumbs up, down, etc.) to assist.

## **Have a 'Calm Down' Corner**

The corner can be filled with sensory toys and fidgets to help the child regulate their emotions in tough moments.



# PHRASES TO CALM A CHILD'S EMOTIONAL BRAIN

When emotions run high, words matter — here's what helps a brain feel safe again

"I can see you're feeling upset — I'm here with you"

"You can let those feelings move through — they won't stay forever"

"You don't have to talk yet, we can just breathe together"

"Your brain is doing its best to protect you"

"Let's find something that helps your body feel steady"

"You're not in trouble for feeling this way"

"Your feelings make sense right now"

"I'm here, and we'll get through this together"

"It's okay to feel angry — I won't leave"

"Let's see what your body needs right now — quiet, space, or a hug?"

"You're safe, even though it feels big right now"

"I can help your body feel calm again"

"It's okay, we can slow everything down"

"Let's take this one step at a time"



Want to learn more about supporting a child's ability to regulate their emotions?

Explore the [MANAGING BIG FEELINGS TOOLKIT FOR PARENTS & EDUCATORS](#) by The Contented Child for visuals, tools, and resources that make emotional regulation simple and child-friendly.

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Phrases to  
Calm the  
Emotional  
Brain





# Challenging Behaviours

What behaviours do you find most challenging?

Is there something that you've heard that resonates for  
you?



# Exploring the Effects on Us




What's it like for you when these  
challenging behaviours occur?  
Thinking about physical, spiritual,  
emotional, and psychological impact.





# What Helps Us?

What has worked for you in the past to help you balance the stressors and your wellbeing? What has helped sustain you over these periods of heightened stress?



A large, soft watercolor splash in shades of light orange and peach, centered on the page. The splash has a textured, painterly appearance with varying tones and soft edges. In the top-left and bottom-right corners, there are smaller, abstract watercolor splashes in muted green and dusty rose colors.

*Thank you  
& feedback*

We welcome any comments or feedback in  
the comments below.