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Leading and Learning

Tacaíocht, Misneach & Spreagadh
Supporting School Leadership

Pupils with Behaviours of Concern

Challenging Relationships in the School Community

Resource Bundle

Glossary of Terms

BoM	Board of Management
CAMHS	Children and Adolescent Mental Health Service
CPD	Continuous Professional Development
DES	Department of Education and Skills
EWO	Education Welfare Officer (Attached to EWS)
EWS	Education Welfare Service (Now part of Tusla)
IPPN	Irish Primary Principals' Network
NABMSE	National Association of Boards of Management of Special Schools
NBSS	National Behaviour Support Service (Now part of NCSE)
NEWB	National Educational Welfare Board (Now part of Tusla)
NCSE	National Council for Special Education – incorporating SESS
NEPS	National Educational Psychological Service
SEN	Special Education Needs
SENCO	Special Education Needs Co-ordinator (member of school staff)
SENO	Special Education Needs Organiser (member of NCSE staff)
SESS	Special Education Support Service – now part of NCSE
SET	Special Education Teacher
SNA	Special Needs Assistant
TESS	Tusla Education Support Service

Note: The term "Parents" in this Resource Bundle is intended to denote both the natural parent(s) as well as guardian(s) who act in a parental role for children.

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1   INTRODUCTION

Children's behaviour is normally a means of soliciting positive (and occasionally negative) attention, affirmation and encouragement from their parents, teachers or peers. Such feelings of appreciation and satisfaction are generally reinforced by their parents at home and by their teachers and other adults in school. In its simplest terms, all behaviour, including behaviour of concern, is purposeful. It is also instructive and enlightening in terms of guidance to school personnel in their interactions and communications with pupils.

Unfortunately, and for a variety of reasons, a minority of children have a negative experience of, or reaction to, life in school. This may originate in the mind of the child within the home or school setting. It behoves us as educators to seek to understand the reasons for such dissatisfaction and to seek remedies for them as best we can.

The purpose of this 'Resource Bundle' is to briefly outline current theory and best practice in relation to modifying behaviours of concern and to provide a guide as to where relevant further resources may be found.

2   WHAT ARE BEHAVIOURS OF CONCERN?

Behaviours of concern are often defined as "Culturally abnormal behaviour(s) of such intensity, frequency or duration that the physical safety of the person or others is placed in serious jeopardy, or behaviour which is likely to seriously limit or deny access to the use of ordinary community facilities" (Emerson, 1995).

In our schools, behaviours of concern are those behaviours that interfere with the child's learning and/or that of others. These behaviours can be triggered by a wide variety of factors and influences, such as being a new pupil in the school, transitioning to a new teacher, or by other external events in their lives.

2.1   BEHAVIOUR

Behaviour is defined as the manner of conducting oneself. It also reflects one's response to one's environment or stimuli. Behaviour may be conscious or unconscious (e.g. quickly pulling one's hand away when one touches something hot). Many factors may contribute to a child's particular behaviour.

2.1.1   Internal factors include:
- age and stage of development
- personality and temperament
- personal history and experience
- physical, sensory or medical factors
- skills, ability to learn
- beliefs about self and others
- resilience and self-efficacy

2.1.2   External and interpersonal factors include:
- parental and family patterns and relationships
- social networks - friends and peer groups
- neighbourhood and community factors
- the status and standing of different groups in society
- school factors
- time, opportunity and support for personal and social development
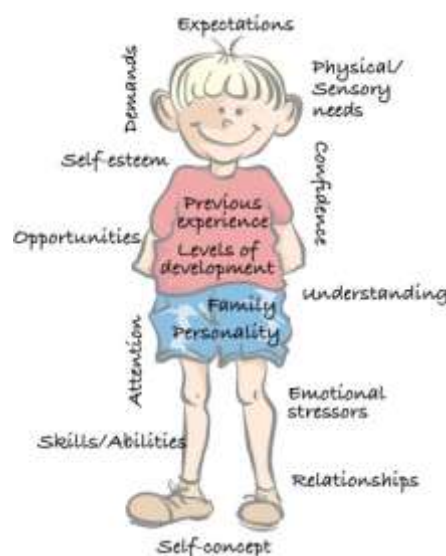
2.2   6 KEY ASSUMPTIONS IN UNDERSTANDING BEHAVIOUR
Ref: Daly, Patricia. (2019) *Small changes can make big differences*, Limerick: CDU

- **Behaviour is not random**: It is connected to events which occurred before the behaviour and is reinforced, positively or negatively, by reactions to the behaviour. It is therefore controllable in terms of interventions targeted at antecedents, or "triggers" and consequences
- **Behaviour works, has meaning and is not random**: It serves a purpose and has goals, though these goals may not be easy to recognise. The functions of behaviour which negatively affect learning are:

  o   Getting attention, from adults or peers
  o   Getting an object – something the child wants e.g. a ball, a chase
  o   Avoiding something e.g. attention or a particular task
  o   Getting or Avoiding a sensory experience or human contact

- **Children want approval**: Adult approval, particularly affirmation and approval from key adults such as teachers, is as important to children as the air they breathe. Your approval is the strongest reward you have in the classroom
- **Children want to learn:** This has been demonstrated time and again, both in scientific and psychological studies, and is borne out by the experience of teachers over the years. Some may have particular difficulties with the learning process, but they all want to learn
- **Children who know "what" and "how" cannot always "do":** It takes a while for children to fully know, understand and apply social interactive skills. Not all children grasp them easily and they need to be taught and supported
- **Some behaviour has hidden dimensions:** These are related to a particular child's unique life experience. We see what happens in the classroom and in the playground but we cannot see the child's unique history or underlying "invisible" conditions e.g. anxieties, sensory difficulties or learning difficulties. We should always be aware of this, especially with children who display challenging behaviour.

2.3 INFLUENCES ON PUPIL BEHAVIOUR

There are many potential influences on student behaviour, and many factors that can lead to behaviour that is challenging for schools to deal with. These include:

- **Biophysical factors**: such as medical conditions or disabilities
- **Psychological factors:** including emotional trauma or lack of social skills
- **Behavioural/social factors:** including where a student's problem behaviour has been learned through reinforcement, consequences or adaptation to social practices (a student with a learning difficulty repeatedly misbehaves knowing that he/she will be removed from the class and this will avoid his/her learning difficulty being exposed)
- **Student group dynamics:** such as bullying and teasing, cliques or student apathy or hostility
- **Environmental factors:** e.g. the level of classroom noise or seating arrangements
- **Classroom organisation issues:** such as inconsistent routines, inadequate materials or obliviousness to cultural differences
- **Teacher behaviour:** e.g. boring or disorganised lessons, over-reaction to misbehaviour or over-reliance on punishment.

In many cases, there is no single "cause" of challenging behaviour, but it is the result of several factors and influences operating in combination.

2.4 BEHAVIOUR AS A FUNCTION OF RELATIONSHIPS

As in all aspects of school life, the quality of the relationships between the school leaders and the various parties involved plays a crucial role in resolving the child's difficulties and helping him/her to successfully and enjoyably access the curriculum.

The school leader will need to build and maintain cordial and collegiate relationships with some/all of the following as s/he attempts to restore calmness and joy to the child exhibiting behaviours of concern:

- The child
- The child's parents
- The child's teacher(s)
- Personnel from various state agencies e.g. NEPS, NCSE, DES, PDST

This 'Resource Bundle' looks at these various relationships and suggests means of building, improving and maintaining them.

2.5 POSSIBLE UNSDERLYING CAUSES OF BEHAVIOURS OF CONCERN

It is the norm for children to seek attention which gives them praise and encouragement from parents and teachers. There is always a reason for, or purpose to behaviours of concern, such as:

- **Anxiety and Stress***: Children may become anxious for a myriad of reasons. Worries about friendships, homework, home situations etc. can be overwhelming for a child, leading to stress. While most children are able to identify the cause and put in place strategies to reduce their stress levels, some cannot
- **Communication difficulties:** These can range from not being able to speak at all, shyness, social inhibition to being very articulate but not understanding the social variations and conventions in a conversation. Behaviours of Concern are often a substitute means of communication for such children
- **Sensory issues:** Some children can be over- or under-sensitive to any of their senses. This is often referred to in the literature as hyper (over) or hypo (under) sensitivity
- **Social understanding:** Not all children have the same understanding of social rules. Not all children grow up in environments with social rules similar to those in most schools
- **Inflexible thinking:** We all adapt to routines and can find them comforting. Some children struggle with changes in routine

3   RELATIONSHIPS WITH THE CHILD'S PARENT(S)

The most precious jewels you will ever have around your neck are the arms of your children. Anon.

All parents feel that their child is special, precious and deserving of the very best in life, including the best education which we, as school leaders, can provide. The parents of children with behaviours of concern feel no differently and are also entitled to the best education service the state can provide. Unfortunately, for many parents with children who present with behaviours of concern, interactions with service providers and authority figures may not have been to date very pleasant in the pre-school and school settings. Little wonder then that they sometimes approach school leaders with an attitude of apprehension and suppressed hostility as they themselves may have had negative interactions with educational services or none at all while growing up.

Building and maintaining a good working relationship with the parents of a child with behaviours of concern is always in the very best interests of the child. This relationship must be based on honesty, integrity, trust and a mutual desire to do everything possible to facilitate and promote the child's learning.

3.1   THE INITIAL MEETING

Under the terms of Circular 0007/2020, schools are prohibited from requiring parents of children "*to attend an interview, open day or other meeting as a condition of admission*". It is therefore possible that the first meeting between the school leader and parents may be when it becomes obvious to the teaching staff that the child is exhibiting behaviours of concern. This meeting will be crucial and it is important that school leaders adopt an attitude of concern for the welfare of the child who is not coping with school and is communicating this through behaviours of concern. The following attitudes on behalf of the school leader will be counter-productive and lead to conflict and cause further harm to the child's education:

- Blaming the parents for not informing the school about the child's issues prior to his/her coming to school
- Concentrating on the disruption the child is causing to the classroom routine
- Concentrating on the stress being felt by the teaching and support staff in the school
- Concentrating on the harm the child may be causing to other children.

A more positive approach will lead to a better long-term relationship between home and school and will make working with the parents much easier. Such an approach will be based on:

- Framing all discussions around the needs of the child and his/her exhibitions of distress in the classroom
- Expressing concern about the fact that the child, through his/her behaviour, is isolating her/himself socially in the classroom
- Encouraging the parents to share whatever background information they may have which might assist the school in alleviating the child's anxieties and behaviours of concern
- Assuring the parents/guardians that we are there to help and will work together every step of the way
- Stating clearly to them that there is no negative judgement being made about them as parents, but that the meeting displays a desire and a willingness on the school's behalf to improve the situation for all (child, family, peers, bus escort, bus driver, teacher, SNAs, school community) involved.

The School Leader should aim to clarify the following messages over the initial meeting(s).

3.1.1   The School's Commitment to the parents and their child

- Make the parents aware of the ethos and vision of the school and how these apply to the education of their child and to meeting her/his needs
- Assure the parents that they are the primary educators of the child and that the school wishes to work with them in relation to their child accessing the curriculum
- Put the parents at ease and assure them that the school will do all that it can within its resources to provide a quality teaching and learning experience for their child
- If applicable, assure parents that the child's needs in relation to settling into a new school environment are the school's main priority. These may include:
    - Ability to cope socially with a new and unfamiliar setting
    - Separation anxiety.

3.1.2   The School's Capacity to meet the needs of the child

- Discuss with the parents the needs of the child and the ability of the child to adapt to the school setting. Some children will exhibit behaviours of concern arising from distress or anxiety due to their inability to cope with what they perceive to be the overwhelming experience of being in a mainstream classroom. In such cases, it is important that both parents and school recognise children in such situations can respond by displaying behaviours of concern as a coping mechanism. Parents should be aware that such behaviours, where they are aggressive or violent, will often frighten other children and cause further social isolation
- Assess with the parents what learning or social needs the child may have in relation to attending school
- Seek and receive full co-operation from the parents in relation to how the school will work with them and their child to meet his/her needs
- Receive all relevant data pertaining to the child's behavioural issues so that the school can begin to understand the reasons why the child is behaving as s/he does
- Make the parents aware of the role of NCSE and the SENO and ask for all relevant data which might assist the school in seeking the required resources from NCSE or DES in relation to their child
- Work with parents to design and teach the child alternative and more socially acceptable responses/behaviours for the child. These new responses or behaviours will promote better acceptance by peers and a stronger, positive relationship with teachers.

3.1.3   The School's Commitment to the creation of a safe environment

- Ensure that the parents are aware that the school's first function is to ensure a physically and psychologically safe environment for all children
- The purpose of creating such a safe environment is to provide the best possible environment conducive to teaching and learning
- Make the parents aware of the school website and where they can read the school policies in this regard. If deemed necessary, provide parents with copies of the relevant policy/policies.

3.1.4   The School's Discipline and Behaviour Policy

- Ensure that the parents are aware of the school's Behaviour, Discipline and Bullying Policies and that they support and accept these policies.
- Advice parents of their important role in supporting their child's compliance with these policies.

3.1.5   Parents Understanding and Commitment to the School Ethos and Values

Open and transparent communication is key to trust between parents and school. It is vitally important that the parents of a child with behaviours of concern clearly understand and support the school's ethos and values in relation to respecting:

- Teaching, support and ancillary staff
- The right of other children to be educated in a safe environment
- Possible concerns of parents of children who may be intimidated by behaviours of concern.

Parents of a child with behaviours of concern must commit to ensuring that their child is made fully aware of these concerns and encouraged to respect other children and all school staff.

Advise parents that a Code of Conduct for Parents/Guardians must be signed.

3.1.6   Recording of Behaviours of Concern

Where behaviours of concern are an issue, ensure that the parents are aware of the school's policy and procedures on recording such behaviours. Parents should understand that the school seeks to record and analyse these behaviours to understand what the triggers are and to put in place a plan to support the child to develop more socially acceptable behaviours. Parents should be assured that they will be fully included in this process. It is important to emphasise that children who exhibit behaviours of concern make life difficult for themselves and inhibit social interaction with their classmates.

3.1.7   Partnership Schools

The underpinning ideology with this programme is that parents, teachers, students and support staff are all working together to support school improvement. This programme offers parents the opportunity to:

- Get to know and understand the school's ethos and vision
- Learn about the school communication plan
- Learn about the school's priorities and goals
- Become involved with steps towards school improvement
- Have their voice heard in relation to future plans for the school within the context of the plan already developed by the teaching staff.

This programme has the potential to reduce parental fear in relation to necessary communication with the school because of their child's behaviour. It can facilitate them to understand why the school is suggesting specific actions, reassure them that their child's health, happiness and education needs are at the core of their work, and that this approach fits into a successful improvement and nurturing school culture that has been developed for everyone.

For more information, select the following links: http://www.npc.ie/primary/partnership-schools-ireland

4 RELATIONSHIP WITH THE CHILD

4.1 INTRODUCING THE CHILD TO THE SCHOOL

For a child who is anxious about coming to school or who has experienced difficulties in a previous school, preparation for the first day is important. This will include briefing the teachers fully on the child's needs and, if possible, facilitating a meeting between the teacher(s) and the child's parents.

The child's classmates should be told that a new child is joining the class and reminded to welcome the new arrival. Some children might be appointed as playmates for him/her during the first few days. It is important the child's first experience of his/her new school is a positive and happy one.

4.2 BEHAVIOUR AND ITS CONTEXT

It is now very clear that behaviours of concern do not arise "out of the blue" – there is always a context. Knowing and appreciating the context of a behaviour increases exponentially our ability to de-escalate the situation, reduce anxiety for all concerned and adjust the focus to teaching and learning.

All behaviours of concern arise within a context which has 4 dimensions:

- Setting Events
- Antecedent Events
- Behaviour
- Consequent Events

4.2.1 Setting Events

These refer to the experiences in the child's life in the recent, or more remote past. Although not seemingly connected to the behavioural event itself, they can pre-dispose the child to react in a particular way to a seemingly innocuous request or event in the classroom.

Examples of this might be:
- A child who is feeling unwell
- A child who feels unjustly treated by his parents because s/he was admonished for not keeping his toys tidy before s/he came to school
- A child who is upset because a classmate is not "being nice" to him/her.

It is common for setting events to be related to the classroom or environment. Examples of these might be:
- A child, who does not want to be touched, is sitting in close proximity to other children
- A child, who has an aversion to loud noise, is in a classroom during lunchbreak where all his classmates are loudly conversing and having fun
- A child who feels that the classroom is too hot or too cold.

Being able to recognise when a child is experiencing anxiety arising from a setting event allows a teacher to intervene and calm the child, thus averting a possible behaviour of concern. Recognising the influence of setting events will depend on how well we know the child and his background – his/her family, likes and dislikes, phobias, etc. Getting to know a child is one of the major keys to averting behaviours of concern.

4.2.2 Antecedent Events

The Antecedent Events are the more immediate actions or conditions which led to an outburst of behaviours of concern. These are often referred to as the "triggers". Once these have been identified, they can be controlled or eliminated from the child's environment. Managing antecedents can greatly reduce incidents of behaviours of concern.

4.2.3 Behaviour

In order to deal with behaviours of concern, it is important to record that behaviour in terms of its type, severity and frequency.

4.2.4 Consequences

Recording the consequences experienced by a child following an episode of behaviours of concern will be helpful in understanding the reasons for the behaviour by identifying the child's reaction to his/her behaviour of concern. We may find that the child enjoys the reaction and the attention received as a consequence of the behaviour or the child may be distressed by the experience.

4.3 RECORDING BEHAVIOURS OF CONCERN

All concerning behaviour must be recorded and analysed in accordance with the ABC model above. NCSE and SESS provide several templates for efficient recording of behaviour. Concise, comprehensive and clear recording forms the evidential basis for all non-biased decisions relating to behaviours of concern.

It is imperative that all school staff and parents are involved in recording behaviours of concern. They are fully cognisant of the school's procedures and policy on such recording and that each and every one of them is thoroughly briefed on these procedures. Developing such procedures and policies should be done at a whole staff level – ideally centred on Croke Park hours. These procedures and policies should also have parental input and be ratified by the BoM.

See also https://www.sess.ie/behaviour-resource-bank   Activity Sheet 30
https://www.ippn.ie/images/PDFs/Rachel-Markey-NCSE-Behaviour-Resource-Pack-for-Principals.pdf

4.4 ANALYSING THE RECORDED BEHAVIOURS

The purpose of recording the behaviours of concern is to help discern patterns of behaviour and to understand the conditions or triggers which cause these behaviours. Understanding the triggers will assist in better managing situations causing the behaviours and helping the child to better regulate his/her behaviour.

See also https://www.sess.ie/behaviour-resource-bank   (Activity Sheet 30)
https://www.ippn.ie/images/PDFs/Rachel-Markey-NCSE-Behaviour-Resource-Pack-for-Principals.pdf

4.5 NEPS Approach

The needs of pupils with special educational needs can best be considered in terms of a continuum and therefore support given is also on the basis of a continuum.

Milder Needs

More Complex Needs

CLASSROOM BASED SUPPORT INDIVIDUALISED SUPPORT FOR MORE MILD OR TRANSIENT NEEDS

INDIVIDUALISED SUPPORT FOR MORE COMPLEX AND ENDURING NEEDS
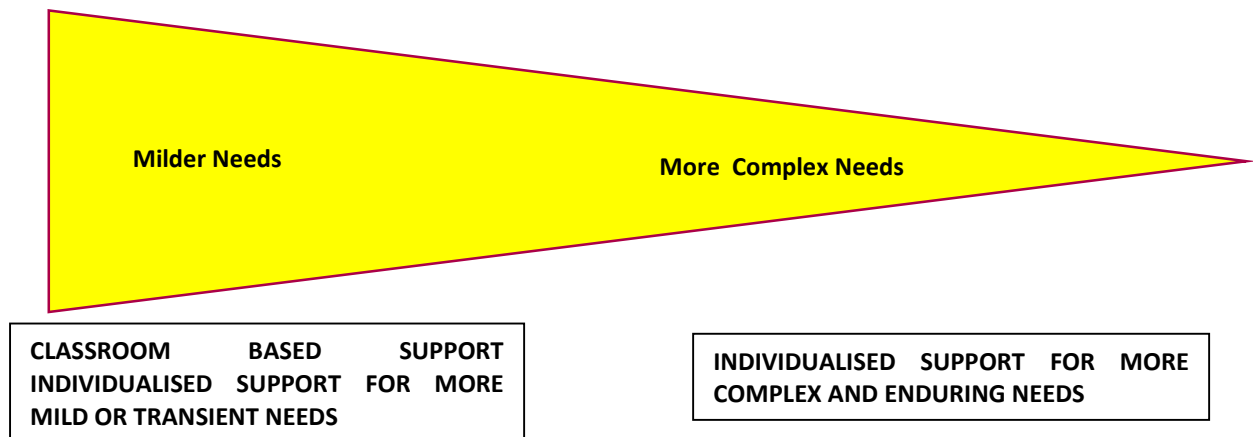
The term support refers to both assessment and intervention. The focus is on identifying actions which can be taken to make a positive difference to the pupil/s. These actions are identified using a problem solving approach. An incrementally more systematic process is outlined depending on where the pupil's needs lie on the continuum in terms of intensity and duration. However, the same thematic questions should guide the thinking and action process at each level of support:

- What is the concern?
- Why is it happening?
- How can we help?
- Did it work?

This problem-solving process is therefore one of assessment, intervention and review.

4.6 NEPS PROBLEM SOLVING DIAGRAM

What is the Concern?
Starting Point

Why is it happening?
Information Gathering and Assessment

How can we help?
Planning and Intervention

Did it Work?
Review

5   RELATIONSHIPS WITH TEACHERS AND OTHER SCHOOL STAFF

5.1   NEPS APPROACH

Schools are urged to use the NEPS model of graded support based on the needs of the child

5.2   CONFIDENTIALITY

All school employees must be fully briefed on the absolute need for confidentiality when dealing with matters concerning pupils. This is especially important when a pupil is exhibiting behaviours of concern and may be the focus of attention of other pupils or parents.

5.3   THE SCHOOL BEHAVIOUR MANAGEMENT TEAM

Many schools have established a Behaviour Management Team whose function is to advise and assist those directly involved in a behaviour of concern situation when it arises.

The Behaviour Management Team will consist of those staff members who have special training or experience in the area of Behaviour Management. It will often include senior staff members and school leaders.

Those directly involved may be experiencing a behaviour of concern for the first time and will require advice and assistance in dealing with it. This can be a junior teacher or SNA or a Newly Appointed Principal.

5.4   THE CLASS TEACHERS

Where a child with behaviours of concern is placed in a mainstream class setting, the class teacher will have primary responsibility for his/her teaching and learning and for assisting the child in overcoming the behaviours of concern. The class teacher will therefore need to be fully briefed by the school leader and ideally should be given an opportunity to meet with the child's parents with the school leader.

The class teacher will, with assistance from the SET and SENCO and the support of the school leaders, draw up an initial plan to help the child adapt to the classroom and to the school routine. The class teacher will modify this plan as more information becomes available through observation, recording and analysing.

The class teacher will be responsible for recording the behaviours of concern and for identifying the triggers which precede such behaviours. The class teacher will be assisted by relevant SETs in this recording also. The class teacher will direct the SNA (if there is one available) in assisting with this observation and recording. The SNA will always report her findings to the class teacher in the first instance.

The class teacher will implement appropriate strategies to contain and modify the behaviours of concern. A menu of such strategies can be found in the SESS "Behaviour Sheets" and the NCSE Resource Pack for Principals.

See also https://www.sess.ie/behaviour-resource-bank
https://www.ippn.ie/images/PDFs/Rachel-Markey-NCSE-Behaviour-Resource-Pack-for-Principals.pdf

5.5   SET

Where a child with behaviours of concern is assigned to the caseload of a SET, s/he will provide additional one-to-one or small group teaching for that child. This may be done by withdrawing the child to a separate location or within the classroom setting. The SET will assist the class teacher with the recording and analysing of the behaviours of concern.

5.6   SENCO

Some schools have a SENCO who co-ordinates SEN provision within the school. When a child with behaviours of concern is enrolled in a school, the SENCO and/or school leader will assign resources as required to assist the class teacher to establish a routine and to facilitate the child's positive and purposeful engagement in classroom activities.

5.7   SNAs

SNAs when deployed by the school leader to work with a child exhibiting behaviours of concern, will at all times work in co-operation with, and under the direction of the class teacher. The SNA will address and provide support for the care needs of the child and will assist with the recording of behaviours. Under no circumstances should SNAs be asked or required to teach a child. SNAs should rarely be on their own with a child, with the exception of escorting a child (if/when it is deemed necessary that an adult escort is required) from one area of the school to another, or for dealing with intimate care needs.

5.8   ANCILLARY STAFF

It is important that ancillary staff (e.g. secretaries and caretakers) would be aware of the identity of children whose behaviours of concern might bring them into contact with the secretary or caretaker e.g. a child who is a flight risk

6   RELATIONSHIPS WITH STATE AGENCIES

6.1   NCSE

The NCSE was established to improve the delivery of education services to persons with special educational needs. The NCSE now has responsibility for services previously provided by the SESS, NBSS and Visiting Teacher Service. This new 'Inclusion Support Service' operates through ten regional support teams.

The NCSE advisory service is a valuable resource that can link in with and support the teacher and the school in relation to behaviours of concern. The Advisor does not require written consent to advise on a case and to discuss methodologies and possible solutions once the child's personal details remain confidential.

The range of services provided by the NCSE may be viewed on www.ncse.ie

6.2   NBSS (NCSE SERVICE)

The National Behaviour Support Service (NBSS) is now part of the NCSE Inclusion Support Service. It was established by the Department of Education & Skills in 2006 in response to the recommendation of 'School Matters: The Report of the Task Force on Student Behaviour in Second Level Schools' (2006).

The role of the NBSS is to assist partner schools in addressing current behavioural concerns on three levels. The NBSS works with schools in addressing students' social, emotional, academic and behavioural needs at:
- **Level 1:** school-wide support for all pupils
- **Level 2:** targeted intervention for some pupils
- **Level 3:** intensive individualised support for a few pupils

Their range of services may be viewed on https://www.nbss.ie/home/about-us

6.3   SESS (NCSE SERVICE)

The Special Education Support Service (SESS) is also now part of the NCSE. Its specific remit is to provide Continuous Professional Development (CPD) for school staffs and in-school support for pupils presenting with special educational needs.

The SESS provides a very useful Behaviour Resource Bank at https://www.sess.ie/behaviour-resource-bank

This is a compilation of SESS Advice Sheets which present some of the many strategies that may assist schools to meet the needs of pupils who display challenging behaviour related to special educational needs. The material covers both the preventative and management aspects of dealing with challenging behaviour and can be adapted to suit particular situations.

6.4   NEWB, TESS, EWS & EWOs

The National Education Welfare Board (NEWB) is a national agency for encouraging and supporting regular school attendance. The NEWB operates under the auspices of Tusla, a section referred to as the Tusla Education Support Service (TESS). Part of this service is the Education Welfare Service (EWS), which employs Education Welfare Officers (EWOs) to assist schools in matters relating to school placement, attendance and child welfare concerns.

6.5   NEPS

National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) psychologists work with both primary and post-primary schools and are concerned with learning, behaviour, social and emotional development. Each psychologist is assigned to a group of schools. The NEPS psychologist should be consulted in all cases where a child is exhibiting behaviours of concern.

6.6   DES

While the Dept. of Education & Skills (DES) has ultimate responsibility for the implementation of education policy throughout the country, it has largely delegated responsibility for SEN and related behavioural issues to NCSE and its various component sections, as outlined above.

6.7   IPPN

IPPN is Ireland's professional support network for primary school leaders. It provides support locally and nationally in several ways through:

Its local network of principals and deputy principals
- Its on-call Leadership Support Team members (who provide a call-back service normally within a 24 hours' time-frame) to answer any query
- IPPN website which provides a host of information, including Resource Bundles
- weekly e-scéal bulletins bringing relevant up-to-date information to school leaders
- Group Mentoring for newly appointed principals in the second year of their leadership journey
- Local, regional and national CPD for school leaders as required

7 PRACTICAL INTERVENTIONS USED IN IRISH SCHOOLS

7.1 PREPARATION 1: GET TO KNOW THE CHILD

Developing a relationship with a child who may have behavioural issues allows the class teacher and others involved to begin to know and understand what is going on in that child's life, what his/her likes, dislikes and anxieties are, and what the child's home context and background is.

As with all other relationships, good communication – listening and talking - is key. This is not an easy task for the busy class teacher as it requires skill and patience.

Good notes and observations by staff members who have worked with the child will help a new class teacher build on the relationships already established.

See also https://www.sess.ie/behaviour-resource-bank Activity Sheet 1 and 8

7.2 PREPARATION 2: AUDIT THE ENVIRONMENT

Aspects of the physical classroom environment may provide potential triggers for inappropriate behaviour. It is important to carefully check the classroom environment and to remove/change anything which might impact negatively on behaviour. The following are just some of the suggested areas to think about:

- Use of space
- Displays
- Respect for property and personal space
- Seating arrangements
- Quiet area
- Noise
- Light
- Air/Heat
- Safety

When making changes to the physical environment or seating arrangements, explain what will happen and why the change is happening

See also https://www.sess.ie/behaviour-resource-bank Activity Sheets 10 and 27

7.3   PREPARATION 3: NEEDS ANALYSIS

All human beings have needs. Abraham Maslow defined the 5 Basic Needs for adults. The following diagram looks at these needs from the perspective of a child
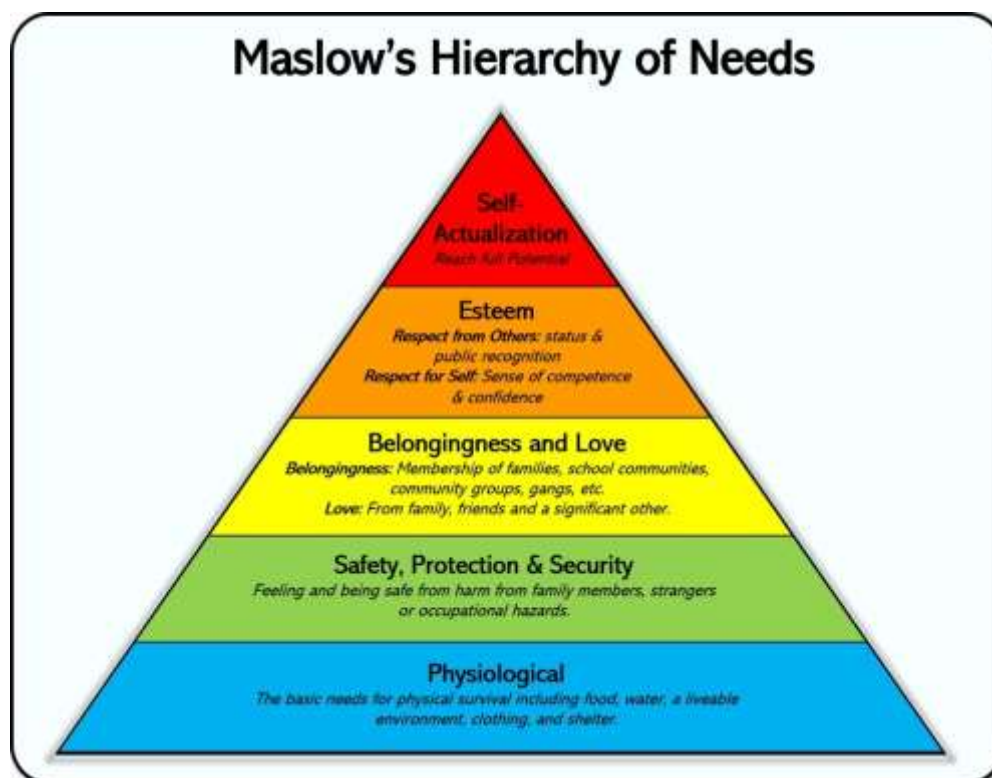
Ideally all of these needs should be met to ensure that every child is perfectly happy and fulfilled at school. The less of these needs that are met in the school/classroom environment, the more likely it is that a child will react by displaying behaviours of concern.

See also **Chapter 2 of** *Small Changes can make a Big Difference*, **by Dr Patricia Daly**

7.4   HELP, ADVICE AND A LISTENING EAR FROM COLLEAGUES WHO UNDERSTAND

Who outside of the school community can a school leader turn to when faced with serious consequences arising from behaviours of concern? It is often helpful to contact a fellow school leader or professional who can listen with understanding. Consider contacting one of the following when faced with a difficult situation: -

7.4.1   IPPN Leadership Support Team
This team of experienced practitioners, who have all *"walked a mile (many miles!!) in your moccasins"* are available to talk through an issue at any time. Simply contact the IPPN Support Office at 1890 21 22 23 and you will get a call back from a member of the Support Team, normally within 24 hours.

7.4.2   IPPN Local Support Network
The IPPN Local Support Network exists to provide collegial support, advice and assistance in times of stress. Just talking to a colleague whom you know and trust and who faces the same challenges as you can put things in perspective, ease anxiety and give you the space to explore options.

7.4.3   Specialised Support Groups
There are many support groups for school leaders of special schools, schools with special classes, schools with ASD special classes, etc. Many of these are organised within the auspices of IPPN.

7.4.4   Service Providers
Many service providers of special schools e.g. COPE Foundation, Ability West, Brothers of Charity, Enable Ireland etc. are funded to provide assistance to school leaders. Many school leaders within a single service provider know each other and have formed support groups.

7.4.5   MDT Meetings
Multi-Disciplinary Meetings are often available to school leaders of special sschools and they can offer guidance and advice in relation to a particular child.

7.4.6   Specific Support Organisations
Organisations such as Down Syndrome Ireland, Irish Society for Autism, ADHD Ireland and Spectrum Alliance, etc. provide varying levels of advice and assistance to schools.

7.5   AT THE FIRST SIGN OF A BEHAVIOUR OF CONCERN
At the first sign that a pupil is displaying behaviours of concern, the following steps should be taken immediately by the class teacher:
- **Ensure the safety** of the child and the other children
- **Document** the behaviour for later analysis
- **Consult** with the child's parents to ascertain if anything has changed at home to cause the behaviour and to enlist their assistance at the earliest possible moment.

7.6   IF THE BEHAVIOUR CONTINUES

Document and Analyse – continue documenting and begin to analyse the behaviours.

Consult with the following to try to "get ahead" of the behaviour by seeking an early understanding of the underlying causes and to find out what worked and, more importantly, what did not work with this particular child in relation to the behaviour:
- SENCO in larger schools
- Principal, directly, in smaller schools
- SET, if involved
- Previous Class Teacher or SETs
- SNAs who have worked with the pupil in the past
- Parents to ascertain if they can shed further light on the cause of the behaviour

Review previous reports and notes about the pupil to see if there has been any earlier indication of the behaviour.

See also https://www.sess.ie/behaviour-resource-bank   (Activity Sheet 14)
https://www.ippn.ie/images/PDFs/Rachel-Markey-NCSE-Behaviour-Resource-Pack-for-Principals.pdf

7.7   IF THE SITUATION ESCALATES

Sometimes a child will revert to their more "normal" behaviour when some small changes are put in place as a result of the steps taken in 6.1 above. However, if the situation escalates, the following steps must be considered:

- **Inform** Principal and SENCO
- **Document and Analyse** – continue documenting and continue to analyse the behaviours
- **Prepare for a Meeting** with the child's parents. Inform the principal of your need to meet with the parents and outline your plan to him/her. Decide if the class teacher alone will meet with the parents or if the principal, SET or SENCO should also be present
- If it felt necessary, assess the risk of injury to the child involved, to other children and adults
- **Meet** with the parents. Be clear in the message you want them to receive, use caring but concise language. Have a clear description of the behaviour you want to target and stick to that description. Explain how it is affecting their child's education (and other children too if relevant). Explain the steps you want to take with their assistance. Ensure they know the entire process that will be followed should the behaviours escalate, but again emphasise that you are there to help.

See Also https://www.sess.ie/behaviour-resource-bank Activity Sheets 15, 20 and 25
        https://www.ippn.ie/images/PDFs/Rachel-Markey-NCSE-Behaviour-Resource-Pack-for-Principals.pdf

7.8   MAKING A PLAN

If appropriate a **Positive Behaviour Plan** can be put into place. This is where short-term strategies are agreed and implemented by class teams, principal and parents to ensure a consistent approach to managing/modifying a particular behaviour of concern. It is essential that any adult interacting with the child knows the language to use and response to make should an incident occur. If necessary, inform all staff of steps to take (or not to take) should they be nearby when an incident occurs.

If necessary, consult with the **School Behaviour Management Team***
- **Recording and Analysing** will continue
- **Record** every step and ensure that it is done with the **knowledge** and **permission** of the parent/guardian
- **Refer** the issue to NEPS and other appropriate agencies as soon as you feel this will not be solved in the short-sterm.

See also https://www.sess.ie/behaviour-resource-bank Activity Sheet 22
        https://www.ippn.ie/images/PDFs/Rachel-Markey-NCSE-Behaviour-Resource-Pack-for-Principals.pdf

8   WHEN A CHILD IS DISPLAYING CONSISTENT BEHAVIOURS OF CONCERN

8.1   WHAT ARE THE OPTIONS WHEN THE SCHOOL IS STRUGGLING TO MEET THE NEEDS OF THE CHILD?

The school will endeavour within its resources to ensure that a particular pupil with behaviours of concern can achieve their potential while also allowing everyone else in the school to do likewise. Many of the strategies and behaviour plans used on the continuum of support have already been outlined earlier. There is always a difficulty in assessing when is the right time to move to other strategies. Every single case is different but when the behaviour of one pupil is seriously affecting their own education and that of the other pupils, then further actions should be taken. This may include a discussion with the parents on the placement of the pupil in a specialised setting. It may also include expulsion as a very last resort.

The behaviours of concern may warrant more specialised interventions through external agencies for additional support, if a child is not already on a pathway. An extensive waiting list is likely for many children.

8.2   HOW DO WE KNOW THAT THE PLACEMENT IS NO LONGER WORKING?

Unfortunately, it sometimes happens that a child does not benefit from his/her placement in a particular school setting. This will be evidenced by the fact that despite the best and exhaustive efforts of parents and school staff, the child continues to exhibit behaviours which inhibit the teaching and learning of that child and/or the other children in the class. At that stage, both parents and school must consider if the continuance of that placement is actually harming the child and causing him/her distress.

Reaching such a conclusion is predicated on evidence-based records and frequent meetings between parents and the school staff involved. It can only be reached when the school has put in place all available resources to facilitate the child overcoming his/her behaviours of concern. Interventions must be given adequate time for success and diligently recorded.

A thorough, honest and brave examination of the actions taken by the school staff and management should be undertaken to see if everything possible has been done to ensure the well-being and safety of all children and staff in the school. This will mean evaluating current school practices in the light of dealing with the needs of the child in question, and not being afraid to alter these practices if they are found wanting.

8.2.1   Shortened school day

The effect of going to school and being involved in a classroom situation can be traumatic for some children who have social anxieties. School leaders need to clearly discuss such anxieties with parents, where the parents inform the school or where it becomes apparent when the child starts in the school. Both parents and school leaders must be conscious of both the benefits to the child in being in school and also the challenging and potentially detrimental effect it may have on a child with social anxieties. In such cases, it may be beneficial to consider graduating a child's exposure to school to facilitate an easier transition from home to school.

Parents and school leaders will need to devise a plan to deal for occasions where it is not possible for a child to remain in school for the duration of the full school day. Where a special class place within the school is available, this will often allow a child to be gradually integrated into the mainstream classroom. Otherwise, a short-term restricted day, dictated by the needs of the child, may have to be considered. Where such a plan is necessary, the parents and school leader should formulate the plan together and accept it by signature. It is very important that such a plan is time-bound and is reviewed on a weekly basis. The SENO and EWO should be notified of such a plan and asked to provide additional home tuition for the child.

8.2.2 Suspension

The school at all times retains its right and its obligation to implement its Code of Discipline, up to and including Suspension or even Expulsion if deemed necessary as last resorts.

All pupils are subject to the Disciplinary Code and sometimes, in cases of serious/gross misconduct involving harm to others or serious damage to property, the BoM may have no option but to resort to suspension.

The decision to suspend a pupil must be justified on serious grounds. Such a determinations by the School Principal/Deputy Principal/BoM that the:

- Pupil's continued presence in the school at this time constitutes a threat to his/her own safety and the safety of others in the school community
- Pupil's behaviour has had a seriously detrimental effect on his/her own education and the education of other pupils
- Pupil is responsible for serious damage to school property
- A single incident of serious/gross misconduct may be grounds for suspension

The Tusla (NEWB) publication *Developing a Code of Behaviour: Guidelines for Schools* states that **"Suspension should be a proportionate response to the behaviour that is causing concern"**. Where suspension is being considered school leaders must become thoroughly familiar with Chapter 11 of this publication and follow the guidelines meticulously.

It is important that the school would be able to accurately account for:
- The behaviours which have led to the BoM considering suspension
- The measures which have been taken by the school to assist the pupil overcome these behaviours
- The assistance sought from outside agencies – e.g. NEPS, NCSE (SESS), NBSS, etc.
- Where NEPS have been involved in advising on the child's behaviour, it would be advisable to make them aware of any impending suspension.

Such accounting will be dependent on the level and quality of recording related to the behaviours of concern.

Where NEPS has been involved in advising on the child's behaviour, it would be important to ensure that the local NEPS psychologist is made aware of any impending suspension.

> *"Suspensions can provide a respite for staff and the pupil, give the pupil time to reflect on the link between their action and its consequences and give staff and parents time to plan ways of helping the student to change unacceptable behaviour. However, suspension can be counter-productive if used without a clear rationale or without measuring its impact and value. School management should consider the risk of any unwanted outcomes from suspension, such as an increased sense of alienation from school that could lead to a cycle of behavioural and academic problems"* - Developing a Code of Behaviour: Guidelines for Schools, Chapter 11.

8.2.3 Expulsion

Tusla (NEWB) publication *Developing a Code of Behaviour: Guidelines for Schools* states that **"Expulsion should be a proportionate response to the pupil's behaviour"**. Where expulsion is being considered school leaders must become thoroughly familiar with Chapter 12 of this publication and follow the guidelines meticulously.

The decision to expel a pupil must be justified on serious grounds. Such a determination by the School Principal/Deputy Principal/BOM that:
- The pupil's continued presence in the school at this time constitutes a threat to his/her own safety and the safety of others in the school community
- The pupil's behaviour has had a seriously detrimental effect his/her own education and the education of other pupils
- The pupil is responsible for serious damage to school property

A single incident of serious/gross misconduct may be grounds for expulsion

It is important that the school would be able to accurately account for:

- The behaviours which have led to the BoM considering expulsion
- The measures which have been taken by the school to assist the pupil overcome these behaviours
- The assistance sought from outside agencies – e.g. NEPS, NCSE (SESS), NBSS, etc.

Such accounting will be dependent on the level and quality of recording related to the behaviours of concern.

Expulsion should be a proportionate response to the student's behaviour. Expulsion of a student is a very serious step, and one that should only be taken by the BoM in extreme cases of unacceptable behaviour. The school should have taken significant steps to address the misbehaviour and to avoid expulsion of a student including, as appropriate, meeting with parents and pupil to try to find ways of helping the student to change their behaviour:

- Making sure that the student understands the possible consequences of their behaviour, if it should persist
- Ensuring that all other possible options have been tried
- Sseeking the assistance of support agencies (e.g. NEPS, HSE Community Services, NBSS, CAMHS, NCSE)

9 USEFUL RESOURCES

9.1 GENERAL RESOURCES

- **Daly, Patricia (2019)** *Small changes can make big differences,* **Limerick: CDU**

This book has been written by Dr Patricia Daly, head of the Dept. of Educational Psychology in MICE, Limerick up to 2019.   It gives very practical advice within an Irish primary school context on the understanding and management of behaviours of concern generally and also addresses specifically pupils presenting with:

- ADHD
- ASD
- MGLD
- Dyslexia

The book includes 29 strategy cards for managing behaviours of concern in various contexts. It also references many useful websites, many of which are also referenced below:

- **SESS Resource Pack**
  This is a very useful resource consisting of 38 Advice Sheets.

- **NCSE Resource Pack for IPPN Members**
  Provides a suite of Planning and Recording/Analysing templates

- **Middletown Centre for Autism**
  A treasury of advice and resources in relation to children on the ASD Spectrum

- **A simple and useful guide to the topic**
  A clear and concise to the topic of Behaviours of Concern

9.2 USEFUL WEBSITES - PRACTICAL SUGGESTIONS FOR VARIOUS BEHAVIOURS OF CONCERN

Hidden reasons for Behaviours of Concern
- 5 Hidden Reasons for Challenging Behaviour

- Behaviour Problems in Children – A Sign of Hidden Low Self Esteem?

- 11 Hidden Issues That May Affect Your Child's Behaviour

- **Recording and Analysing Behaviours of Concern** -   Activity Sheet 30

- Playground Structuring – Structured Games for the Playground

Movement Breaks / Motor Activities
- 10 Classic hand clapping games to teach

- Movement games

- Handwriting warm up activities for kids

Self-Monitoring and Self-Management
- Self-Monitoring Intervention Guide

- SESS Behaviour Resource bank – Activity Sheet 34

- Response Cards – visual clues displayed by children to answer questions in class

- Token Systems

- SESS Behaviour Resource bank – Activity Sheets 32 & 37

- Motor Activities

Autism specific resources
- Video Self-modelling – a strategy for children with ASD

- Integration of children with ASD – the effect of Peer Modelling

Social Stories
- Social Stories Comic Strips

- SESS Behaviour Resource bank – Activity Sheet 31

- Behaviour Shaping – progressive rewarding of children as they develop a new skill

- Using Visual Strategies and Supports, including Visual Scripts

- SESS Behaviour Resource bank – Activity Sheet 38

- [Visual Supports for Behaviour](#)

Behaviour Contracts
- [Student Behaviour Contracts](#)

- [SESS Behaviour Resource bank](#) – Activity Sheet 5 & 12

Self-Monitoring
- [Self-Monitoring](#)

- [Self-Monitoring Interventions](#)

Sensory Differences
- [Sensory processing disorder checklist](#)

- [Sensory processing resource](#)

Choice Boards

- Choice Boards

- SEN Choice Boards

- SESS Behaviour Resource bank – Activity Sheet 11

ADHD-Specific Resources

- ADHD and School - School can be a challenge for students with ADHD—but here's how you can help your child or teen succeed in the classroom.

- Teaching Students with ADHD

- Teacher Tips

- SESS Behaviour Resource bank – Activity Sheet 2

Dyslexia-Specific Resources

- Maths Trails

- Precision Teaching

- Precision teaching for reading and spelling

- Precision Teaching - what is it?

- Design your precision teaching worksheet