

Chapter 6

Management of Children's Behavioural, Emotional and Learning Problems

- Understand the Causes of Problems, Develop Management Strategies
- How to Manage Children's Problems



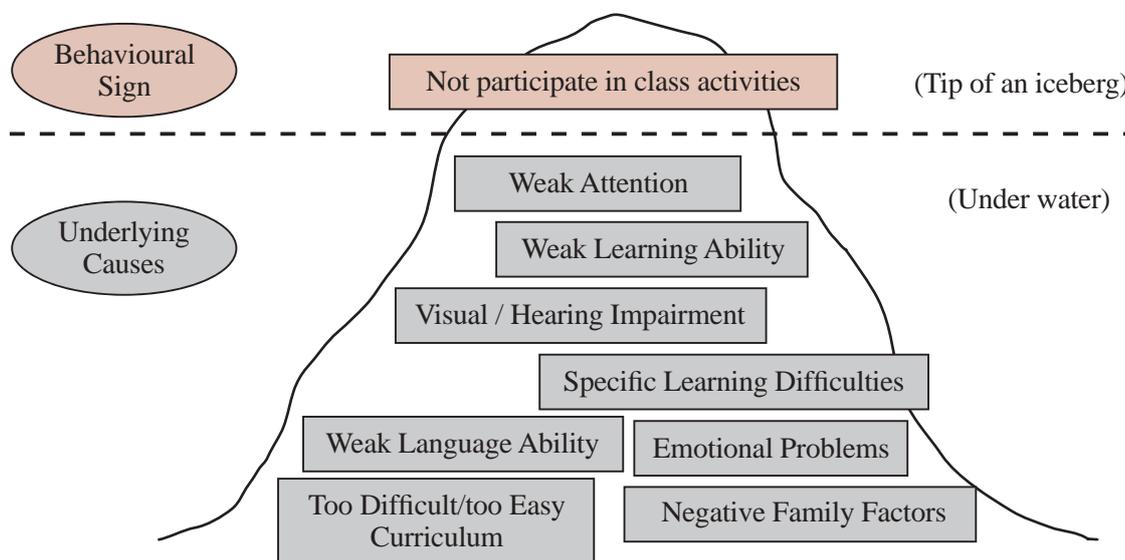
Chapter 6: Management of Children's Behavioural, Emotional and Learning Problems

In previous chapters, we have discussed ways of identifying children with special needs, their characteristics, and the basic behaviour theory and techniques. In this chapter, we will further put them all together to apply to the classroom setting and provide suggestions to teachers in ways of helping students with different characteristics and learning needs.

I. Understand the Causes of Problems, Develop Management Strategies

In Chapter 3, we have mentioned that one problem can have different causes. When a child has any learning, emotional or behavioural problems, teachers should observe the child carefully and collect information from various sources to determine whether the problems are related to different factors “Chapter 3 : How to Identify Children with Special Needs”. For example, teachers may notice a learning problem in a child who does not participate in class activities. The observable sign might just be the tip of an iceberg; there may be other underlying causes (the portion of an iceberg under water), including:

- The child has weak cognitive and learning abilities and cannot keep up with the curriculum, thus appearing to be inattentive in class;
- The child has a short attention span and has difficulty concentrating in class, thus he/she has learning problems;
- The child has a visual or hearing problem and thus has difficulty to understand the class materials;
- The curriculum is too easy for the child, thus he/she feels bored and resulted in being inattentive in class ;
- The child's family has recently experienced a significant event which causes the child to worry, thus he/she cannot concentrate in class.



Let's take the actual underlying reason for the child's lack of participation in class in the above example to be having weak cognitive and learning abilities. If teachers mistake the sign for his/her having weak attention, then an unfit management strategy will be applied and the child will not be helped effectively. Therefore, knowing only the child's observable behavioural signs is not enough. If a teacher has already referred the child for an assessment and has been informed of the assessment results, he/she can develop effective management strategies based on the professional recommendation. If referrals have not been made, the teacher will need to closely observe the child and explore various possible causes of his/her problem in order to improve the child's performance with suitable strategies.

II. How to Manage Children's Problems

When a child has any learning, behavioural, emotional or social skills problems, teachers may try to use the following methods in the classroom. As these methods are only suggestions, teachers should apply them with flexibility in light of their own teaching experiences, children's individual differences and environmental limitations.

When teachers use various methods to help a child, do not forget to have frequent communication with the parents and explain to them why the methods are used. Then both can work together to help children learn and manage their problems more effectively.



Refer to Chapter 6 of the DVD

1. Global Learning Difficulties

Children who have weak cognitive and learning abilities are slow to acquire new skills and knowledge. They have difficulties adapting to new environments and accepting new things. They dislike challenges and tend to be more dependent. Teachers may try the following methods for these children:

i) Allowing Plenty of Time

- It is important to give children enough time to learn and adapt. For example, teachers can give these children an extra 10 minutes to finish class work.



ii) Being Concise in Explanations and Instructions

- Teachers should give simple, clear and brief instructions and explanations so that the children can master and understand easily.

iii) Simplifying the Tasks

- Teachers can simplify the tasks or divide them into smaller parts. For example, for a worksheet with 5 items, ask the children to do only 3 items; or they can be allowed to complete the worksheet at different times.

iv) Increasing Level of Difficulty Gradually

- The first few items of an assignment should be easy or provided with hints, so that children can master them and develop a sense of accomplishment. Then increase the level of difficulty gradually.
- The level of difficulty of the assignment should be set according to the child's learning progress.

v) Giving Individual Supervision and Repeated Instruction

- If there is sufficient time and staff support, teachers can give children instruction individually and repeatedly.



vi) Arranging a Buddy

- For older grades, teachers can pair up these children with a buddy who is more competent. They can sit together so that the buddy can provide help easily.

vii) Giving Praise and Encouragement

- Praise and encourage children for their efforts as well as successes.

2. Word Learning Difficulties

Children with word learning difficulties usually have little problem in their general learning. However, they are particularly weak in learning words and easily forget words learned. Teachers can try the following methods with these children:

i) Teaching the Forms of Chinese Characters

- When teaching Chinese, teachers can explain the relationship between a character's form and meaning; and how the meaning of characters can sometimes be inferred from their radicals. For example:

「艹」 is related to plants;

「扌」 is related to an action.

- The forms of characters can also be learned through images or stories. For example:

「山」 (Mountain) —  ()

「男」 (Male) — Strength is used to cultivate a field

ii) Teaching Basic Phonics

- When teaching English, teachers can use creative ways to help children remember the pronunciation of words. For example:

The “l” in “leg” is pronounced like singing : “la la”;

The “s” in “snake” is pronounced like the hissing sound of a snake: “sss”.

- Teachers can also teach basic phonetic rules. For example:

The pronunciation of “apple” can be divided into “ap / ple”;

The pronunciation of “ice-cream” can be divided into “ice / cream”.

iii) Using Multi-Sensory Teaching

- In general, children learn new words through visual and aural means. Multi-sensory teaching helps children learn new words by stimulating their various senses, such as visual, auditory (aural), tactile(touch) and kinesthetic(motion) senses.

For example, teachers can ask children to write on a piece of sandpaper or sand tray (tactile), or waving their arms to write in the air (kinesthetic); at the same time, the children pronounce the word (auditory). Through multi-sensory stimulation, children's memory of the forms of the words can be consolidated (visual).

- Teachers can also use other creative methods in teaching. For example:

- ◆ Use mnemonics such as spelling acronyms to help children remember a word: “ocean” are made up of the first letters of the words in the phrase “Old Cat's Eyes Are Narrow”.

- ◆ Use different colours to emphasise the correct strokes of a Chinese character or syllables of word: 「春」, “donkey”



iv) Developing Reading Habit

- Children who have difficulties in word learning, may have more resistance to words. Teachers can help children develop the habit of reading and create more opportunities to introduce words to them. This will foster their familiarity and interest in words and help them overcome their resistance to word learning.
- Start the children on story books with fewer words but more illustrations, then gradually move them to books with more words.
- Arrange the children to read with their peers or with a teacher to facilitate their participation and enjoyment in reading.
- Remember to create a happy and relaxing reading environment without forcing the children to memorise words.



v) Learning through Games

- The children's interest in word learning can be enhanced through the use of games. Their resistance to words can be reduced as a result.
- The children can learn more effectively in a fun and relaxing environment.

(Refer to "Appendix 6: Word Games")

3. Weak Language Ability

Children who are weak in verbal comprehension and expression have difficulties understanding long and complicated sentences. They sometimes misunderstand the meaning of questions and phrases as well. These children usually speak in simple and short sentences, with a limited vocabulary and frequent grammatical mistakes. In reporting events and maintaining conversations, they may be confused in expression. Because of their weak language ability, they are often unwilling to communicate with others, which affect their social life. Therefore, teachers should pay attention to the following points when communicating with these children:

i) Simplifying the Sentences

- Teachers can simplify their sentences while talking to the children. For example : "We are going to have tea time soon. There are two kinds of snacks you can choose from. One is cake, another is sweet corn and both are delicious. Which one do you prefer?" The expression can be simplified into: "What do you want for snack, cake or sweet corns?".
- Teachers can also help the children understand better by using facial expressions or gestures with their words.

ii) Giving Time for Children to Express

- Allow the children to express themselves. Do not speak for them, or interrupt or respond when they have not finished speaking.
- Sometimes children may not want to speak and teachers should not urge them at such times. Try to be patient with the children and give them more time to let them feel that talking can be comfortable.

iii) Enhancing Interest and Intention to Speak

- Talk more to the children about what is happening, what they are interested in and topics about daily life to let them know that language is closely related to daily living.
- Encourage the children to express themselves even though the teacher has already understood what they want. For example, when Sharon points to a cup of juice, the teacher can encourage her to express by asking, ‘What do you want?’ even the teacher knows what she wants.

iv) Learning Language through Games

- Read picture books together with the children and take turns with them in describing the story. Encourage the children to sing nursery rhymes together but teaching them the lyrics is not necessary.
- Play more language games to make the children find speaking is fun.
(Refer to “Appendix 7: Language Games”)



v) Giving Positive Responses

- Listen carefully to what the children say and give non-verbal encouragement such as a smile or nodding from time to time .
- Remember to praise and encourage the children who try to speak.

vi) Not Laughing at or Overcorrecting the Children

- When the children do not express themselves clearly or are unclear in articulation, try not to laugh at or overcorrect them as it will defeat their confidence in speaking.
- Teachers only need to pronounce the word correctly for the children to imitate. For example:

Teacher: (Pointing to a rabbit in a book) “Sharon, what is this?”

Sharon: “Wabbit.”

Teacher: “Right, this is a rabbit. What about this?”

(Pointing to a banana in the book)

Sharon: “Nana.”

Teacher: “Right, this is a banana. What is the colour of the banana?”

Lok Lok: “Yellow.”

Teacher: “Correct! The banana is yellow in colour.”

4. Overactivity

Some children are more active than others. They often leave their seats and run around. They have difficulty to remain seated. They are usually talkative. They frequently interrupt other’s conversation and answer questions without raising their hands. Also, they are usually more impulsive and impatient. Teachers can try the following methods when dealing with these children:

i) Arranging a Seat near the Teacher

- Teachers can have better observation and control of the behaviours of the children if they sit near them.
- When a child is trying to leave his/ her seat, teachers can touch his/ her shoulder lightly to signal the child to sit down.



ii) Giving Clear and Brief Instructions

- Because the children are usually impatient, teachers should give simple and clear instructions to make children instantly and clearly know what they should do. Instead of giving lengthy preaching, say something like “Please keep quiet” or “Go back to your seat”.

iii) Posting Schedules and Rules

- Teachers can post lesson schedules and classroom rules at a prominent place in the classroom to remind children what they should do. There should not be too many rules. To make them easy to follow, three to four will be enough.

iv) Arranging Simple Tasks

- Arrange some simple tasks for the children such as asking them to hand out school supplies and help teachers put away materials. By doing so, the children's energy can be diverted to more constructive activities and it can also prevent them to misbehave out of boredom.

v) Changing Activities from Time to Time

- In view of the short attention span of the children, teachers can change activities when needed or shift to a different teaching method. This will also give them a chance to engage in more activities.

vi) Giving Appropriate Responses

- When children behave well, teachers can praise them or smile at them. Teachers can also reward the children for following rules. For example, if they raise their hand before answering questions or sit quietly, teachers can reward them by putting a stamp on their behaviour reward charts.
- When children misbehave, teachers can give them clear instructions to stop the misbehaviour. If they do not stop, give them consequences immediately with strategies such as planned ignoring, logical consequence or quiet time. (Refer to "Chapter 5: Basic Behaviour Theory and Techniques" in the Manual and DVD for the methods in modifying behaviour)



5. Weak Attention

Children with weak attention have difficulty concentrating in class. They are easily distracted by external stimuli such as noises from outside or birds flying by the window. It is not easy for them to sustain their attention in an activity and they may not pay attention when talking with others. They are often careless, making careless mistakes in their work, appearing forgetful and often lose their belongings. They are disorganised and often place their belongings here and there. Teachers may use the following methods with these children:

i) Arranging Seats Away from Doors and Windows

- Ask the children to sit away from doors and windows to reduce external distractions.

ii) Calling out Their Names or Asking Them Questions

- When teachers notice that the children are getting distracted, call them by name and ask them questions more often to ensure that they are paying attention in class.



iii) Maintaining Eye Contacts

- When talking to the children, maintain eye contacts. Teachers may tap their arms to get their attention.

iv) Asking Children to Repeat Instructions

- To ensure that the children are listening and understand what they need to do, teachers can ask them to repeat the instructions they were given.

v) Using Interesting Teaching Materials

- Use novel and interesting materials to engage the children's attention in class.

vi) Changing Activities from Time to Time

- Change activities or teaching methods from time to time to avoid the children losing their concentration after a period of time.

vii) Arranging a Buddy

- For older grades, teachers may ask children with better attention control to sit next to these children to remind them to pay attention in class or to provide assistance in class work.



6. Tantrums

Some children have relatively poor emotion control and will throw tantrums easily. There are many reasons why children go into a tantrum. Examples are: children who tend to be self-centred will express their frustration by throwing tantrums when their needs are not met; some may use tantrums to get attention; some who cannot express themselves well or feel that they are misunderstood may lose their temper; and there are some children who are always rebellious and refuse to cooperate with adults tend to make a scene over trivial matters. Therefore, when dealing with children's emotional problems, teachers should first understand the reasons why children have a tantrum in order to handle them effectively.

Teachers may use the following methods for children with weak emotion control:

i) Setting Rules

- Set rules with the children to let them know teachers' expectations and understand that throwing tantrums is an unacceptable behaviour.

Explain to children in advance the consequences of throwing tantrums.



ii) Increasing Communication

- Talk with the children more often. Try to understand the reasons behind their frequent tantrums by listening to their thoughts and feelings.

iii) Showing Them Ways to Express Feelings

- Some children may throw tantrums because they do not know how to express their feelings. Teaching them the appropriate ways may reduce the chance of their tantrums.
- Teach the children the “feeling words” e.g., “You shouldn’t throw things when you are in frustration. Instead, you can say ‘I am angry’ and tell me why.”

iv) Instilling the Concepts of Sharing and Compromising

- When dealing with children who tend to be self-centred, teachers may instill the concept of sharing and compromising.
- Praise them when they do share things or compromising their wants with others.

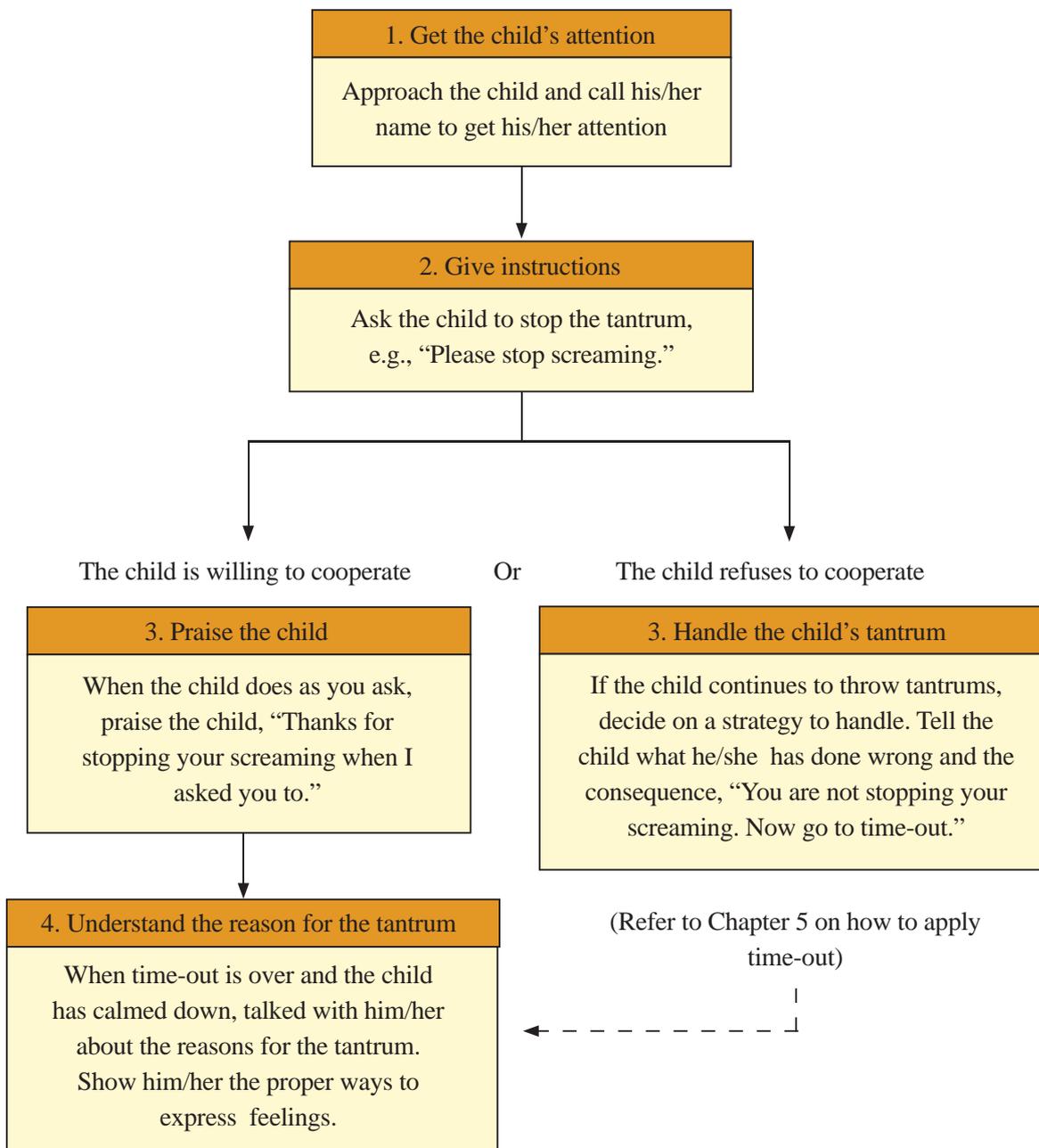


v) Giving Appropriate Responses

- If children oppose to and refuse to cooperate with teachers intentionally, teachers may ignore such behaviour. Do not pay attention to them. Apply other methods such as logical consequence, quiet time or time-out when necessary.
- Teachers should praise and pay more positive attention to children when they behave well.

(Refer to “Chapter 5 : Basic Behaviour Theory and Techniques” in Manual and DVD)

Teachers may follow the steps below in handling children who are screaming and throwing a tantrum:



7. Other Emotional Problems

Besides tantrums, children may have other emotional problems, such as being anxious or feeling depressed.

Anxiousness

Some children get anxious easily. Their anxiousness is more than being shy. When talking to others or answering questions, they may be at a loss and gets fidgety. In more serious cases, they may refuse to participate in class activities or even refuse to go to school.

Depressed Mood

Children who are feeling depressed looked always sad. They show no interest in class activities and games and are unwilling to talk with people. They easily cry or lose their temper.

Teachers may use the following methods with children having emotional problems:



i) Listening to the Children's Thoughts and Feelings

- Talk to these children more often to understand what they think and feel. As they may be unwilling to talk right away, teachers should be patient with them and make repeated attempts.

ii) Observing and Describing Their Feelings

- Observe the children's behaviour closely and identify their emotions. Try to describe their feelings. When the children feel that they are being understood, they will be more willing to share their thoughts with you. Teachers may say,

“I can tell you are a little upset. Will you tell me what's happened?”

“Are you feeling a little nervous so that you don't want to tell stories in front of others?”



iii) Using Toys or Drawing to Aid

- Children are usually more relaxed and easier for them to express their feelings when playing games or drawing.
- For those children who are unwilling to express themselves, teachers may change to a more relaxed environment, such as the play room or family corner, and try to start the conversation with the aid of puppets, toys or drawing.



iv) Allowing Time with Encouragement

- If children do not want to participate in an activity or are not willing to speak, do not push them. Instead, give them more time and be patient with them. Let them join the activity when they feel comfortable to do so.

v) Understanding Their Current Situation

- Pay attention to any events happened in school or at home that would possibly affect the children and lead to their emotional problems.

8. Weak Social Skills

Some children have weak social skills. They do not like to interact with people. They often prefer to be on their own and play alone. Rarely would they initiate to communicate or share with others. They avoid eye contacts and are hardly able to notice others' needs and feelings. They do not know how to get along with people. It is hard for them to start or hold a conversation, and sometimes they even say or do something inappropriate. Teachers may try the following methods with these children:

i) Encourage Children to Participate in Social Activities

- Using the activities they find interesting to encourage the children to take part in social activities. For instance, if a child likes to play with toy cars, teachers may encourage him/her to play with toy cars in a group.
- At first, the children may need teachers to stay by their side to guide them in interacting with others. Teachers may gradually get less involved after the children begin to mix with others.



ii) Encouraging Others to Approach the Children

- Teachers may ask a few more outgoing children to approach these children, e.g. inviting them to activities such as reading books or playing in the family corner together.



iii) Demonstrating Social Communication Skills

- Teachers may demonstrate the appropriate social communication skills to them if the children speak or act inappropriately. For example:
“If you see teachers or classmates in the morning, you may say ‘Good morning’, or you can nod your head and smile to them.”
“If you want to play with others, you may say to them, ‘I want to play with you’ instead of hugging and kissing them.”
- Practise such skills with the children frequently so that they can be familiarized with the skills gradually.

iv) Creating Opportunities for Communication

- The children may not have intention to communicate with others. Sometimes, teachers can create chances for them to express themselves. For instance, teachers might have already figured out from their behaviour that they want more snacks. Teachers may take this opportunity to encourage them to ask for the snacks before giving them.

v) Encouraging Eye Contacts

- Remind the children to look at others when they are talking.
- Whenever the children are looking at you, give them a smile. They will eventually understand that maintaining eye contacts will result in a positive response.



vi) Allowing Time with Encouragement

- If the children do not want to join in activities, do not push them. Teachers should give them more time to participate when they are ready.

9. Difficulty in Adapting to Changes

Some children find it hard to cope with changes, such as changes in activities and the environment. Teachers may consider the following handling methods:

i) Using Visual or Spatial Prompts

- Teachers can enhance children's understanding of the flow of activities by using picture cards or posting classroom rules and daily schedules.



ii) Using Verbal or Gesture Prompts

- Teachers may tell the children before they change classrooms or activities, so that they are better prepared.
- When changing to the next activity, teachers may give verbal instructions or gesture cues to assist the children.

iii) Maintaining Routines, Avoiding Sudden Changes

- The daily routines must be consistent and follow through to make sure that the children can follow. Avoid frequent changes.