

BUILDING POSITIVE PARTNERSHIPS:

WORKING TOGETHER WITH SCHOOL STAFF TO UNDERSTAND AND SUPPORT BEHAVIOURAL ISSUES AT SCHOOL

PARENT AND CARER FACT SHEET

Working Together

Most children can act in ways that parents find challenging – such as breaking rules or arguing with siblings. Similar behaviours are also common in schools – students talk in class or don't do their homework. For the most part this is just a normal part of growing up and parents and teachers play a role in guiding this behaviour positively.

However, sometimes these behaviours are more serious. A child may behave in a way that causes harm (or risk of harm) to themselves or to others, including fighting, making threats, throwing items, hitting or biting.

As a parent, dealing with challenging behaviour can be very distressing and it can be very difficult to know what to do.

This is also a major challenge for schools as teachers have a duty of care to protect the safety of all students and they also have the right to be safe themselves.

The best way to support students to develop positive behaviours and to safely manage any challenging behaviour is for you, your child and the school to work together.

Talk with the school

If your child is demonstrating challenging behaviour at school it is likely the school will contact you to discuss this. If you are worried about your child's behaviour you can take the first step and contact the school. You should ask to speak to your child's teacher, year level coordinator or a wellbeing staff member such as the school psychologist.

If your child has been assessed as having a medical condition, mental health issue or disability which may impact their behaviour, it's important to pass this information on to the school. It is also important to let the school know if there have been circumstances which you think might be influencing your child's behaviour, for example, something happening at home or school.

Your child's school may ask for your consent to speak directly with the doctor or other health professional. This can help them to get a clearer picture of your child's needs and the best way to support them.

Positive Behaviour Support Planning

A Positive Behaviour Support Plan is a plan developed specifically for your child. It includes strategies that the school, you and your child can use to help develop positive behaviour and safely respond to any challenging behaviour.

As a parent you play an important role in developing your child's Positive Behaviour Support Plan. If your child doesn't already have a plan you can bring this up with the school so you can work together to identify possible reasons for the behaviour, and strategies to support a change.

If your child has a disability they must also have an Individual Learning Plan which outlines the adjustments the school will make to enable your child to participate fully in school. Schools must make reasonable adjustments for students with disabilities as required under the Disability Standards for Education (2004).

Understanding your child's behaviour

In order to develop strategies that make a real difference to your child, it's important to understand why these behaviours are arising. Are they in response to a traumatic event, or related to a disability or mental health issue or because of a family or school stress? Is there a particular situation that distresses your child and triggers their behaviour?

As a parent you may already be aware of what triggers your child's behaviours and know what works to calm them down. Sharing this knowledge with the school is important, so teachers can try to avoid situations that may distress your child.

Your child's school may talk to you about undertaking a Functional Behaviour Assessment. This is a process that can help to understand more about why a behaviour is occurring and helps develop strategies to reduce it and replace it with positive behaviours.

What to expect if there is a serious behavioural incident involving your child

If your child has been involved in a serious behavioural incident the school will contact you as soon as possible after the incident. The school will also report the incident to the Education Directorate, and in very serious cases, to emergency services.

The school will also inform you if during the incident your child was restrained by a school staff member to protect their safety or the safety of others. After the incident the school will invite you to meet to discuss appropriate actions including: developing and/or reviewing your child's Positive Behaviour Support Plan.

In some cases, serious behavioural incidents may warrant a suspension, transfer or exclusion from school. Schools are required to follow procedures when suspending or excluding a student. These are outlined in the [Suspension, Exclusion of Transfer of Students in ACT Public Schools Policy and Guidelines](#).

Preventing potentially harmful student behaviour

The best way to manage potentially harmful behaviour is to prevent it from occurring in the first place. This is why Canberra Public Schools have a strong focus on positive behaviour support, effective planning, early intervention and de-escalation.

Physical intervention and restrictive practices

There may be times when school staff need to use restrictive practices including physical intervention and seclusion, to protect the safety of your child, other students and/or themselves.

Canberra public schools operate under the *Safe and Supportive Schools Policy and Procedures* which address the use of restrictive practices. This can be found at: www.education.act.gov.au.

The policy states that restrictive practices may only be used as a last resort where other strategies are unsuccessful and only ever where there is a risk of immediate harm to a student or others. Where restrictive practices may be needed as part of a planned response to protect the safety of your child or others as a result of their behaviour, they must be documented as part of the Positive Behaviour Support Plan and Protective Action Plan. There must be clear evidence from appropriate professionals to demonstrate that this practice is necessary in the short term to protect the student or others from harm and a clear plan in place to remove the restrictive intervention. Additional information can be found in *Procedure B - Safe and Supportive Schools – Safely responding to complex and challenging behaviour in Canberra Public Schools*.

Where can I go for more help in supporting my child?

If you are concerned about your child's behaviour, speak first to the school. You can ask your child's school about engaging appropriate professionals to help with strategies for addressing behavioural concerns, and linking your child to specialist services if needed.

Your GP is also a good person to speak to about your child's behaviour. They can investigate any medical causes for the behaviour and make referrals to paediatricians and other professionals with expertise in mental health and behavioural issues.

What can I do if I'm concerned about the school's response to my child's behaviour?

In the first instance you should always raise your concerns with the teacher involved, and following this, with the school principal. If you are unhappy with the school's response, or would like to seek external advice about the interventions put in place by your child's school you can contact:

- **The ACT Education Directorate Liaison Unit**

The Liaison Unit can support families in managing concerns about ACT schools. The Liaison Unit will speak with relevant people within the Directorate's central office to support you and the school in finding a solution.

Phone: [\(02\) 6205 5429](tel:0262055429)

- **The Director for Families and Students**

The Director provides the key contact for parents, students and the community to raise concerns when they have not been satisfied with the ACT public school response in meeting the needs of individual students.

Phone: [\(02\) 6207 3723](tel:0262073723)

Email: familiesandstudents@act.gov.au

This information is based on materials produced by the Victoria State Government Education and Training Directorate