

## Before, during and after

### Trying to understand your child's difficult behaviour

Why is your child behaving like that? Sometimes it is very hard to understand why your child is suddenly having a temper tantrum. Why is she trying to break things or hurt another child for no apparent reason? Some of the things children do seem to have no relation to what is going on around them. You may be exhausted or feel helpless trying to cope with your child's behaviour.

This leaflet explains one way of trying to understand your child's behaviour. What children do has a meaning behind it, even if it's difficult to see. It is very rare for a temper tantrum to come out of the blue. This approach can help you gather up the clues to what is happening and why it is happening. In turn, this can help you with the situation. You may be able to see a different way of doing things or it may show you that your child is struggling to come to terms with something that you may be able to help her with. This approach looks at what happens before, during and after the tantrum or behaviour.

When your child does 'it' again, take a few moments to think about what happened. Looking at a situation in this way, what happened before, during and after, can help in several ways. The 'Before' section can show you what is setting the situation off. This may give you ideas about what to do differently. The 'During' section tells you a bit more about what is happening, which again can give you ideas about what to do differently. The 'After' section shows you whether the behaviour of your child is rewarded in any way. If so, this will make it more likely that the behaviour will happen again. For example, if your child knows that if he makes enough fuss at bedtime you will let him stay up longer, this will make it more likely that next time he will complain long and loudly about going to bed. There is a 'Before, During and After' chart that your health professional can give you.

### Before

Think about what was happening before 'it' began. What were you doing? What was your child doing? What were other people doing? You may also find it useful to try and think about what you were feeling and thinking at the time and about what your child was thinking and feeling.

## During

Think about exactly what you, other people and your child did. Again, it can be useful to remember what you were thinking and feeling at the time and what you imagine your child was thinking and feeling.

## After

What happened afterwards? What did you do? What did your child do? What thoughts and feelings did you and your child have?

A more complicated example is the everyday story of Lee and Jordan. Lee and Jordan were brothers. Lee was 8 years old and Jordan was 5 years old. Most of the time they got on fairly well, playing all sorts of games, but sometimes Jordan became suddenly very cross as he was playing.

At first mum and dad thought he was just being selfish, wanting to be the centre of attention as he played, but when Jordan began to throw things, break things and kick and punch Lee, they began to get very cross with him and also worried that his behaviour might get worse. There were soon frequent scenes in the house when both boys were upset, something was broken and mum and dad were telling one or both of them off.

Mum and dad thought that Jordan was a naughty boy who just wanted attention but they decided to try to use the Before, During and After approach to understand a little more about what was going on.

They chose a particular event when a game on the computer had ended with Jordan almost breaking one of the controls, pushing Lee and storming out of the room in angry tears.

They described the following things:

**Before:** Jordan and Lee were playing happily. They seemed excited and cheerful, laughing and giggling. Lee seemed to be concentrating more. Jordan seemed to be becoming increasingly serious. The game was reaching a crucial point. Lee was winning.

**During:** Jordan became very angry, frowning and complaining. He shouted and screamed and said it wasn't fair. He seemed unable to control himself and seemed to want to break the computer. He punched Lee as if he really wanted to hurt him, then ran out of the room. Jordan seemed very cross with Lee.

**After:** The game was not over but nobody was now going to win. Lee looked shocked and upset. Jordan was upset in another room. Mum and dad were telling Jordan he was a naughty boy. Lee said 'It wasn't my fault.' Mum and dad were cross with Jordan.

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Having noticed these things mum and dad sat down and talked about what could be going on. Here are some of the questions they found themselves trying to explain:

- What were the boys thinking about as they were playing?
- What was happening in the game as Jordan began to get cross?
- Why was Jordan so cross with Lee?
- Why did Lee have to concentrate so hard?
- What did Jordan think was unfair?
- Who had been going to win the game?
- Why did Jordan leave the room?

After discussing this for a few days, they sat down with the boys and talked it through. They asked the boys some of these questions and tried to help both of them to explain what they had been feeling at the time. The conversation got quite heated but eventually mum and dad had an idea of what had happened in this game and in other games too. It turned out that Jordan was getting very cross because Lee had a way of always winning. Jordan was not skilful enough to beat Lee because he was younger. Lee was very good at making sure that he always beat Jordan. Jordan felt that Lee was deliberately making him cross and this made him even more angry. Jordan then spoilt the game and left it before it was over so that Lee did not actually win. In this way, the game did not have an ending and there was no winner or loser.

Now that mum and dad were thinking about this event like this they were able to try to find ways of dealing with the cross feelings in the family. Competition is normal between brothers and sisters, but sometimes children (and parents!) need help to manage it.

- They spoke to Jordan about how hard it is to be only 5 years old when Lee is 8 years old and is able to do more than Jordan.
- They spoke to Lee about how they now knew that it wasn't all Jordan's fault and that Lee liked to annoy his brother by beating him and then getting him into trouble by making him angry.
- They tried to arrange for Jordan to play more with children of his own age and ability.
- They encouraged the boys to play some games that didn't have to involve one being a winner and the other a loser.

## Behaviour chart

Name \_\_\_\_\_

<b>A Before</b>	<b>B During</b>	<b>C After</b>
Where was the child? What seemed to lead up to the behaviour? Were any warnings given prior to the behaviour? What did individuals do or say to the child?	What time of day was it? What did the child do exactly?	What happened as a result of the behaviour? How did the episode come to an end?
<b>Date</b>		

## Guidelines for the use of star charts

A star chart acts as a reward. Your child earns gold or coloured stars for the behaviour you are trying to encourage. Star charts also show your child how her behaviour is changing. Children are usually ready to record their successes, so you can encourage your child to record them. Some children like star charts.

There are various charts available but parents usually wish to design their own to suit their child. Instead of using a star chart, you can use a drawing of your child's favourite character, divided into sections. One section is coloured in instead of using stars.

It is important to explain to your child exactly what must be done to earn a star/smiley face. You should ensure that she understands what needs to be done. Eg: Sarah, you tidied your toys and put them away. Sarah, you played quietly while I fed Johnnie. You read Billy a story and gave him a nice soft hug. You let Amy sit on the horse/go on the trampoline first.

- Keep the chart in a place where it can be easily seen by your child.
- Tell people who see your child regularly about the star chart so that they can also encourage your child to earn stars. Success at an early stage is vital to keep your child interested.
- If your child is not able to earn a star in the early days of trying, then you could make the first step easier to encourage her.
- Always praise your child when she earns a star and let her stick it on the chart at once.
- If your child is disappointed when she has not earned a star you should sympathise, but encourage her by saying 'You can try again.'
- It is important to remember not to get cross or upset – be positive.
- It is also important not to remove stars for bad behaviour.
- Once a star is earned it should never be removed.
- Use the chart to reward your child. Never use the chart in a negative way.

If the desired result is not being achieved, it is important to find a behaviour that can be praised. It does not have to be drastic. Try and catch her doing something that you have asked and say something like 'you did what I asked. I am very pleased.'

Three stars on a chart are rewarded with a small present or an activity/event. This does not have to be expensive and should be appropriate for the child.

Parents have noted that the following have been important for their children:

Books/comics, cooking biscuits, small toys/treats, trips to library/park, sweets, extra bedtime story, watching a favourite TV programme, short game, time with parents, water play/swimming.

## **When to stop using a chart**

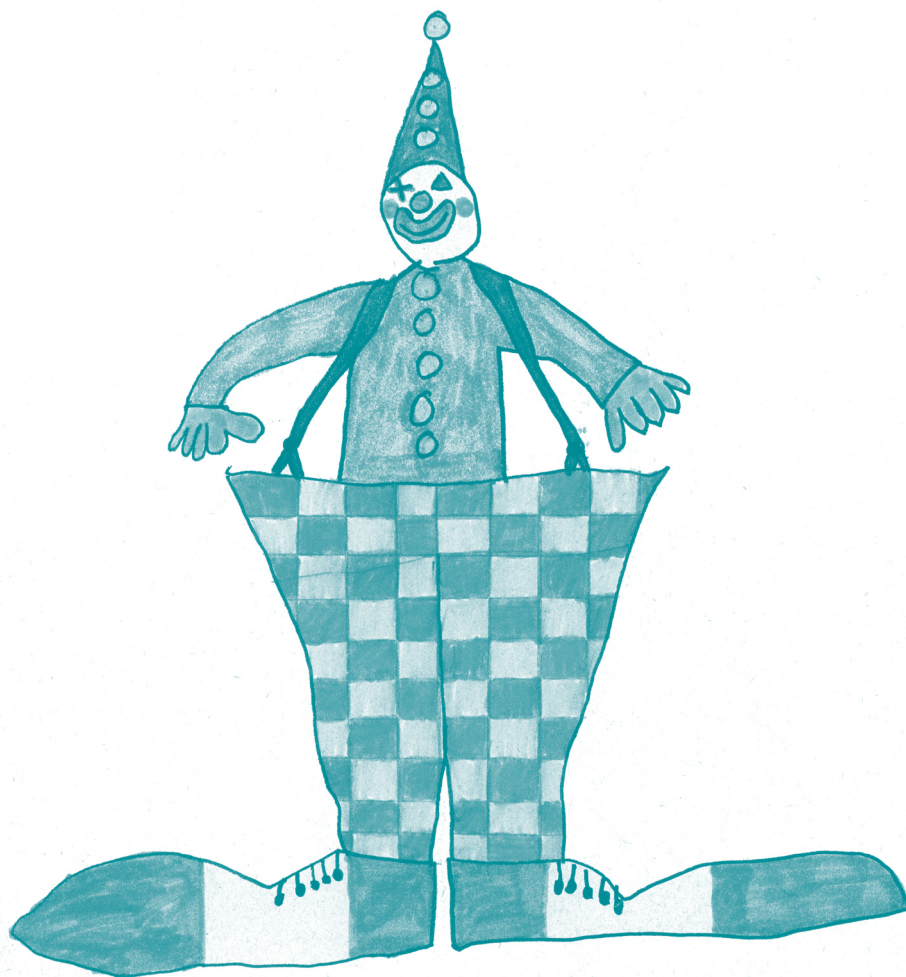
Wait until your child is regularly earning stars. Then you can either:

- Stop giving stars but always continue to praise your child.
- Gradually decrease the number of stars you give your child.

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You can put your child's favourite picture here  
or your child could draw their own picture to colour in



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## Journey to the castle

Your child's name \_\_\_\_\_



## Behaviour: handy hints

- Routines are important. They provide a sense of safety. However, they shouldn't be rigid as sometimes they will need to bend according to what's happening or for your child's needs. What routines does your child need? What routines do you need?
- You will have times when you feel helpless and useless. Although it is easier said than done, try to have some confidence in your ability as a parent.
- If many different people are giving you lots of advice, you may find it confusing and unhelpful.
- You will need to decide what you think is acceptable behaviour, so that if other people criticise you for your child's behaviour, you will be more sure of your ground.
- Difficult behaviour usually has a meaning, even though sometimes it is not clear what the meaning is. Behaviour is communication! You may need to keep an open mind for a while about what is causing the difficulty. Your child may have little idea about why he is getting cross or upset and behaving in the way he is.
- You may need to try to think about why your child is behaving like this. Sometimes it is possible to involve the child in this.
- It can be difficult to identify and stick to boundaries with some children. However, you need to be clear in your own mind about how you want your family life to be organised. It will then be easier for you to stick to the rules you want.
- Do not, however, make unrealistic rules. Make a few rules and stick to the few you make.
- You will need to be aware of what you are asking from your child. You need to make sure that you are not expecting too much, but neither are you expecting too little.