



Supporting Behaviour through Engagement in Outside School Hours Care Services

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The National Quality Standard (NQS) sets a high national benchmark for OSHC services in Australia. The ability of services to meet these outcomes, particularly in relation to supporting behaviour, regulation and positive relationships, often relies on high levels of educator engagement. Achieving this however is not always easy.

The role of an OSHC educator is a complex one for many reasons, including how to provide a service to children in middle childhood of varying ages, development, and relationships. This period is a time of significant change for children, with marked differences in the rate of development, the emergence and importance of identity, acceptance and for many, the realisation that social power has many benefits.

These factors however do not exist in a bubble. They interact with children's individual personalities & development – and play out in an OSHC environment where social relationships may not be as well established and defined as in the school environment. This interaction between internal and external factors can all impact significantly on social behaviour and regulation.

Supporting Behaviour

Educators use a variety of supports to promote positive behaviour. Routine & predictability, choice & control, visual supports, and passive sensory areas or “Chill Zones”, are all effective strategies to support ALL children's behaviour and regulation.

However, we cannot assume that simply providing these supports alone will reduce behaviours of concern, particularly in children who struggle to regulate or engage positively with peers.

All strategies to support behaviour are dependent upon high levels of educator engagement, an understanding of individual children's profiles and a strong focus on building those relationships.

The benefits of high educator engagement

High educator engagement often has an unintended benefit of “levelling the playing field” for children socially. For some children, the very presence of an educator within the activity allows them to initiate, negotiate and stay calm more easily. This is achieved not only through the natural scaffolds, modelling and guidance an educator provides, but also through the influence their presence alone has on the behaviour of OTHER children and THEIR ability to be fair, negotiable and inclusive. It allows for a more proactive response, an opportunity to ‘guide’ behaviour in the moment and model how to problem solve socially. In other words, it helps everyone “keep in check”.

The benefits however are not only for children. The more regulated children remain, the more engaged they are and the more positive and meaningful interactions between educators and children – the greater level of job satisfaction is possible. So how can this be achieved?

Engagement vs Supervision

Firstly, it is important to think about how we view the role of educator in OSHC. Do we view engagement as something that comes at the expense of supervision or duty of care – especially when behaviours of risk are present?

How can we use high engagement to reduce risk through purposeful, targeted interactions and situational awareness?

There are several possible ways:

- ▶ Considering which children will be in attendance and pre-empting potential challenges;
- ▶ Pre-planning and ensuring preferred activities are on offer;
- ▶ Staff collaboration to identify where pro-active, purposeful engagement by educators will have the greatest impact (e.g. targeted to cohorts or activities associated with higher risk); and
- ▶ Creating opportunities to build relationships that may need nurturing between particular children and educators.

Reflective Practice

- ▶ Is my view that behaviour and regulation are a “skill” or do ALL children have the ability to “behave appropriately”?
- ▶ What feelings and attitudes in me are triggered when children engage in behaviours of concern?
- ▶ What positive qualities can I focus on when trying to nurture a relationship that has been difficult to establish?

Your Inclusion Professional can support you to reflect on your role as an educator and plan for engagement. Contact your Inclusion Professional to find out more.

Understanding behaviour
What can educators do?

We need to critically reflect on our practice individually and with our team

Knowledge and beliefs	Interactions	Environments	Routines and transitions
<ul style="list-style-type: none">▶ What do I know about each child?▶ What do I know from my relationship with each family?▶ How do my values impact on the way I view a child's behaviour? (e.g. do I see behaviour as being curious, communicating a need or 'naughty'?)▶ How can my knowledge of typical child development help me to understand challenging behaviours?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▶ What is my connection with each child?▶ How am I being available to children's emotional needs?▶ Do I respond in a supportive way rather than react? (i.e. my body language, voice, what and how I say it)▶ What are the barriers or stressors and how can we limit or remove these?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▶ How does the physical environment promote positive behaviour?▶ Does the environment support all children's needs? (e.g. access, sensory, resources)▶ What opportunities do we provide for independence and agency, in both the outdoor and indoor spaces?▶ How am I communicating positive behaviour expectations with each child?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▶ How do our routines provide predictability, but also allow flexibility?▶ Do my group times allow choice and support every child's needs?▶ Are transitions child focused not educator (time) focused?

Where can I access support?
Talk with your Inclusion Professional.
Phone 1800 703 382 Visit www.inclusionagency.nswact.org.au

The Australian Government funded NSW/ACT Inclusion Agency is managed by KU Children's Services, in partnership with Include Me and Gowrie NSW.

You can download the Understanding Behaviour posters for OSHC educators and CBDC and FDC educators from the resource section of the NSW/ACT Inclusion Agency website

<https://inclusionagency.nswact.org.au/resources?keyword=behaviour>