

family

A D V O C A C Y

Institute for Family Advocacy & Leadership Development Assoc. Inc.

A New South Wales association concerned with the rights and interests of people who have developmental disability

Ms Rhia Victorino
Senior Council Officer
Legislative Council
NSW Parliament House
Macquarie Street
Sydney NSW 2000

3 June 2010

Dear Rhia

Catherine Hogan and Kim Roots of Family Advocacy appeared before the General Purpose Standing Committee No. 2 on Monday, 10 May, 2010.

Catherine Hogan sought and was granted an extension until Friday 4 June to supply a response to the Witness Feedback Questionnaire, a corrected copy of the transcript of evidence and a response to a question on notice from Reverend the Hon. Dr Gordon Moyes.

The Questionnaire has been sent by post to Ms Kate Harris and the other items are attached.

Please feel free to contact me if I can be of further assistance.

Yours sincerely



Catherine Hogan
Director

Response to question on notice from Reverend the Hon. Dr Gordon Moyes:

What can be done to discipline disabled people who are being rejected within the class? There has been mention of forms of discipline such as hitting, smacking and suspension, which is not appropriate. What would be an appropriate form of discipline?

The question put by Reverend the Hon. Dr Gordon Moyes raises important issues around supporting heterogeneous student populations that include students with disability. A comprehensive study of approaches to behaviour support is not within the ambit of an advocacy organisation and we rely on the research of others. That being the case, we set out below a discussion of the question raised in broad terms and suggest relevant web links as well as experts who have written and can speak to issues around supporting students characterised as having challenging behaviour.

The general approach to discipline for children is the same as for all children in the schooling system and should focus on positive rather than punitive approaches. However, some children, including some with a disability, may have particular needs that must be addressed in order for the child to function positively in the school setting. There are two elements to dealing with challenging behaviour in such circumstances.

The first element involves the implementation of individualised support strategies to prevent the behaviour from occurring and the second, reactive strategies which can be implemented should an instance of challenging behaviour occur which are aimed at calming the situation.

Preventative measures

Instances of challenging behaviour usually occur through the interaction of three broad factors; environmental conditions, social contexts and personal characteristics of the child. Preventative measures involve identifying the particular factors that are impacting on the behaviour occurring and taking action to address these factors. Frequently, changes to the environment and/or social contexts can be easily undertaken and prevent the behaviour from occurring. Two examples of how this may occur are given below.

- A child with autism may find the flickering of fluorescent lights particularly disturbing and even painful (a personal characteristic resulting from their autism). When placed in a classroom that has fluorescent lighting installed (an environmental factor) the child may behave in ways that might be interpreted as inappropriate because they are distressed by the fluorescent lighting. Changing the lighting that is used will mean that the child will not be distressed and the inappropriate behaviour will be avoided.

- Another example might involve a child with intellectual disability finding it difficult to understand complex verbal communication (a personal characteristic resulting from their impairment). When a classroom teacher gives complex verbal instructions (a social context factor) the child may not follow the instructions and be considered to be non-compliant, when in fact, the child does not understand what is required. Introducing communication aids, ensuring that instructions are given using the communication aids and that instructions are broken into smaller steps will enable the child to comply with the classroom requirements.

The analysis of the causes of the behaviour and the preventative measures will ensure that the vast majority of behavioural situations can be avoided. Sometimes, if the cause of the behaviour has not yet been identified or cannot be avoided in a particular situation, the child may become distressed and display challenging behaviour. In this case, reactive strategies would need to be implemented.

Reactive strategies

The aim of reactive strategies is to prevent escalation and calm any particular situation. Strategies may include those listed below.

- Redirecting the child to some other situation or item that takes their focus away from the situation that is causing them distress.
- Talking to the child using active listening strategies.
- Assisting the child to obtain or avoid whatever is causing them distress.

Using the two previously mentioned circumstances as examples, the following reactive strategies could be applied.

- For the child who finds fluorescent lighting distressing, a circumstance may arise where the child is on an excursion to a building that has fluorescent lights that flicker at a rate that causes them distress. The child may display the first signs that they are distressed and the teacher may ask an assistant to take the child out of the room.
- The child who has difficulty processing verbal information may become confused about what is required of them during a school assembly and begin to display inappropriate behaviour. The teacher can calm the situation by using active listening strategies to let the child know that they understand the child's distress and then direct the child to use their communication aids to help the child make sense of the situation.

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Many people have written about the inappropriateness of punitive measures. For example:

Our experience and that of many of our colleagues convinces us that there are a variety of interventions described in the literature that are as effective as punishment, with fewer problematic side effects. Among the side effects associated with punishment are that it frequently elicits aggression by the learner against staff and/or against self, that generalization is poor, and that continuation of the punishment is often required in order to avoid a return of the behaviour to its previous strength. Further as additional programs provide service for adults and adolescents, the aggression issue becomes more critical because of the size and strength of the learners. Moreover, the use of common aversive procedures such as time out and contingent spray mists has become essentially impossible in community-based programs due to the negative feedback from co-workers, neighbours and other citizens. Conscientious staff unfamiliar with alternative strategies often feel forced to limit the educational and other experiences of the learner until the punishment procedures 'control' or make the individual 'ready' for the community. Unfortunately, the well documented generalization problems associated with punishment often make such readiness only a remote possibility, commonly leading to staff frustration and unhappiness.

Progress without Punishment – Effective Approaches for Learners with Behaviour problems

Anne M Donnellan; Gary LaVigna; Nanette Negri-Shoultz; Lynette L Fassbender

1988 Teachers College, Columbia University

Suggested sources of further information relating to positive behaviour support initiatives

Contacts:

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Web sites:

- Positive Behavioural Interventions and Supports

www.pbis.org

- Queensland Government Department of Education and Training

<http://education.qld.gov.au/studentservices/behaviour/swpbs/index.html>

- Tasmania Department of Education

www.education.tas.gov.au/school/health/wellbeing/positivebehaviour

- National Association of School Psychologists

www.nasponline.org/resources/factsheets/index.aspx