

Watch your tone!



Be it praise or admonishment, the key to success is in the delivery, says **Paul Dix...**

It's not just what you say but the way that you say it. The finest actors never show the extremes of their range. So it goes with your performance in front of the children. In the mid-range of your tone there are fine shades of assertiveness that will improve your behaviour management.

The pace, inflection and volume of what you say is being constantly interpreted and misinterpreted!

Underneath the more obvious behaviour management strategies are an infinite amount of more subtle ways to influence behaviour. The rising inflection can introduce too much doubt – 'Cleaning up with Kyle(?)' – the falling inflection discouragement. A turn of phrase can be the difference between defiance and compliance. A looming adult a change from tears to tantrum. Rather than the huge variations in your reactions to poor behaviour, try rehearsing more gentle tonal control.

Keep it subtle

Leading and managing large groups of young children requires the honing of some important 'teacher' tones:

- It's all going to be incredible fun.
- That is totally and completely normal and doesn't revolt me at all.
- You are the best child in the world.
- That is going to stop.
- I am very disappointed in you.
- I am even more disappointed in you.
- My disappointment couldn't be stronger.
- Right, that's it, I am really, really, really disappointed (but still calm).

Subtle shifts in tone, volume and pace are the behaviour skills that are so hard to pinpoint in expert nursery nurses. Tone of voice is a palette of behaviour management colours. Shades of positive manipulation mixed with increasingly dark levels of disappointment and the bright splashes of distraction. The way that you deal with difficult incidents is as important a model as how you lead, instruct, teach and model fantastic behaviour. The way that you exaggerate the positive, attack behaviour not the child, intervene early in the child's thinking and make difficult moments comfortable for everyone. Throughout, it is your performance that is key. Subtle adjustments in performance are more effective tools for behaviour management than the big stick, latest *Daily Mail* strategy or tasty carrots. Try restricting your range for a day: volume turned down, tone restricted, pace limited. How many behaviour interventions could be silent? How many single words or signals? How dramatic would small changes in tone seem after just a short time.

Of course, what you say is also critical. In the crazed world of the little people, messages need to be simple, clear and easily repeatable. 'Choice' is an important anchor in behaviour management. When children know the boundaries then they can make a choice whether to follow them or not. As you guide children to take responsibility for their behaviour, you can frame it around their choices. Using the 'choice' allows you to attack the behaviour and not the child's character. It puts the responsibility for behaviour onto the child, encourages dialogue that stays focused and separates their behaviour from the behaviour of others.

Discuss a child's 'poor choices' and 'good

Show restraint

SEVEN REASONS TO STOP SHORT OF YOUR FULL RANGE...

- Children see shouty adults as adults who lack control. They are either frightened by it or find it funny.
- You would never shout at a child in front of their parents.
- If your model of behaviour is poor it will affect the way children choose to deal with each other.
- Over emotional responses to inappropriate behaviour will frighten many. It will also encourage others to push your buttons.
- Colleagues hear your voice echoing down the corridor and begin to question your ability to manage behaviour.
- Managing behaviour through fear is unsophisticated and unsustainable.
- Disproportionate responses to inappropriate behaviour encourage unfair punishment: "Right, that's it, you are in trouble... FOREVER!"

choices' in their behaviour, e.g. "You made some poor choices in your behaviour this morning, particularly the hair grabbing/screaming/paint eating/kicking/toilet paper embalming. This afternoon I need you to make better choices. I remember last week when you helped me to clear up, that was a good choice." Help children to learn that all choices have consequences. Present 'closed' choices, "You can continue trying to poke Chelsea with your boingy thing and I will have to take it away, or you can put it in the tray and help the others tidy up. Make a good choice."

When you are encouraging children to reflect on their behaviour, the focus on 'choice' can echo: "What do you think the poor choices were that caught my attention?" and "What do you think you could do to stop this happening when you go back?"

Be assertive

Of course, using choice sounds entirely reasonable in the relative calm of magazine reading. In reality, many adults recognise that their pattern of behaviour is to be nice or compliant for far longer

than they really want, until they reach the point of no longer being able to hold it in. Then they explode nastily all over children who just happen to be around. This can leave children with the impression that there are only two states or behaviours adults can do: Nice or Nasty. The shades in between are unused and eventually lost from the repertoire of behaviour management strategies.

Assertiveness is not simply standing your ground, just saying "no" and repeating your demand (the 'broken record' technique). Just as children have choices so you too have the opportunity to choose your behaviour. You have many options as to how you respond to inappropriate behaviour, all of which can be assertive actions. You might choose to record it and address it at a more appropriate time, ignore it, confront it, walk away and consider your response, etc. Assertiveness is knowing that you can control your own behaviour and making considered appropriate choices in your response to students. Don't be afraid of saying "no" and saying it with impact when it's appropriate. Be careful not to overuse it as it will soon lose its power. You risk being ignored if your repertoire of verbal responses becomes too predictable.

findoutmore

Paul's Online behaviour management course for nursery staff is flexible, interactive, contains original video and the largest behaviour management resource library on the web. For a demo of the course go to pivotaleducation.com/online-demo or call Ellie on 020 7000 1735.

Sticking to a performance that is heavy with positive reinforcement, laden with choice and assertively delivered gives an atmosphere of certainty to the room

