

BEHAVIOUR

This fact sheet has been written by parent carers for parent carers.



What are behavioural problems?

If your child has a disability or additional needs that affect their behaviour, it can be extremely upsetting and stressful to deal with. This is especially true when you are out and about with your child, when unusual or socially unacceptable behaviour may lead to unwanted comments or judgements by other people. Often, this is down to ignorance. If a child does not 'look' disabled, people may assume that their behaviour is because they are 'naughty' or that you are a 'lax parent'. Even so, comments and 'tuts' can be hurtful and add to the stress of dealing with an already difficult situation.

What kinds of behaviour may be a cause for concern?

What's acceptable or unacceptable behaviour varies from person to person but, in general, the following behaviour may mean you and your child need some help:

- physically aggressive behaviour such as kicking, biting, hair-pulling or pinching
- verbally aggressive behaviour
- self-harm, such as head-banging, scratching and biting
- being withdrawn and unusually quiet
- vomiting
- obsessive behaviour
- repetitive behaviour such as rocking, repetitive speech or movements
- other issues such as smearing poo, damaging furniture or other objects

Causes of behavioural problems

Whatever the cause, if your child is having difficulty communicating their needs or something that's troubling them, it can surface as an unwanted behaviour instead. Sometimes it may be that your child is experiencing sensory overload (see our *Sensory Issues* fact sheet for more information).

Understanding why it is happening and giving your child the right support can help to ensure their needs are met and also head off some issues before they result in unwanted behaviours. Changing how you respond to their behaviour may also help.

Ways to help behaviour

In the first instance, it could be useful to discuss your concerns with your child's health visitor, school nurse or school and seek their advice. You can then seek further information and support via the following channels:

- **Therapy** – there are a huge variety of therapies available. Which method you use can depend upon the cause of the behaviour – ask for advice.
- **The Challenging Behaviour Foundation** – works with families caring for children with severe learning disabilities. As well as information on their website, they can also have a family linking scheme so that parents can speak to others who have had similar issues.
- **Scope** – their website has some useful advice about challenging behaviour. See:



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www.scope.org.uk/support/families/diagnosis/behaviour.

- **The National Autistic Society** – if your child is on the autistic spectrum, you can find useful advice on behaviour at their website: www.autism.org.uk/about/behaviour.aspx.

Ask about

- **Autism Sussex** – offers behaviour advice and support for people on the autistic spectrum. Go to: www.autismsussex.org.uk or call their helpline: **0345 450 0060**.
- **CAMHS (Children & Adolescent Mental Health Service)** – doctors and therapists who help children and young people with mental health issues. Referrals must be made by a professional from health, social care or an educational setting.
- **Children and Family Centres** – you can access information and support for children under five from your local children and family centre, which you can find on the Family Information Service website: <http://familyinfoservice.westsussex.gov.uk>.
- **Find it Out Centres** – targeted Youth Support for families. Find your local centre by going to www.westsussex.gov.uk/education-children-and-families/your-space.
- **Health Visiting Service** – support for parents of children under five. You can find your health visitor through your GP surgery, children and family centre, or through the following link: www.sussexcommunity.nhs.uk and look up 'health visiting'.
- **Learning Inclusion Team** and **Social Communication Team** – specialist teams of advisory teachers who support mainstream schools to better work with children with communication and behavioural difficulties. Ask your child's school for information.
- **MASH** – support from health and social care. If your child is under 18, call the MASH, tel: **01403 229888**, email: MASH@westsussex.gcsx.gov.uk. For over 18s call the Adult Social CarePoint: **01243 642121**, or email: socialcare@westsussex.gov.uk.
- **Portage** – a home-based educational programme tailored to a child's individual needs. Available to very young children. Chichester: **01243 536182**, Crawley: **01293 572480**, Horsham and Mid-Sussex: **01444 243150**, Worthing: **01903 242558**.
- **Youth Offending Services** – work with young people and other organisations to prevent and reduce offending. Email: youthoffendingteam@westsussex.gov.uk or call **01903 839920** (Worthing).

Further reading and useful links

- **Making Sense of it All** – our handy parent/carer guide contains information and advice on local contact groups and much more. It is available to download or buy. For further information, visit our website: www.reachingfamilies.org.uk.
- **British Association of Counsellors and Psychotherapists (BACP)** – www.bacp.co.uk.
- **The Challenging Behaviour Foundation** – www.challengingbehaviour.org.uk.
- **West Sussex Local Offer** – go to <https://westsussex.local-offer.org> and search for 'behaviour'.

