

TRANSFORMING LIVES TOGETHER⁺

Filling the Gap

A few tips on managing behaviour

Creating a good atmosphere amongst both the children and the adult volunteers at your Filling the Gap project is not difficult but it does need a bit of thinking about and preparation of the adults.

1. **Children need to feel valued by the adults**

Always make sure that every child is welcomed and greeted by name by one or more of the adults. Feelings of self-worth and value come as children receive the message that the grown-ups like them and want to get to know them.

(Don't just tick them off in the register, speak to them and let them know you are interested)

2. **Give good, clear instructions and plenty of warning before making changes.**

Children who live in chaotic households (and many do) can't easily predict what is happening and they will often try to take control themselves. This can result in others 'putting up for boss' and suddenly there are problems.

Make sure that all the adults listen carefully when instructions are given and model keeping still and quiet.

Make the instructions short and clear and use the '5-minute warning' system before anything changes. i.e. "In 5 minutes we are going to stop for a snack"

When you have given an instruction, ask one of the children to repeat what you have said. This serves to reinforce and clarify any misunderstandings and also, in time, leads to them all paying better attention as it may be their turn to repeat.

3. **Keep children occupied, hydrated and in sight.**

Make sure that all adult volunteers understand that all children need to be accounted for at all times. (Just locking the door isn't enough to ensure safety).

Make sure that children are always involved in something. Busy children are usually happy and create fewer problems than those who are at a loose end.

Make sure that they are getting enough to drink throughout the session as being dehydrated can cause poor focus and restlessness.

4. **Use 'Time in' and NEVER 'Time out'**

Children who are causing disruption or who are a bit chaotic are not going to improve by being excluded or given 'time out'.

They benefit far more from an adult who will read a book with them, take them aside to 'help' with collecting the cups or setting out another activity.

Make sure that this is an adult who understands the principle of distraction and positive adult time. Anyone who believes that all poor behaviour deserves to be punished will be cold and distant, thereby defeating the object.

Children really can benefit from 'good attention' and a bit of one to one distraction far more than from shaming negativity.

5. **Encourage adults to have fun!**

Children love to see adults who can enjoy fun and can be silly together.

This is a great opportunity to model fun, kindness, sharing, friendship and many other desirable behaviours.

Many children only experience adults 'letting their hair down' whilst under the influence of drink or other stimulants. It may be a bit scary at first for some children to see silly adults but once they know it's safe they will enjoy it and benefit from the example.

Some of you may be running projects at which the parents are also encouraged to stay. Please remember that for some of them this will be a learning opportunity to see how other adults manage their children. This is a great chance to show some of them new techniques and alternative ways to parent.

Most of all enjoy each other. Many of the children attending your projects will remember their experiences for years to come.

Make great memories!!!