

Idea 6: Children's Actions Serve a Purpose

Purpose

Understanding the reason behind your children's action/s (the purpose they are serving), can help to identify, teach and celebrate the use of more productive replacement action/s that your child can use instead, that serve the same purpose. For example, some children can be taught to ask for a break when they are overwhelmed (useful replacement action), versus storming out of the room or throwing their books on the ground (unproductive action). Making a plan to encourage the use of more productive replacement actions can support your child to maintain the use of positive behaviours over time.

Steps to follow

Watch your child during routines. When are they/aren't they engaging in positive and productive actions?

- Unproductive actions are simply actions (skills or behaviour/s) that your child is seen to be doing, that are not contributing to an increase of skills or engagement.
- Sometimes, unproductive actions are the only ways that children know how to communicate, and they might need help to learn actions you want to see.
- Your child uses actions to express how they are feeling. Using certain actions over time, has helped your child to **get something** or **avoid something**.
- **Example:** your child might express frustration when they throw their pencil down, cover their eyes, and lie their head in their arms on the desk. These actions could be your child communicating their frustration that the homework is too difficult, and their actions have helped them **avoid completing it**.

Gather information on one specific action

- Identify one specific action you want to focus on – pick one that will support your child's productivity. Describe what can be seen, heard and counted e.g. 'I see my child (showing anger by) pulling a face, yelling and stamping their feet. My child does this 2-3 times every time they are asked to read.'
- What information have you gathered about the action? Use the table below to prompt you.

Find the reason for your child's action – what purpose might it be serving?

- Review the information gathered. Are there any patterns? Use the table below to prompt whether you think your child is using the action to get something or avoid something. This is the likely reason behind (purpose) of your child using that action. Discuss this with your child's teacher.

Make a plan – and monitor

- If your child is trying to access adult/sibling attention, find ways to proactively schedule in time with your child throughout the day e.g. first complete your maths homework, then you can play a game with Mum and John; or Maria checks in with Dad three times a day – 10am, 1pm and 3pm.
- If your child is trying to avoid a task or activity, consider how your child a) can be supported to complete the task – simplify if needed, or use a range of engagement strategies; or b) can be supported to temporarily take a break before coming back to the task.
- Define the **action/skill that you want to see**. Make this achievable for your child. What do you want to see your child doing instead?
- Think of who can help assist your child to learn/use this new action. Ask your child's teacher, support team/s, parents/carers, siblings and family to help.
- How will the new action be celebrated when used? Make sure this is motivating for your child and given immediately following use of the replacement action.
- **Monitor:** How will you know if the plan is working? Is the new action is happening more than the old action? Are they serving the same purpose?
- If required, request support from your child's teacher for an in-home Behaviour Support Plan.

Visible (unproductive) action	Information gathered	Purpose of the action	Replacement action
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Talking • Disrupting • Yelling • Running away • Hurting self or others 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When? • How often is it happening? • What happens before? • What happens after? • Teacher perception of the reason why your child is using this action (if related to learning). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is the child using the action to get something (adult or sibling attention, or an item or activity)? 	<p>If you think your child is using the action to get something:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • build a plan that provides acceptable ways to access adult or sibling attention • monitor progress.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unproductive • Distracted • Running away • Hurting self or others 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is your child doing instead? • Is your child able to complete the homework/task/activity? • Is your child able to remain focused? Consider medical/health/sensory needs. • Teacher perception of the reason why your child is using this action (if related to learning). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is your child using the action to avoid something (task, person or activity)? 	<p>If you think your child is using the action to avoid something:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • build a plan that allows the child to complete tasks and activities with necessary support and include a break • monitor progress.

	(get or avoid)	(avoid)	(get or avoid)	(get)
Functions of behaviour	SENSORY STIMULATION	ESCAPE OR AVOID	SOCIAL ATTENTION	TANGIBLE
Examples	Fidgeting, tapping pen, flapping hands	Asking for a break, leaving the room, refusing to do a task.	Talking, yelling, hitting, raising hand, calling out.	Playing on laptop/tablet, holding onto a specific item.
Purpose of the behaviour to your child	Provides preferred sensory experiences that feel good.	Removes undesired activities, tasks or interactions.	Provides access to people or to interactions.	Provides access to preferred activities or items.