



All behaviour is
communication:
distressed behaviour and
support at school

Wednesday 29th May 2024

11.10am – 12.20pm, Cap & Thistle Suite



ENQUIRE

Our vision

All children in Scotland are supported, included, and listened to throughout their education.



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REACH

Today's session

Introduction: What we hear through our work at Enquire

Activity 1: what is the impact of distressed behaviour in schools? Considering the impact of distressed behaviour on children and young people, families, and professionals.

Activity 2: what can we do about distressed behaviour in schools? Sharing best practice.

Conclusion: What we're going to do with what we hear today.



Distressed behaviour is a difficult topic,
for many different reasons.

Please look after yourself

Only share what feels comfortable to you, take a step away if you need.

Please look after one another

Keep everything anonymous, be mindful of language and respectful of others. Consider what is necessary to share.

The context

- Scottish Government *Behaviour in Scottish Schools* report 2023
- (subsequent) media interest in behaviour and violence in schools
- ASL (Morgan) review, 2020

The collage features several news snippets and the cover of the Scottish Government report 'Behaviour in Scottish Schools 2023'. The report cover is white with a purple border and includes the Scottish Government logo and the Gaelic name 'Riaghaltas na h-Alba'. The news snippets include:

- Northern Scot**: 'New report shows the continued decline of pupil's behaviour in primary and secondary schools'
- News Politics**: 'Aggression and violence in Scottish schools is on the rise, study reveals'. Subtext: 'The report found that serious disruptive behaviour, aggression and violence to...'
- tes magazine**: 'Serious disruptive behaviour rising in Scottish schools' (Subscriber-only article)
- THE SCOTSMAN**: 'BREAKING' news about a landmark case. Columnist: 'Scottish schools are struggling amid 'tidal wave' of badly behaved, aggressive pupils and 'mob rule' in some classrooms' – Cameron Wyllie. Subtext: 'Some pupils require care well beyond the scope of a...'
- The Herald**: 'Bad behaviour: Worrying rise in violence in Scottish schools, report finds'. Subtext: 'Ministers are warned about a 'rising tide of disruptive behaviour, aggression and violence in Scotland's schools''.
- The Herald**: 'Education in Scotland: Pupil behaviour 'the worst it's been in years'' (14th May 2022)



What is distressed behaviour?



Examples of challenging behaviour include:

- having lots of angry outbursts or 'tantrums'
- regularly shouting, swearing, hitting, biting or kicking
- kicking, hitting, smashing or damaging things in the home
- regularly refusing boundaries and routines, including not wanting to respond to reasonable requests
- being impulsive and taking physical risks
- blaming others for their behaviour
- bullying or being unkind towards others
- persistently getting into trouble at school
- refusing to engage in conversations about what's going on

- *Young Minds*

'It is damaging to place any child into a bad versus good definition where types of behaviour are pitted against each other rather than exploring the root causes.'

- *Billy Anderson, Head of Services, Children in Scotland*

A child showing distressed behaviour demonstrates their distress through actions which are risky or harmful to themselves or others.

- *Children 1st*

School staff reported the most common forms of serious disruptive behaviours between pupils were physical and verbal abuse, particularly physical aggression, general verbal abuse and physical violence.

- *Behaviour in Scottish Schools, 2023, Scottish Government, (p.5)*

Behaviour & ASN

A child has additional support needs where, **for whatever reason**, they can't benefit from school education without extra help.

Unmet needs can cause distress.

Bullying	Sensory impairment	Being a young carer	English as an additional language
Issues at home	Being particularly gifted	Physical disability	Moving school frequently
Learning difficulties	Care experienced	Parent in the Armed Forces	Mental health issues
Behavioural difficulties	Social and emotional problems	Language or speech impairment	Bereavement

What we hear

- the emotional impact of incidents
- the importance of, and desire for, de-escalation and early intervention
- frustrations related to support planning
- communication breakdown between schools and families
- uncertainty of next steps – what to do or what resources are needed (and how to get them)



Activity 1

What is the impact of distressed behaviour in schools?

Read the case study.

Discuss how a situation like this could impact:

- the child or young person
- the professional(s) involved
- the parents or carers

Think about:

- What emotions or feelings they might have
- The reasons why they might feel this way
- What other factors could influence their responses

On your table:

- A lovely Enquire facilitator
- A case study
- 3 pieces of paper
- Pens and sticky notes

You have 15 minutes

(5 minutes on each type of person)

Please look after yourself and others

Feedback

What can we do about distressed behaviour in schools?

There is lots of good work already happening!

We want to provide an opportunity for you to share best practice with one another.

We want to understand common themes or concerns, so that we can use this to inform our own work at Enquire.

We also want to share some of the work we've already done –





Inclusion Ambassadors

Relationships and behaviour summary paper

[Read the report here](#)

Relationships and behaviour summary paper

April 2024



Background

The Inclusion Ambassadors are a group of secondary school-aged pupils who have a range of additional support needs and attend a variety of educational provision across Scotland. Children in Scotland delivers the group, with support from Enquire.

There are currently 17 members of the group from across 15 local authorities. The group share their experiences of accessing additional support in school through online and in-person meetings. The group meets regularly to discuss their vision for additional support for learning, guided by their vision statement which can be read here.¹

This paper explores the group's experiences of schools' approaches to relationships and behaviour. This topic has been a prominent feature in discussions about Scottish education in recent months. There has been research conducted which has explored the experiences of teachers and other school staff.² There has also been a focus on the issue in the press and a series of summits held by Scottish Government to consider responses. However, there has been less evidence relating to the views of children and young people and as a result, we have explored the topic with the Inclusion Ambassadors to understand their views in this area.

This paper highlights the impact on children and young people when schools focus on building relationships and recognise **all** pupils' achievements and successes. The paper also suggests changes that could be made to how schools approach relationships and behaviour in order to make improvements for children and young people with additional support needs.

The Inclusion Ambassadors have previously conducted work that is relevant to conversations about relationships and behaviour. In 2022, the group co-produced a Language and Communication Guide.³ They have also explored the importance of proactive, child-centred support planning. Throughout this paper we have highlighted where their previous work could support the development of policy and practice.



¹ Inclusion Ambassadors vision statement (2021), Vision and overview document.

² ScotCan (2023) Behaviour in Scottish Schools 2023 report, Fifth Wave.

³ Inclusion Ambassadors Language and communication guide (2022).

Using a calm voice

Give options for how to communicate

Have challenging conversations outside of the classroom

Talk to me, don't talk through me

Remember not every child or young person will feel comfortable opening up to everyone

Don't match the anger/frustration of pupils

Focus on the positive parts of class rather than the negative



**Inclusion
Ambassadors**



Activity 2

What can we do about distressed behaviour in schools?

On your timeline, use sticky notes to share your ideas.

Stick on your ideas from quick, immediate responses to longer term structures and strategies.

Think about:

- Language that helps when talking to a child in distress
- Whole-school approaches vs personalised strategies
- How to work with families to find solutions
- Creative ideas and innovations
- Resources you've found helpful

On your table:

- A lovely Enquire facilitator
- Your timeline
- Sticky notes
- Pens

You have 15 minutes

Please look after yourself and others

Feedback

Conclusion – what we’re going to do with what you’ve shared

We hope you enjoyed today’s session. We appreciate your engagement with what can be a difficult topic.

We’ll use what has been shared today to inform our future work for professionals and families:

- The experiences and concerns you’ve shared will help us in our role informing the Scottish Government about issues surrounding ASL.
- The good practice you’ve shared will be compiled into a resource that will be available on our website.



ENQUIRE

Success Looks Different Awards

Designed by the Inclusion Ambassadors to recognise schools and nurseries who support, celebrate, and include pupils with additional support needs.

Next year's applications will open soon!

[Read more here](#)



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