

## **Signposts For Building Better Behaviour**

### **What is Signposts?**

It is specifically developed to help parents whose children have a developmental delay or an intellectual disability.

Signposts helps parents understand the behaviours. It also enables parents to work out the purpose of the behaviour.

Parents are given tools to build effective ways to:

- Manage current difficult behaviours.
- Plan ahead for managing further difficult behaviours.

### **Issues for parents of children with developmental delay or intellectual disability**

- Family life is complex
- Managing difficult behaviour is just one part of a complex set of challenges
- Need to build on parenting skills by:
  - Increasing parent confidence
  - Preparing and practicing how we respond
  - Preventing & managing difficult behavior
- Early intervention approach recommended
- Signposts is recommended for **ages 3 -15**

### **Understand difficult behaviours**

- What is difficult behaviour?
  - As children grow they develop new skills that parents are pleased to see.
  - Most children at some time also exhibit behaviours that parents are not so pleased about!
  - Behaviour changes happen to all children and can range from mild behaviours such as whining to serious problems like hurting other people
  - These serious behaviours are known as difficult behaviour.
- Children with an intellectual disability or developmental delay may learn more slowly than others
- This can cause them to feel frustrated by a lack of success

### **Reasons for difficult behaviour**

- **Long term physical make-up** refers to aspects of our physical self such as male/female, tall/short, or a chromosomal abnormality such as Down syndrome. Because you cannot change something of this kind, it is important to find out how to overcome any problems that may result, which is where Signposts comes in.
- **Past learning** refers to everything we have learned, and the more things we learn, the more things we can do. Sometimes children learn to behave in ways that are difficult for parents to manage. You cannot change past learning, but you can teach your child new skills to replace the undesirable behaviours they have developed, and Signposts is designed to help you do that.

- **Current physical state** is whether we are tired, angry or upset, all of which might cause us to behave differently. As an example, lack of sleep on a regular basis may cause your child to be grumpy. Signposts can help you deal with situations such as these. Sometimes difficult behaviours are treated with medication: the aim is to change the child's physical state and, therefore, improve their behaviour. There is debate about the extent to which medication leads to long-term improvement in children's behaviour, and the procedures in Signposts do not rely on the use of medication.
- **Current environment** is the things going on around us. This includes factors such as the weather and what people are saying or doing to us. The current environment has a significant influence on your child's behaviour. It affects immediate behaviour, and is also important in teaching new skills to children. Signpost materials focus on helping you structure your child's environment to bring out their best.

### **A focus on parents**

- Parents are the key people in determining a child's environment
  - While many things contribute to the development of particular behaviours in children, a child's environment is a key. Parents are the main people involved in determining a child's environment, and are therefore the main influence on how their children develop behaviour.
- Parents bring existing knowledge and skills about managing difficult behaviour
  - Parents have an extremely important role. Parents know their children better than anyone else; they know a child's likes and dislikes as well as what a child will generally respond to. In addition, parents bring significant knowledge and skills about managing difficult behaviour. These factors are critical starting points for doing something about difficult behaviour.
- Parents know what will work for their family
  - Parents may also have some knowledge of the principles in Signposts through contact with workers or other families, or through their own experience.
- Parents are the experts on their child
  - Even parents who are well equipped with the above skills and knowledge can reach a point where they need help, including developing a plan of action to work towards.

### **Impact on other children in the family**

- Signpost strategies are also effective for siblings
  - Families that have used Signposts material tell us that the strategies work very well with the other children in the family. Some parents set out to use the strategies with their other children, while for others it was a very pleasing side-effect of using the strategies with their child who has an intellectual disability.
  - When you make changes to the way you manage difficult behaviour, it is very important for everyone dealing with the behaviour to be doing the same thing. Older children may be taking an active part in dealing with the difficult behaviour, but younger ones may not.
- Any changes you make to deal with difficult behaviour should be consistent for all family members

- To successfully change behaviour, you need to :
  - Explain what is happening to everybody who is dealing with the behaviour
  - Talk it through in a way that is appropriate to their age
  - Describe what you expect them to do; for example, if they are to ignore tantrums. If they know what is expected, they are less likely to accidentally undo your efforts to manage the difficult behaviour

### **Current Research (Done in Australia)**

- Data now available from 435 families who have participated in Signposts in every mode
- As with earlier analyses, these families have reported very positive outcomes, saying that they were:
  - More satisfied with their parenting and more confident in managing their children
  - Significantly less hassled, stressed, anxious or depressed
  - That their children are more obedient, less aggressive and less disruptive
  - That they were very satisfied with the program

### **Features of Signposts**

- Minimum of 5 sessions
- Session length: 2 - 2.5 hrs
- Evaluation of the program
- Free parent materials – 8 booklets (modules) and DVD/video

### **Contact Us**

For enquires or registration, please call Child Development Unit at

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Operating hours: 8.30am to 5.30pm (Monday to Friday)