

Classroom Management Strategies for Looked After Children

Understanding Classroom Behaviours of Looked After Children	
Why is...	Maybe because...
Jodie often ignoring the teachers' instructions?	Jodie is so alert to everything around her that she cannot hear the teacher's instructions.
Jamal always exploding during maths or spelling?	Jamal finds it difficult to be wrong or make mistakes.
Rebecca not wanting to go to school?	The exams are about to start and Rebecca is very worried about failing or not doing well.
Kelly in trouble at playtime or during moves between classrooms?	Kelly feels more secure in small groups – preferably with people she knows. She feels panicky in crowds.
Wesley refusing to be helped with new work?	Wesley wants certainty in his life and never wants to feel 'helpless' again, so he finds it very hard to accept any help.
Harrison often taking other pupils' belongings?	Stealing is often linked to early loss, especially of caregivers, and this can lead to a more general misunderstanding of the difference between 'mine' and 'yours'. Harrison had little of his own in his early life.
Sarah constantly asking the teacher trivial questions about her work?	Sarah has very low self-esteem and needs to feel an adult is close to her constantly. She may feel she cannot bear to get it 'wrong' or the teacher may 'disappear' like others have in her life, for which she blames herself.
Ben's behaviour suddenly getting much worse?	Something has happened that is hard for him to cope with. Perhaps a new sibling has arrived, or there is a painful anniversary, or a visit to his birth family, or changes at home. Stress can be in the past, now or in the future.
Adam being sulky and refusing to speak with the teacher or others in authority about difficulties?	Adam has no words to describe how he feels, so, looking sulky is a communication.
Jane frequently telling lies?	Telling lies is often linked to early loss, especially of caregivers, and leaves children with difficulties distinguishing between fact and fantasy. Jane's early life had no boundaries and she has difficulty describing her feelings. She is also desperate to be liked and will say what she thinks will please.
Charlie sometimes very quiet and withdrawn; he often seems to be in a world of his own?	Charlie finds it safer not to respond to or engage with others, especially adults, when he finds a situation stressful.

Providing Opportunities for the child to practise new things: Looked After Children have a range of new skills and strategies to work on within the classroom setting. We therefore need to provide ample opportunities to practise these with support and guidance leading to independent self-directed use of the skills. We need to help these children:

- Practise asking for help, 'it's great you asked for help there, you gave it a go and it worked out well'
- Practise relaxing – practise using the strategies when there is not a problem and then when there is an issue direct the child to try one of their strategies from the 'calm box'
- Practise resolving conflict through modelling and role play
- Practise showing affection to self and others, accepting and giving compliments, giving yourself a break when you make a mistake and the same for others, friendship skills, social skills for playground etc.
- Practise having fun – managing exuberance/arousal levels, knowing when enough is enough, etc. through playing alongside the child and making commentaries and suggestions/directions where needed.

Communicating Hope and Empathy – We need to make comments and draw attention to the progress that is being made within the classroom setting. 'I know you are getting stronger at this and I see you getting better day after day'. Reminders that there may well be set backs and that as teachers we need to reframe some of the failures as perhaps we gave the child too much responsibility/freedom before they were skilled enough to handle it. We reassure these children that we want to help them and that it is our job to help them get better at these skills and that we are sure that they can do it with our help. Positive affirmations confirm what is going well and we can provide real life examples for these children, using a box of personal affirmations.



Managing Distractions:

Children with attachment difficulties are often very poor at **waiting**, they just don't trust that you will keep them 'in mind' and remember a promise you make to them or of something yet to come. Memory cards, visual prompts and concrete reminders of delayed tasks can help these children tolerate their anxiety about waiting.



We also need to be **explicit in our communication** with children who have attachment difficulties. These children have a template for interactions with others and come to expect the same things from new adults, they transfer feelings and expectations from 'there and now' to 'here and now' so we need to be very explicit in our communications to avoid misinterpretations of social interactions. The use of real life examples helps as well as commentary, direction and modelling, for example how to ask someone to borrow a pencil,

let the child know that most people will be happy to lend you a pencil if you ask nicely and return it afterwards. When giving directions it is important to state the desired behaviour rather than a negative behaviour for example, 'let's walk into the classroom' rather than 'stop jumping'. In other words, describe the behaviour you want to see.

Children with attachment difficulties often respond poorly to praise

Acknowledge good decisions and choices: These children often receive little praise and in fact they often don't respond well to praise. But they do need positive reinforcement when they have done something well. Try to avoid statements about internal characterises, such as 'you are a good girl' or 'you are a kind person', as sometimes that is too much of a contradiction for a child who believes they are not good or kind. It is better to comment on actions, as then they can feel good about something they have done, rather than having to think about whether or not they are intrinsically good or bad... 'I see you made a good choice and finished your work before break, so off to play now', 'that was a good decision not to fight with Lauren, I think that it must have been really hard to walk away and not hit back. Well done'