

## Foreword

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### Coordinator's Comments

#### Introduction

One of the key elements of the PDP is the opportunity for psychologists from different services to work together on a subject of common interest. This year has proved no exception. When this topic first emerged from the annual selection process it was identified as *Anger Management*. Fearing that this might become too narrow, the Steering Group broadened the title to *Difficult Behaviour*. Now it was anything but limiting!

The story which I enjoy unravelling is the tale, not just of the product which emerges from the PDP, but of the process. For the psychologists who opted into this group that process became one of keeping the topic manageable, as together they explored insights from the literature and from their pooled experience through frequent and lively debate. It quickly became clear that their experience and concern lay with the children who have the most challenging behaviour, and this defined a focus for the group: to produce training materials for psychologists, teachers, parents and others who work with children in challenging situations.

It was not just the topic which united the psychologists. Within the group emerged two sub-groups of developed professional interest and expertise, which favoured two particular approaches and which gave rise to the two different sets of training materials: one focused on cognitive behavioural approaches to anger management, the other on applying insights from solution focused approaches to difficult behaviour. The title *Managing Difficult Behaviour* was born.

#### Timescale and Process

There is an agreement that each psychologist will have twelve days freed for work on the project between the May start-up conference and the submission of final drafts the following March. In reality, in a time of staffing shortage in Scotland, this is not always achievable, but even where it was offered, it was a significant achievement that the psychologists continued to meet every two months as a plenary group and more

frequently in task groups. First versions of the two packs were prepared by Christmas, and piloted with a variety of teacher groups in January and February 2000. From the experience of leading the training and from feedback obtained from participants (both formal and informal) significant revisions were made. The materials were passed to me for final editing in March 2000.

### **The Publication**

In the early years of the PDP, the publication contained a series of written text reports. This made the twin tasks of editing and publishing relatively straightforward. In 1999 floppy disks were introduced to the yellow folder containing INSET materials that supplemented the text documents. Mindful that Psychological Services were at different stages in terms of access to technology, versions were offered for both Mac and PC using earlier versions of Word (since only those with Word 97 could at that time open Word 97 documents). Overhead transparencies were prepared for printing in black and white.

Just one year on we are offering a range of INSET materials on CD-ROM, including Powerpoint materials for coloured printing of activity sheets and for overhead projection of slide presentations. The same materials are reflected in the text documents, but access to the CD-ROM allows materials to be downloaded for individual selection, customisation and, indeed, updating.

It is, however, a significantly larger task to prepare and produce.

I am mindful of three concerns. Firstly, that the considerable amount of editing required will have been faithful to the writers' intentions. When the materials were submitted in March, different units reflected different writers' house styles. Members of the group had not had a chance to see all the revised materials. There could, in fact, have been a further three-month period of group revision and editing before offering the materials for hands-on use by a wider audience. This may become a consideration as the PDP continues to be evaluated and to evolve.

Secondly, even while I have been preparing these materials for dissemination, I am aware that the authors have themselves been adapting and revising the materials further as they have moved on to work with new audiences. The materials are not static. New users should feel just as free to edit and adapt!

Thirdly, we acknowledge that not everyone will find a CD-ROM with Microsoft Word and Powerpoint accessible. The dilemma is real. A year ago our approach was highly cautious, but already the climate is changing (Hannah and Kane, 1999). More services are now geared up for technology and, even in Councils where Mac software is used, the education services usually have access to Powerpoint. For those who continue to experience difficulty, the same materials on the Internet are provided in Acrobat format, which is more widely accessible. As a fallback position, the writers are willing to supply sets of acetates and handouts – negotiate directly, but the cost will be £15 for either Training Pack.

We do seek and welcome feedback from users on both content and accessibility of the materials.

## **Managing Difficult Behaviour**

The eight psychologists who came together to consider this topic, **Martin Abramson (South Ayrshire), Mardi Alexander (East Renfrewshire), Alison Crawford (Glasgow City), Beth Hannah (Glasgow City), Audrey Jenkins (Angus), Maureen Myant (Glasgow City), Maggie Palmer (West Lothian) and Derek Young (Glasgow City)**, chose to focus on those youngsters whose behaviour was at the extreme end of a continuum of difficult behaviour. They aimed to identify common threads and themes from the literature, and to secure a working definition of difficult behaviour. This highlighted the effect of complex relationships, working at the level of the individual and the environment, relating to home, school and the broader community. Discussion also highlighted the importance of individual perception as to what is deemed as *difficult*, flavoured as it is by personal experience as well as by the prevailing values within the community or institution in which a person lives or works (Miller, 1999). The group eventually summarised the main characteristics of difficult behaviour as behaviour which:

- has an influence upon effective teaching and learning
- causes harm or distress to an individual or others
- challenges a teacher's skills
- is resistant to accepted strategies or management systems
- is beyond an acceptable level of intensity, duration or frequency.

Long and Fogell (1999) state, "One strong performance indicator of an effective school is its ability to turn potential conflict into creative energy". The psychologists were clear

that they wanted to draw on the contributions from psychology to produce materials that would assist teachers, parents and others in understanding and responding to extreme behaviour in children and young people.

There are several ways that this can be approached. **Martin Abramson** has provided an *Issues Paper* and comprehensive *Bibliography*, offering an overview of the issues arising when the topic is looked at from various perspectives. These include the influence of the media, the school as an ecological community, staffroom culture and its effect on teacher response, and approaches to difficult behaviour using thinking styles, reframing, self monitoring and self management.

This analysis touches on materials and approaches already available and in use in some of Scotland's schools. **Maggie Palmer** sampled some of these, and has provided a paper for teachers which offers a brief description and a practitioner's critique of approaches as varied as Feindler and Ecton's *Anger Control Programme* (1986), *Assertive Discipline* (Cantor and Cantor, 1992) and *Video Interaction Guidance in Schools – SPIN* (Simpson, Forsyth and Kennedy, 1994).

Within the project group there were two clear sub-groups of developed interest and expertise, which gave rise to the two sets of training materials.

### **Training in Anger Management**

**Mardi Alexander, Beth Hannah and Maureen Myant** had for some time been involved in running *Anger Management* workshops for secondary age pupils using cognitive behavioural techniques. They used their involvement in the project to develop a pack of training materials for teachers and parents, entitled *Training in Anger Management*. The contents are organised into four main units with additional introduction and appendix, and within each unit there are handouts, activities and materials for overhead presentation. The material is organised as follows:

Unit 1	<i>Understanding Anger</i>
Unit 2	<i>A Whole School Approach to Anger Management</i>
Unit 3	<i>Dealing with Aggression and Conflict</i>
Unit 4	<i>Groupwork in Anger Management</i>
Appendix	<i>Materials for use in Parents' Workshops</i>

Unit 1 draws on the work of Faupel et al (1998). It examines the stages of the *anger assault cycle* in order to understand and look at the effects of anger on the individual, relationships and on society.

Unit 2 looks at the rationale for developing a whole school approach, key features and components of a positive behaviour management policy, and the process by which a school can set up a school-wide anger management strategy as part of an overall approach to managing behaviour.

Unit 3 takes the classroom as its focus and offers very practical advice to teachers. It looks at advice and techniques for managing each stage of the anger assault cycle, and includes a detailed section on responding in a crisis.

Unit 4 provides both training in cognitive behavioural techniques for dealing with anger, and advice to teachers on how to plan, organise and run a programme of groupwork on anger management with young people. A suggested outline for six sessions of groupwork is supplied.

### **Solution Focused Approaches to Difficult Behaviour**

The members of the second group - **Alison Crawford, Audrey Jenkins and Derek Young** - were experienced in the use of *Solution Focused Approaches*. Their intention was to provide training materials that could be used by psychologists with teacher audiences to outline the contribution of using a solution focused approach to deal with difficult behaviour. Their materials fall into two parts:

**(i) Keys to Solutions**

An elaborate Powerpoint presentation with presentation notes and activity sheets to introduce the principles of a solution focused approach, using case study examples that all involve difficult or challenging behaviour.

**(ii) Additional Materials**

Additional Powerpoint materials and activities, which develop further the application of the approach to the field of emotional and behavioural difficulties.

A basic assumption of this approach is that an emphasis on the past and on the details of a problem are not necessary for the development of solutions. There are always exceptions, that is, times when a problem is less (or even absent), and these can be

critical when identifying effective strategies. Fundamental to a solution focused approach is the belief that a small change can lead to more widespread changes. People have the resources to resolve their difficulties. The individual's own goal is central.

These, then are the materials. We hope that as you work through them they will call to mind your own experiences of managing difficult behaviour and offer affirmation, insight or a generous serving of both.

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