

Managing behaviour during unit meetings/activities (disability/learning difficulties)

The way people behave always has a purpose or intent behind it. Some disabled people particularly those with learning disabilities can find it hard to communicate what they want or how they are feeling, so react in ways that are challenging.

This can cause distress and anxiety for the young cadet, the wider group or for leaders.

These behaviours could be:

- Aggressive or harmful - such as hitting, kicking or biting others.
- Destructive - such as breaking things.
- Cause injury to them or others - such as banging heads, pulling or poking eyes.

They might not have much control over this behaviour and might not recognise it as a problem for others.

How they communicate and how they feel can be affected by:

Their impairment: some impairments can cause involuntary movement or make it hard to control behaviours.

The environment: some people can find certain environments distressing, for example where it is loud or there are people they don't know.

How they have learnt about interacting with others: if someone has learnt structured ways of communicating, they can act differently if those methods aren't followed.

For Example

When someone stands close to Mike and doesn't move, it becomes very frustrating as he can't explain his need for space. Mike could then hit the person near him to get that person to move away. This is the behaviour.

This results in distress for the person who got hit and people around them, and they find the behaviour challenging. If there had been another way of understanding Mike's intent, that behaviour could have been avoided.

At times we can all be challenged by another person's behaviour. How and when this happens can depend on many things like:

- Who we are, our knowledge, skills and experience.
- The time and place. Factors like our energy levels and how many people we are working with.
- Our previous experience of this behaviour – are we used to it or is it new to us?
- Our connection to the person – do we know them well and have a trusting relationship with them?
- Our expectations and understanding – any information we have about them.

As leaders, we should treat all cadets with sensitivity, dignity and respect. That means that when we respond to behaviour that challenges, we need to be sensitive to whatever has caused this behaviour. We also need to consider the health and safety of everyone involved when we decide what to do.

Talk about it

Many children, or their parents or carers, can explain how they prefer to communicate and what will help them stay calm or avoid behaviour which others may find challenging.

Use a basic care plan with any cadet with challenging behaviour to help have this conversation and to plan ways to support the cadet appropriately.

If you are worried about a cadet's behaviour, talk to them about it clearly and calmly. They are behaving this way for a reason. Try to understand if there are things that trigger the challenging behaviour.

In these conversations do your best to:

- Stay calm and non-confrontational. Explain your worries in simple terms.
- Avoid blame and guilt. Focus on the consequences of the behaviour.
- Give clear, concrete examples of behaviour that has been challenging.
- Listen. They might be able to tell you what the intent behind this behaviour was.
- Focus on finding a solution. Work together to understand what you can do to help.
- Understand. Find out what support they have in other parts of their life – can this be provided in the unit meeting?

It may be that there are wider needs or issues that are affecting how they behave in guiding activities. Their parent or carer might not realise the level of support that the cadet needs. Using a care plan will help you all agree what you can do to make sure that the young person is correctly supported.

Once a plan is agreed, make sure you plan to review it with the parent or carer and see how things are going. You might need to then adapt or change the plan, depending on how things go.

Get consent before sharing

Sometimes aggressive or disturbing behaviour happens when other cadets in your unit unknowingly trigger it. Speak with the cadet, and where appropriate with their parents or carer, about what they find difficult or upsetting. And talk about how you can let others in the unit know what to do to help.

- Use a communication card which can help the cadets describe their likes and dislikes.
- Develop a code of conduct as a unit. So everyone can agree what behaviours aren't acceptable in the unit. This stops anyone from being singled out.
- Have clear ways that cadets can ask for extra support. For example, if they arrive feeling anxious or frustrated, they could tell people themselves directly or wear a yellow/green badge or bracelet, so others know what kind of day they are having.

Make some changes

Making simple changes to how your unit runs can help accommodate cadets who need additional support.

- See if a young leader or specific support volunteer can work with the young member as their buddy.
 - Have introduction sessions in your unit where potential new cadets can see how they would feel and participate in the group
 - Offer a choice of activities. Choose similar activities at different levels of complexity or giving cadets the choice between an activity done in a group or done individually.
 - Have a quiet space available. Could you identify a place where cadets can go if they need time alone or a moment to breathe? Make this available to anyone if they need it.
 - Be flexible with the length of sessions. Some cadets might find an hour too long and they can engage better for shorter periods of time. Maybe they can come for the first or second half of the meeting?
 - Share tasks – sometimes it's boredom that triggers the difficult behaviour. Keep everyone occupied by sharing practical tasks that need to be done.
 - Demonstrate the activities. Sometimes behaviour that challenges is a response to misunderstanding. When running activities try showing each step or guiding them through the activity together. Different cadets may require higher levels of assistance.
 - Do new things little and often. When introducing new things do it in small doses. This helps build confidence and reduces anxiety.
 - Give activities a set time. Let cadets know how long an activity will last and give a 5 minute warning before it ends. This can help if change makes a member anxious. You can use our visual timetables to show the plan for the whole unit meeting too.
- See our information reasonable adjustment and adapting activities

Take care of yourself

All of us can find other people's behaviour challenging at times. This can cause us to feel angry or frustrated. When we feel like this, we don't always make the best decisions or react well.

Remember it's okay to take a break. You can always contact your Force Coordinator or other leaders to ask for support in cases like this.

You can also try

- Being open with your team about behaviour you are finding challenging and why
- Keeping records of specific incidents which have been challenging or which have resulted in distress or harm to a young member or volunteer
- Looking to recruit a volunteer specifically to provide support to someone. This can take time so agree it with the cadet (and parents or carers) in advance
- Agreeing regular breaks and rotation for leaders giving more intensive support to a cadet. Remember, no leader should ever strike or restrain a child. Any physical interaction like this should be reported proactively to your safeguarding lead person.

As much as possible, keep in touch with parents or carers and talk about how things are going. Be open about any concerns and work with them to agree a plan. Be honest about where you might need help and extra support.

At times you might need to be clear about how long something will take to put in place, like finding a buddy or getting extra equipment.

There may be times where you can't reasonably make adjustments for some young people because of cost or need for additional leaders. Every effort should be made if it is reasonable to do so. But some young people may have needs that can't be accommodated, and this is ok.