

Educational Psychology Overview Guide

Behaviour is communication

Rethinking behaviour

Child Psychologist Ross Greene states that, “kids do well when they can”, challenging the philosophy of, ‘kids do well if they want to’. He said that behaviour is due to delays in the development of crucial cognitive skills. When we see children displaying challenging behaviour, this is the means by which the child communicates having difficulty meeting certain expectations. Due to this, traditional reward and punishment approaches will not work as it does not address the underlying need.

Addressing the ‘lagging’ skill

In his book, *Lost at School* (2014), Greene explains that when children display challenging behaviour, it is a result of ‘lagging skills’ (executive, social, linguistic, cognitive and/ or emotional regulation) and/ or ‘unsolved problems’ (see image). Thus, challenging behaviour is a form of communication letting us know there is an unsolved problem or lagging skill.

Greene discusses the Collaborative & Proactive solutions approach which is centred on solving to problems that cause the behaviour. He suggests the following:

1. Identifying both the skill that is ‘lagging’ and the specific expectations they are having difficulty meeting. For example, they may be experiencing challenges accessing the language used during interactions with peers so when conflicts arise they are expressing this physically towards a peer.
2. Collaboratively solving the problems underlying the misbehaviour. For example, considering engagement with Speech and Language Therapy.

Through compassion, reframing thinking and understanding challenges, adults can recognise when young people do not have the skills to do better, and can equip children with what they need.

It is important that the adults around the child identify what challenges they have, in order to create or restore relationships and apply different approaches to support skill development.

