# Managing Challenging Behaviours

*The NSPCC Sport Managing Challenging Behaviour guidance has been adopted with thanks by the Youth Sport Trust for the purpose of these guidelines.*

**Introduction**

As a charity working with children, young people and adults through our activities and events there will be occasions where we have to manage misbehaviour and challenging behaviours.

This guidance is based on the following principles:

1. The welfare of children, young people and adults participating in our activities/events is the paramount consideration.
2. Everyone involved in Youth Sport Trust activities/events is provided with our Code of Ethics and Conduct which sets out the charity's standards of behaviour.
3. Everyone involved in Youth Sport Trust activities/events is aware of the reporting process for alleged breaches of the Codes of Ethics and Conduct.
4. Everyone involved in Youth Sport Trust activities/events understands that children, young people, and adults must never be subjected to treatment and behaviour that is harmful, abusive, humiliating or degrading in accordance with our Safeguarding Policies Procedures and guidance.
5. Everyone involved in Youth Sport Trust activities/events understands that a person may display behaviour that is challenging. This could be due (but not limited to) a physical disability or condition, mental health condition, learning difficulties, neurodivergence, adverse childhood experiences, trauma, their background and life experiences.

**What is difference between misbehaviour and challenging behaviour?**

**Misbehaviour** is a deliberate action that disrupts and stops the Youth Sport Trust running the activity/event safely or effectively. It's a conscious choice and could put others at risk or cause harm to people, equipment or the environment.

**Challenging behaviour** is any action that is difficult to manage or puts the person's own or others' safety at risk. It's often a response or way for an individual to communicate their frustrations or express distress.

Behaviour is a way of communicating, so if a person is showing challenging behaviour, it is likely to reflect how they are feeling. To manage behaviour in a trauma-informed way, ask what has happened to them rather than what is wrong with them. It is important to understand the person is not giving you a hard time, they are going through a hard time and may need support to help them manage how they are feeling.

**Understanding behaviour**

A person's behaviour may be challenging for a reason. Understanding this can help you to support their needs and put steps in place to help ease the behaviour and avoid potential misbehaviour, outbursts or meltdowns.

When someone feels worried, scared or overwhelmed, their body can switch into survival mode. This isn't something they choose, it happens automatically. When this happens, the brain focuses on staying safe rather than thinking clearly, listening or following instructions. Because of this, behaviour can change in ways that we might find challenging or confusing.

Here is what that can look like:

- **Fight** – a person may lash out, shout, argue, or seem angry.
- **Flight** – a person might run away, hide, avoid eye contact, or try to escape a situation that feels too much.
- **Freeze** – a person can go very quiet, 'switch off,' or find it hard to move or speak.

With calm support, reassurance and time, a person can return to a state where they can listen, think, and learn more easily.

**Planning activities and events**

When planning activities/events always consider in advance if any child, young person, or adult participating requires additional support or supervision to participate safely. Some may be identified as having additional needs that affect their behaviour through the registration process, direct contact from a parent/carers, school, or other partner organisation.

Where potential needs/risks are identified always:

1. Conduct an assessment of any additional risk associated with behaviour. This could include speaking with the person directly if they are over 18 years. If they are under 18 years of age consider speaking to parents/carers/school/other partner organisation to understand their needs and how their behaviour may be affected and what management strategies help at home or at school, can these be replicated at the activity /event? For adults 18 years of age and over, speak to them directly about support measures and strategies that could be implemented at the activity/event.
2. Remember, you do not need to be an expert in additional needs, trauma informed practices or managing challenging behaviour. Simple adjustments may be all that is required to support someone's engagement.
3. Ensure there is suitable ratios of adults managing the activity/event.
4. Ensure that all activity/event personnel running the activity/event understand how to manage the behaviour that has been identified to ensure a consistent approach.

If a person has been identified prior to our activity/event to have additional needs or behaviours that may require support and / or physical intervention this should be discussed with them directly if they are an adult aged 18 years or over. If they are under the age of 18 consider speaking to their parents/carers or their school before they attend. This allows us to work in partnership with them to ensure they can be supported to attend the activity/event safely. This can include asking for the provision of a suitably qualified and trained support worker or volunteer to support a person's attendance and deal with any behavioural issues and / or any required physical interventions.

**Responding to concerns around behaviour**

When responding to any concerns around challenging behaviour our response must always be proportionate to the behaviour being shown. Any resulting response must be taken as soon as practical and fully explained to the person.

**Always:**

1. Stay calm and talk to the person to hear their perspective and understand their behaviour. They could be tired, missing home, feeling anxious or not feeling part of the team.
2. Ask them what would help to make them feel more comfortable/settled. Be mindful there is usually a reason someone is struggling to manage their own behaviour.
3. Help them find other ways of expressing themselves and their emotions.
4. Consider making adaptions to the activity or session to help engage them.
5. Respond early, this is more effective than leaving behaviour to escalate or become disruptive.
6. De-escalate the situation by talking with the person and distracting them from their behaviour.
7. Consider whether giving them space and taking time away from the activity to calm down and reflect may help.
8. Help the person understand what acceptable behaviour looks like, remind them of the Code of Conduct for the activity/event and the consequences of continuing unacceptable behaviours.
9. Speak to the Event or Youth Sport Trust Safeguarding Lead for further support.
10. Share management strategies that have worked well so these can be shared with colleagues across the charity through training, CPD and staff updates.

**Code of Conduct sanctions**

The Youth Sport Trust Code of Ethics and Conduct detail the behaviours expected of everyone at our activities/events. Taking disciplinary steps and imposing sanctions when they are absolutely necessary are important to ensure our activities/events are safe, inclusive and enjoyable environments for everyone attending. The following points should be followed:

1. Ensure the Code of Ethics and Conduct is clearly communicated to everyone. Encourage a sense of responsibility and respect for others and property at the activity/event.
2. If anyone behaves in breach of the Code of Conduct, consider a verbal warning in the first instance.
3. If following a verbal warning, there is a further breach consider removing the person from the activity for a short time. Two members of staff should accompany them to a safe place.
4. Use this time to allow them space and the opportunity to calm down and tell you what is happening for them, remind them of their responsibility under the Code of Conduct, the potential impact of their behaviour on others and the consequences to them of any further unacceptable behaviour.
5. If the person struggling is under 18 years old, consider speaking to their parent/carer or school to see what strategies could help support them to continue their participation.

6. If the person struggling is 18 years old or over, ask them whether you can contact a parent/carer or someone they trust to help support them to continue their participation.

Always talk to the Event or Youth Sport Trust Safeguarding Lead if you are concerned. If someone attending our activity/event is subject to frequent sanctions regarding their behaviour a review of their continued participation may take place. Reviews by the Youth Sport Trust may include involving the adult, child or young person, their parent, carer or school and any other persons involved in supporting or providing services to them and their family. This ensures that informed decisions about further participation can be made. If someone's behaviour presents a risk of danger or harm to them or others, they may be removed from the activity/event and be unable to participate at any future Youth Sport Trust activities/events.

**Physical Intervention**

Physical intervention is only permissible when it is absolutely necessary to prevent children, young people and adults from harming themselves or others or causing serious damage to property. It should always be the last resort and as a result of conscious decision making rather than a reaction. You should consider "is this the only option in order to manage this situation and ensure everyone stays safe?" If you must physically intervene always:

1. Use it only after other strategies have been exhausted.
2. Use your voice first to try to diffuse a situation with words, if you must physically intervene, ensure you give a verbal warning first.
3. Keep yourself safe and protect yourself if necessary.
4. Use only the minimal amount of force required for the shortest period of time. This could be restraining a person from hurting themselves or others or moving them away from a situation of conflict.
5. Avoid contact with the buttocks, genitals, breasts, and intimate areas of the body to reduce the risk of allegations of assault.
6. Avoid contact with the head and neck to reduce the risk of allegations of assault and unintentional injury.

Any physical interventions at Youth Sport Trust activities/events must be reported to the Youth Sport Trust Safeguarding Team using the safeguarding incident report form.

Physical intervention provokes strong feelings and emotions for everyone involved. A review and debrief meeting following a physical intervention should always take place. This meeting will usually involve Youth Sport Trust staff, the adult or young person, their parent, carer or school and any other persons involved in supporting or providing services for the individual at the event or activity (e.g., a support worker). This is to ensure that informed decisions about further participation in the activity/event can be made. This meeting provides the opportunity for all parties to talk about what has happened in a calm and safe environment. The welfare and wellbeing of all those involved in the incident should be discussed and support provided where necessary. A review/debrief meeting may also need to decide about a person's continued participation in a Youth Sport Trust activity/event.

**Further resources and support can be found on the following links:**

**The Challenging Behaviour Foundation**

Homepage for The Challenging Behaviour Foundation - Making a difference to the lives of people with severe learning disabilities

**National Youth Agency**

Introduction to Trauma Informed Practice - National Youth Agency

**MIND Spot, Support and Signpost**

Spot. Support. Signpost | Sport and mental health | Mind

**Young Minds**

YoungMinds | Mental Health Charity For Children And Young People | Young Minds

**NSPCC Sport**

Managing challenging behaviour

**Childline**

Feelings and emotions | Childline

**Sense**

Challenging behaviour - Sense