

Proactive Strategies

Tip Sheet

What is it?

Proactive (**antecedent**) strategies are tools used to prevent or avoid problem behaviour or dysregulation from occurring. They are introduced before any challenging behaviours and help to reduce the chances of them occurring.

Proactive Strategies include:

1. **Visual supports** – can support children in understanding the expectations and instructions. They provide structure and allow children to know what is coming next. For example, First-Then board, red-green schedule.
2. **Transition warnings** – can support children in understanding how long an activity would be, or how much longer they have with a preferred activity or item. Sudden end (termination) to an activity may be difficult for some children. Can use timers, visuals, count-downs, etc.
3. **Give clear and simple instructions** – can support children in understanding what the expectations are.
 - Ensure child is looking or paying attention.
 - Be clear and direct.
 - Statements and avoid questions.
 - Give instructions up to two times.
 - Allow for processing time (e.g., 5 seconds).
 - Ensure they are realistic expectations.
 - Stay calm.
4. **Choices** – can give children a sense of control and independence. When offered choices such as “Do you want the ball or car?” it can be easier for children to make a choice, then to ask “What do you want?”
5. **Descriptive praise** – can encourage positive behaviours in children. Let them know exactly what it is that they are doing well. This can encourage or motivate them to do it again.
6. **Positive attention** – catch children while they are doing something good and provide them with praise. Checking in and letting them know they are playing nicely, and giving them attention can promote positive behaviour.
7. **Reward system** – can encourage positive behaviour in children. Parents can select certain behaviours and provide a certain reward when children demonstrate these positive behaviours. Some reward systems can include: behaviour charts, first-then, level system, etc.



Why is it Important?

Proactive strategies are used to:

- clarify expectation,
- promote learning and positive behaviours,
- prevent problem behaviours from occurring, and
- promote positive relationship.

Things to Consider

Prior to introducing proactive strategies:

- What types of instructions does the child respond best to (one-step instructions, or two step-instructions?)
- Does the child require reminders (prompts) and if so, do they need a visual?
- Before giving an instruction, does the child require transition warnings?
- How long does the child require to process an instruction?
- Can the child make a choice when given two options or more? Can they make open-ended choices?
- Does the child love social praises and attention?
- Does the child respond to a reward chart? What behaviours would go in a reward chart?
- What appropriate behaviours does the child demonstrate consistently?
- Proactive strategies should be used prior to challenging behaviours occurring. Once challenging behaviours occur, will need to use consequence-based strategies.

How to Use Proactive Strategies

1. Determine which strategy to try.
2. Practice before using them.
3. Know which situations to apply which strategy.
4. Be consistent in applying them.
5. Reward the child as often as possible, with attention or something tangible.

References

- Cooper, J.O., Heron, T.E., & Heward, W.L. (2007). *Applied behavior analysis* (2nd ed.). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Education, Inc.
- Triple P Positive Parenting Solutions. (2010). *Stepping Stones Triple P for families with a child who has a disability*. Milton, Australia: Triple P International Pty. Ltd.