

**Filling the Gap**

**A few tips on managing behaviour**

When organising a Filling the Gap project, it is essential to create an environment that presents positive relationships. When it is a project where parents are not expected to stay, developing positive relationships between both the children and the adult volunteers is very important. Here are some ideas to bear in mind:

1. **Helping children to feel valued**

* Try to arrange things so that one or more adults welcome the children, greeting each one by name as they arrive. This helps to develop the child’s feelings of self-worth and value, and gives them the message that the grown-ups like them and want to get to know them.
* Try to avoid just ticking the children off in the register.

1. **Giving instructions**

When addressing everyone at the event:

* Give instructions that are short and simple.
* Use a ‘5-minute warning’ system to signal any changes. i.e. “In 5 minutes we are going to stop for a snack”.
* Make sure all adults are listening carefully when instructions are being given, as this models keeping quiet and being still.
* When you have given an instruction, ask one of the children to repeat what you have said. This serves to reinforce and clarify any misunderstandings and encourages them to pay better attention in case they are the one asked to repeat the instruction.

**NB.** We need to remember that some children live in chaotic households where they can’t predict what is happening. This means they will not necessarily be used to being silent or to listening to instructions and may interrupt or try to take control. Dealing with this needs patience and firmness, with maybe one volunteer placing themselves next to the child to encourage their active listening.

1. **Keeping children safe**

* Make sure that every adult volunteer understands that ***every*** child must be accounted for ***all*** the time. (Just locking the door ***does not*** to ensure safety).
* Make sure that children are always involved in something. Busy children are usually happy and create fewer problems than those who are at a loose end.
* Make sure that drinks for the children are provided throughout the session as being dehydrated can cause poor focus and restlessness.

1. **Use ‘Time in’ and NEVER ‘Time out’**

If a child becomes over excited or their behaviour becomes disruptive, having positive ways to tackle this is essential. Children can really benefit from ‘good attention’ so being excluded or given ‘time out’ is often counterproductive. Positive ideas include:

* Distracting a child by asking an adult to read a book with them.
* Taking the child aside and asking them to ‘help’ with collecting the cups or setting out another activity.

**NB.** Make sure adult volunteers understand the principle of distraction and positive adult time. In this instance, it is unhelpful to have an attitude that considers all poor behaviour deserves to be punished.

1. **Encourage adults to have fun!**

* Children love to see adults who can enjoy fun and can be silly together.
* This is a great opportunity to model fun, kindness, sharing, friendship and many other desirable behaviours.

**NB.** It’s important to remember that some children only experience adults ‘letting their hair down’ whilst under the influence of drink or other stimulants. For them to see adults being ‘silly’ may be a bit scary at first but once they know it’s safe they will enjoy it and benefit from the example.

**Projects at which the parents are encouraged to stay**

It’s important to remember that for some parents, seeing the way other adults manage their children, will be a learning opportunity for them. This is a great chance to show them some new techniques and alternative ways to parent.

Most of all enjoy each other. Many of the children attending your projects will remember their experiences for years to come.

**Make great memories!!!**