

Young Leaders' Scheme

Kids behaving badly!



Module D

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What is 'challenging behaviour'?

Have your teachers ever told you to behave yourself and stop acting like a child? Perhaps you did not think you were behaving badly. Perhaps you thought your actions were justified. Maybe you felt aggrieved about something that was said or done to you. Maybe you thought that your actions or behaviour were an appropriate response to what happened. In your mind you had perfectly good reasons for behaving the way you did.

Clearly, your teachers did not see things from your perspective, or they would not have commented on your behaviour. Their opinion of your actions was very different to yours – possibly they felt that they were unjustified, inappropriate or childish.

In short, regardless of the rights and wrongs of the situation, what you exhibited was 'challenging behaviour'. Your actions (which you thought acceptable) were seen as rebellious, childish and wrong by others – in this case your teachers.

Why is it important to recognise challenging behaviour as a Young Leader?

As a Young Leader, you will undoubtedly come across 'challenging behaviour' in your Section. You may have come across it already. Two Cub Scouts fighting over who should go first in a game; a Scout refusing to take part in an activity that she feels is boring or uninteresting; a Beaver Scout crying because one of the other Beavers hit him. These are all examples of challenging behaviour.

'Challenging behaviour' does not need to be loud or aggressive. A Scout sitting quietly in a corner, alone because he is being bullied may be an example of 'challenging behaviour'. It is a challenge for you on two counts – how do you reassure the upset Scout and help him rejoin the activity, confident in the knowledge that he will not be bullied again and how do you deal with the person (or people) doing the bullying? Indeed, how do you go about finding out who was the guilty party in the first place?

Triggers and causes

There are many, many triggers and causes of 'challenging behaviour'. It can be very difficult to find out what these are and understand what best to do about them. Let's look at a few examples:

- ◆ Bullying in the Section is an obvious one.
- ◆ Boredom – an important one for Leaders to bear in mind.
- ◆ Too many elimination games where the first person sits around for long periods waiting for the game to finish.
- ◆ A lack of balance in the programme.
- ◆ Not enough challenge in the programme.

The above problems are the ones that you can do something about. The issues below are less easy to address.

- ◆ Problems at home e.g. parents separating or arguing;
- ◆ A family bereavement
- ◆ Problems at school
- ◆ An underlying medical problem that you don't know about.

How to start dealing with the problem

Before you attempt to tackle the problem of 'challenging behaviour', you need to identify:

- that it is happening
- what the trigger or cause of the problem is. Remember this may be obvious, but often it is not.

If the problem is to do with the way the Section is being run or some aspect of the programme – then try to help correct the problem. Discuss it with your Section leadership team and don't be afraid to offer suggestions that might help deal with the problem.

If the problem is more complex, then your role is to alert your Section Leader to the problem and let him or her deal with it. Their experience should help them identify the best way to tackle the problem.

Possible solutions

The solution to any problem depends on what the problem is! Each of the issues on the first list above would seem to have an obvious solution:

- If the programme is boring, then change it.
- If there is not enough challenge in the programme, then add some.
- If you are playing too many games where people sit out for long periods, then reduce the number.

The more complex problems are much more difficult to deal with and are the responsibility of your Section Leader to address. One thing, which sometimes helps, is to establish a Code of Conduct within the Section. Get all of the members of the Section to agree on some simple rules and on what should happen if someone breaks those rules.

Here is an example of a Code of Conduct:

All Scouts will come to Troop meetings regularly.

If someone can't come to a meeting, they should let their Patrol Leader know why before the meeting.

Scouts will work as a team in their Patrol.

No-one will make fun of anyone because of a disability, their religion, colour or funny habits.

Bullying is strictly forbidden and will be dealt with severely by the Leadership Team.

Smoking in the Scout Hall is forbidden.

Finally, whatever the problem, it is important that you as a Young Leader you don't make it worse. Never lose your temper because you are angry or frustrated with one of the Section's members. We have all made mistakes 'in the heat of the moment'. A firm hand in control with a calm attitude will defuse most difficult situations and you will earn the respect of both your Section leadership team, and your Section's members.

What have you learned in this module?

'Challenging behaviour' can mean different things in different circumstances. Often, the behaviour demonstrated hides some more deep rooted problem. Some of these problems are straightforward to deal with; e.g. avoid elimination games to limit the chance for boredom. Others need more experienced leaders to resolve them. Some may be beyond the ability of any Leader to resolve. Remember that as a leader, whatever behaviour you are faced with, never lose your temper!

At you next Section meeting, why don't you try to identify examples of 'challenging behaviour'? See whether the skills you have learned in this module have a practical use.