

## Behaviour Strategies and Tools

### EMPATHETIC RESPONSE

The purpose of this strategy is to acknowledge and validate the child's feelings, needs and wants. In order for a child to develop empathy they need to experience it. An empathetic response lets a child know that their emotions are recognized and understood. It provides reassurance, comfort and can reduce the escalation of challenging behaviour.

### IMPLEMENTATION

The teaching team will:

- Observe to get a better understanding of the situation (the child's body language, who is involved, etc.).
- Reflect on what the child may be feeling and trying to communicate. It is important to focus on the child's emotions rather than on the challenging behaviour.
- Consider factors that can influence the child's state of mind.
  - Did the child get enough sleep the night before?
  - How was the transition from school to the program?
  - Is the child recovering from an illness?
- Remain calm and use a genuine and reassuring voice.
- Position yourself at the child's level.
- Provide an empathetic response as it relates to the situation (e.g. "It's so hard to put your shoes on. Do you need help?" or "You feel scared, the fire alarm is loud. It hurts your ears.").
- Validate the child's feelings, desires or needs by asking direct questions or by making short statements.
  - Feeling: "Do you feel sad?" or "You feel sad."
  - Desire: "Do you want a turn?" or "You want a turn."
  - Need: "Do you need help?" or "You need help."
- Support the child by:
  - Waiting for a response.
  - Listening carefully and paraphrasing.
  - Offering choices.
  - Guiding the child through problem solving.

### CONSIDERATIONS

- Empathetic responses can create opportunities for communication and skill development such as problem solving and conflict resolution.
- For some children, suggesting a specific emotion can trigger an escalation. In this case it is important to focus on the situation rather than the emotion (e.g. "You like to build sand castles, it's hard to stop.").

- Some children are not able to label and express what they are feeling. These children experience relief when their emotions are acknowledged (e.g. “You look upset. You have waited a long time for a turn.”).
- Allow the child to feel emotions such as anger, sadness, frustration, excitement, fear, worry, jealousy and happiness. These feelings are normal and children need to learn to express them appropriately.
- Remember to use an empathetic response to validate the child’s accomplishments and joyful moments (e.g., “You love jumping, this is fun!”).