
Section 1:
Basic Principles and Framework of Behaviour

1. BASIC PRINCIPLES AND FRAMEWORK OF BEHAVIOUR

Introduction

Children experiencing behavioural challenges have been identified as the fastest growing special needs population in Manitoba. Other provinces and jurisdictions outside of Canada have also reported similar increases in the number of students with behavioural problems in schools. Media reports on school violence, parental surveys, and opinion polls continue to maintain a community focus on the problem of school violence and students exhibiting challenging behaviour. Parents*, teachers, and school administrators are concerned with the growing impact that behavioural problems are having on the educational system and on their ability to maintain effective learning environments.

The *Manitoba Special Education Review, Final Report* (January 1999) confirms the growing concern regarding the numbers of behavioural problems that schools are experiencing. The recommendations (Section A.4.1) of this report suggest that “Manitoba Education and Training continue to develop documents that provide support to educators on “best practice,” including, but not limited to, issues of emotional/behaviour disorders (EBD) and FAS/FAE.”



Underlying Principles Used in *From Challenges to Possibilities*

In the development of this planning resource, a number of underlying principles and beliefs have been used as a guide. They include:

- Many behaviours are learned, therefore, they can be unlearned and changed. Educators and parents must take the time to understand the purpose or function of the behaviour. Once it is understood, then the appropriate strategy or intervention can be used to help students learn new behaviour. Poor behaviour can occur for a variety of reasons. Some “problem behaviours, rather than being located within the student, are often due to a mismatch between the characteristics of the learner and those of the instructional environment or the broader home/school context.” (Ysseldyke et al., 1997) Thus, when addressing behaviour, it can be helpful for the school to consider environmental issues.

*The term “parent” is used throughout this document to refer to parents, guardians, families, or others who have responsibility for caring for students.

- Learned behaviour can be influenced by:
 - factors within the environment
 - factors within the individual
- Research has confirmed that using positive interventions has a higher degree of success than using punitive responses. This document focuses on positive ways to intervene with behavioural challenges. (Sulzer-Azaroff and Mayer 1991; Mayer, 1995).
- For students and teachers to be successful and productive, they require a positive learning environment in their school. *Educational Leadership* (September 1998) provides several articles that focus on realizing a positive school climate.
- Many of the more severe behaviour challenges are best addressed through the collaborative efforts of students, teachers, parents, community members, and government and community agencies. Schools must develop strong working partnerships with all the stakeholders in the school.
- All students have individual strengths as well as individual needs. Teachers and parents need to recognize and build on the strengths, as well as address critical needs, in order for the student to feel good about him or herself and the school.
- Educators and parents must help children develop a “way of thinking and acting that allows all individuals to feel accepted, valued, and safe.” (*Philosophy of Inclusion*, Manitoba Education, Training and Youth) Educators and parents can provide this assistance by being good role models and providing experiences that will promote independence and belonging.
- One of the goals of education is to assist students in developing personal and social responsibility. Education must search for ways to work with students to improve the socialization process. Students with behavioural challenges need assistance in developing responsible behaviour for getting along with others, for developing positive relationships, for working with others, and for solving conflicts.

It is when the students can become a full member of a social network and are influenced by peers within the network to behave in an acceptable manner that we have begun the socialization process. This will assist individuals to feel accepted, valued, and safe.

Student Strengths and Abilities

All students have strengths and unique abilities. As the schools work with students with behavioural challenges, staff must search for these strengths and abilities. Once a special ability has been identified, it may be used to help the student discover that he or she has talents or gifts that are valued by the community.

Understanding Behaviour

Before using the suggestions in this document, it may be helpful to review some of the basic assumptions about behaviour. Several of these key assumptions are listed below.

- Behaviour often has a purpose.
- Behaviour is the response of an individual to his or her environment.
- Many behaviours are learned and, therefore, can be changed.
- Behaviour difficulties can be viewed as a learning opportunity for us (about the child) and for the student (about their community).
- Problem behaviour may be maintained by the environment.
- Behaviour may be a way of communicating.
- Survival strategies learned in early life may not be functional in later life.



For additional information on the principles of behaviour, please see:
Malott, R.W., D.L. Whaley, and M.E. Malott. *Elementary Principles of Behaviour* (3rd edition), 1999.

With a clear understanding of the child and his or her behaviour, we can better program for students with challenging behaviour. An understanding of the child can influence the way we approach behavioural problems and lead to a positive rather than a punitive approach.

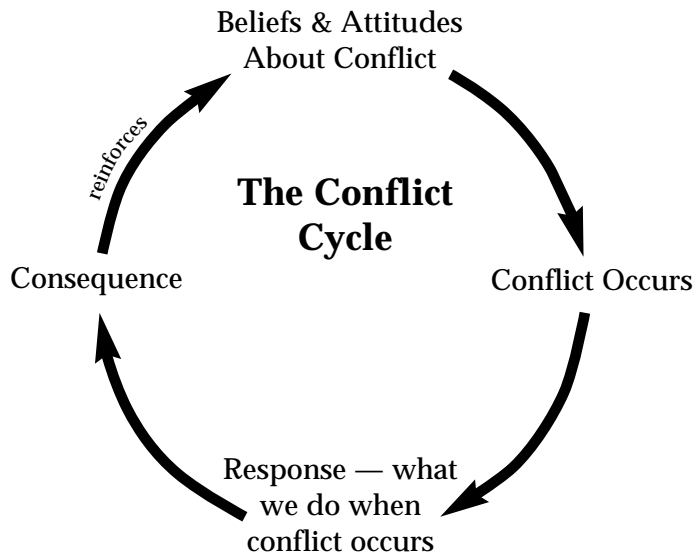
Understanding Conflict

When addressing conflict, it is important to remember the child. The school works together with the parents and child to solve specific behavioural issues in a respectful and caring atmosphere. Remembering to work together creates a sense of social responsibility that allows all children to feel accepted, valued, and safe.

As parents and educators search for solutions to address behavioural challenges, it is important that all parties understand the nature of conflict. Conflicts do occur between students and staff, but they do not have to result in strong feelings and stress. Instead, there are approaches that can lead to a successful resolution of the conflict.

It is important to remember:

- Our beliefs and attitudes about conflict determine how we address it.
- Getting into a confrontation with a student is rarely productive.
- Conflict is inevitable. How you address the conflict is a choice to be made.
- It is possible to confront and respond without escalating a conflict.
- Be aware of the triggers that can escalate conflict.
- Times of conflict can be an opportunity to teach.
- Many conflicts can be dealt with by developing relationships with the individual.
- Conflict usually follows a four-phase process.



For additional information on the conflict cycle, please see the support materials at the end of this section.

An Inclusive Philosophy and Positive School Climate

“All students are important, all belong, and all need to be validated.”

As we work with students with challenging behaviours, the implementation of an inclusionary philosophy is necessary from the outset. This philosophy is included in Manitoba Education, Training and Youth’s statement on inclusion.

Philosophy of Inclusion

Manitoba Education, Training and Youth is committed to fostering inclusion for all people.

Inclusion is a way of thinking and acting that allows every individual to feel accepted, valued, and safe. An inclusive community consciously evolves to meet the changing needs of its members. Through recognition and support, an inclusive community provides meaningful involvement and equal access to the benefits of citizenship.

In Manitoba we embrace inclusion as a means of enhancing the well-being of every member of the community. By working together, we strengthen our capacity to provide the foundation for a richer future for all of us.

The Conflict Cycle: From Wood, Mary M., and Nicholas J. Long. *Life Space Intervention: Talking with Children and Youth in Crisis*. Austin, TX: PRO-ED, Inc., 1991.

Philosophy of Inclusion: From “Meeting the Challenge: Exploring Student Diversity,” a presentation by Drew Caldwell at the Coalition for Children Forum, February, 2001.

In addition to this inclusive philosophy, the staff of a school needs to commit to the development of a positive school climate. The purpose of the climate is for every person to feel valued and that he or she belongs. A positive school climate includes the physical environment, the social/emotional environment, and the learning environment. All of these areas will contribute to the development of a school that values all students, supports diversity, encourages mutual respect, and provides a safe and caring school atmosphere.

The school division or district should develop a clear vision based on a philosophy of inclusion. This vision will create schools where all students are accepted, valued, and safe. Based on this vision, the division or district will begin to address the planning necessary to make it happen.

Divisional Role in Planning

The school division or district plays a key role in the process of planning for behavioural challenges. The division sets the philosophy, policies, and procedures that the schools will use in addressing behavioural issues in partnership or consultation with the residents of the division.

As well, the division should provide leadership, through planning and professional development activities related to behavioural challenges.

Once the direction has been established by the division, it needs to be effectively communicated to all partners involved with the school.

School-Wide Planning and Interventions

The philosophy and climate of the school will lay the groundwork for a positive environment for developing processes and systems for assisting students with behaviour problems. A planning process must be in place that involves the community, parents, staff, and students in developing appropriate responses to challenging behaviour. There is no “cookbook approach” that will work for all students. There are, however, several processes and systems that can assist the school and its teachers in working with the students experiencing behavioural difficulties. The keys often lie in working together with the families, developing a team approach, trying to understand the reasons for the problem behaviour, utilizing interventions that work, and finding appropriate supports.

Challenging Behaviour is Not Only a School Issue

We must always remember that behaviour challenges may not be solved by the school alone. The partnership of school and parents is a critical component. School staff and parents need to work together to solve discipline or behavioural problems. For some students, resources in the community may be needed to provide for additional expertise and support. Sometimes parents need support to address their own unique challenges. Those parents will need specialized support from the school’s interagency partners in order to develop an appropriate response to helping the child.

“There is no ‘cookbook approach’ that will work for all students.”

The Target Student Population

Students experiencing behavioural problems in schools are a diverse group that require a variety of approaches. For the purposes of this document, and to maintain an educational focus, these students with behavioural difficulties are described along a continuum based on the complexity of **programming requirements**. This continuum has been divided into five broad categories that are not mutually exclusive. The categories include:

Category 1: Students needing learning supports

Category 2: Students needing redirection and positive discipline practices

Category 3: Students requiring specialized interventions and supports

Category 4: Students requiring intersectoral involvement with treatment plans or placements

Category 5: Students requiring intensive coordinated multi-system interventions and highly personalized treatment facilities tailored to address individual needs

Teachers possess many skills and talents that can potentially turn a child's behaviour from a challenge to a success. First, teachers need to use their effective teaching practices, and then turn to the specialized practices designed to meet the unique needs of the student with behavioural difficulties. Schools need to support the teachers by providing a variety of processes and systems to meet the needs of all students. There are many rewards for teachers as they help students develop the skills necessary to manage their challenging behaviour.

“All students need a safe place where they can be themselves, learn to know themselves, and take important steps toward an OK life position, They need to learn that they are important, listened to, and cared for, and in learning this, they are able to extend themselves in responsible and loving ways. A safe classroom atmosphere in which, with peer and teacher support, a student can relate more realistically, responsibly, and constructively with the environment, nurturing healthy self respect, should be one of our primary goals as educators.”

(Coloroso, 1983)

Section 1 Support Materials

- The Conflict Cycle

“Stress arouses feelings. Feelings trigger behaviour. Behaviour incites others. Others increase stress. And around it goes!”

— Wood and Long, 1991

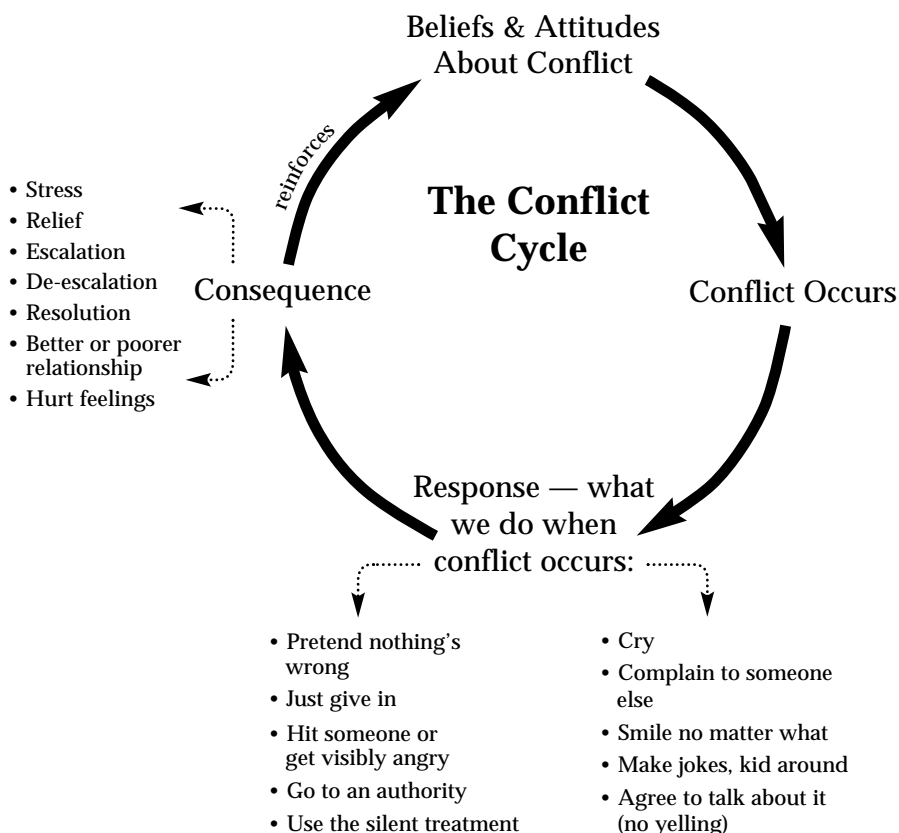
The Conflict Cycle

Our individual experience of conflict moves through a series of phases that together make up a self-perpetuating cycle. This cycle can be positive or negative. By examining the cycle for ourselves, we can provide a mechanism for thinking about the ways in which conflict operates in our lives.

One way of looking at crisis is to see it as the product of a student’s stress, kept alive by the reactions of others. When a student’s feelings are aroused by stress, the student will behave in ways that buffer against the painful feelings. This behaviour usually is viewed as negative by others (adults and peers), causing them to react negatively to the student. This reaction from others causes additional stress for the student. We call this the Conflict Cycle. It is a way of looking at crisis by analyzing the interactions among a student’s feelings, behaviour, and the reactions of others in the environment. If this cycle, produced by these actions and reactions, is not broken it will inevitably explode into crisis.”

(Wood and Long, 1991)

The term “The Conflict Cycle,” as coined by Wood and Long, includes the idea of conflict between two opposing forces: needs within the student clashing against the expectations of others. The Conflict Cycle can be set in motion by some trivial event. This event triggers a torrent of thoughts and feelings that are often based on belief systems that may be somewhat irrational. These feelings will be expressed in some observable behaviour. Staff who are unaware of the Conflict Cycle have the tendency to mirror the student’s behaviour, causing the conflict to escalate.



Four Phases of The Conflict Cycle

Phase One: Attitudes and Beliefs

The cycle begins with our beliefs and attitudes about conflict, which affect how we respond when conflict occurs. These beliefs and attitudes stem from many sources:

- Childhood messages we received about conflict
- The behaviours modeled by parents, teachers, and friends
- The attitudes presented by the media
- Our own experiences with conflict

Phase Two: The Conflict

In this phase of the cycle, a conflict occurs when an individual's needs do not meet his or her expectations.

Phase Three: The Response

The response is the point where the teacher will take action. The student may begin to shout, withdraw, leave, or attempt to talk about the situation. Given our personal set of beliefs and attitudes, we will usually react in the same general way no matter what the particular conflict. Thus, reactions can tell us much about our own patterns of behaviour in conflict situations.

Phase Four: The Consequence

The response leads to a consequence. Often the consequence will reinforce one's beliefs and attitudes about conflict, bringing us back to the beginning of the cycle and perpetuating the pattern.

Once the teacher or parents understand their beliefs and attitudes about conflict, they can begin to deal with conflict in the classroom or home more effectively.

From Wood, Mary M., and Nicholas J. Long. *Life Space Intervention: Talking with Children and Youth in Crisis*. Austin, TX: PRO-ED, Inc., 1991.