



Using reflective language as a behaviour management tool

Section One - Understanding reflective language

What is reflective language?

Reflective language is a subtle way of providing positive messages to a child and an opportunity to tentatively explore what may be happening for a child, without making judgements or assumptions about it, e.g. "It can feel frustrating when we get things wrong." It provides an opportunity to build a connection and develop a relationship with a child, along with providing a commentary of their behaviour e.g. "I can see you are trying to fit those pieces together."

Reflective language works on the understanding that every child communicates to us through their behaviour. When children show us their feelings through their behaviour it is important that we not only try to understand what they may be feeling and trying to communicate to us, but also that we provide them with an emotional vocabulary to help them to talk about their experiences. For example, when a child says they do not want to do something or behaves disruptively, they may be telling us they are scared. Reflective language provides children with an emotional vocabulary, which in turn can help them to start understanding and expressing how they feel.

Examples of reflective responses:

- "Sometimes it can feel hard to ask for help"
- "I can see you look unsure about what to do"
- "Perhaps you're worried about getting it wrong, but everyone makes mistakes sometimes"
- "It can feel difficult when I am not in class"
- "Maybe you're worried about starting that piece of work"

Activity - Impact of the teacher's response

Kyle age 6 arrives ten minutes late for school. He looks tired, anxious and disheveled. You know there is a history of domestic violence in his family and his mum is finding it hard to cope with his three younger siblings.

Make a note below of what you anticipate the child's emotional response to be.

Teacher A response:

"Oh you're late again, tuck your shirt in and get your reading book and catch up with the rest of the class".

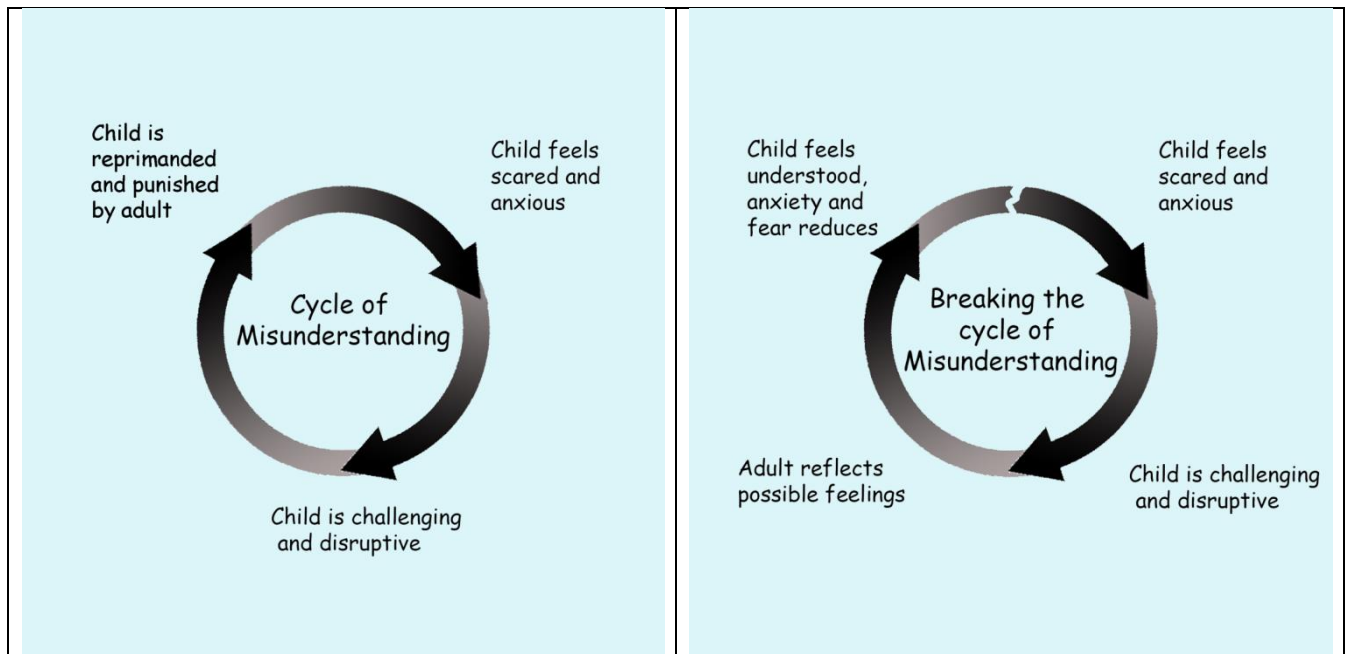
Child feels:

Teacher B response:

“Morning Kyle, it’s nice to see you. I can see you look tired, are you ok? Here’s your book, we’re on page 27.”

Child feels:

The cycle of misunderstanding



Watch video: What is Reflective Language

Section two - The benefits of using reflective language

Positive impact on child's well-being and behaviour by:

- Validating the child's emotional needs
- Enabling the child to feel seen, heard, accepted and understood
- Building confidence, self-esteem and sense of self worth
- Building self-awareness, self-control and resilience

It can be beneficial to use reflective language rather than always reprimanding children or telling them what to do, because it acknowledges and validates the child's feelings and experiences. Therefore, it can be a powerful tool to change children's behaviour

Providing positive messages to the child

I've been thinking about how hard it is for you to remember your PE kit	You are worth thinking about
I'm going to ask Mrs. Jones to spend some time with you and teach you how to tie your shoelaces, I can see it frustrates you when you try to do them	You are worth helping
It's important that everyone has a turn at being at the front of the line	Your needs matter
You looked sad when you didn't get chosen for the football team, I wonder if you'd like to choose a friend and help me unpack the new books	You are important

Activity

Think of a child you know well, describe some of their behaviours and identify at least 5 reflective responses to use with them. E.g., a child who finds it hard to start their work,

"I can see by your face you look unsure, sometimes it can be hard to start, remember I can help you if you need me to."

Watch video: From Sighing to Singing

Section three - Integrating reflective language into the school day

Reflective language can easily be used throughout the school day, but like anything you are doing for the first time, it may feel a bit strange at first. However, I encourage you to persevere and experiment with using it. When a child feels an adult is trying to help and understand them, they may start to feel more positive about themselves, therefore enabling them to make changes to their behaviour. The use of reflective language within settings encourages a sense of safety and security rather than fear and anxiety.

Activity

Think of the school day and identify specific times when you could use reflective language with a child or children and identify the possible impact:

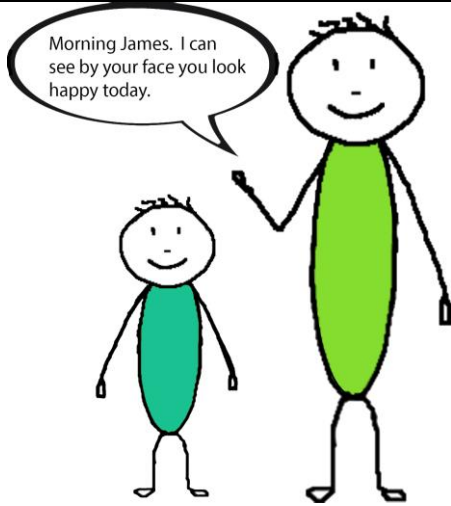
Situation	Reflective response	Impact on Child
Teacher being on PPA	"It can feel hard when a new teacher comes in"	Validates feelings

When a child's behaviour is explored in a gentle and reassuring way by using reflective language, it provides them with an opportunity to begin to understand about making mistakes and gradually learn to start taking responsibility for their actions. These are small but essential steps towards learning about choices and consequences and ultimately making positive changes to their behaviour.

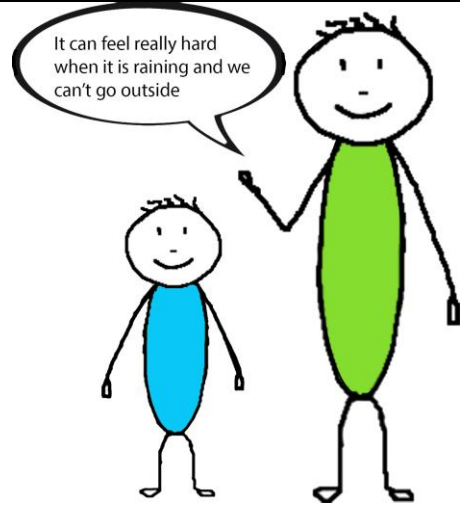
How school staff can acknowledge their own feelings

- Make the most of opportunities to admit mistakes, for example, "Even grown-ups get things wrong sometimes"
- Acknowledge your own feelings where appropriate, for example, "I felt cross when the photocopier was broken"
- Identify difficult times during the day, for example, "It's raining again and that can feel frustrating when we were looking forward to doing PE outside"
- Acknowledge when you need help from someone, for example, "I'm going to ask Mr Bell to help me with the display, everyone needs help from other people sometimes"

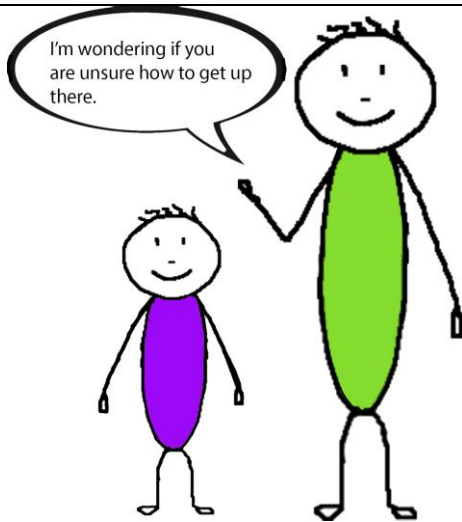
Integrating Reflective Language into the School Day



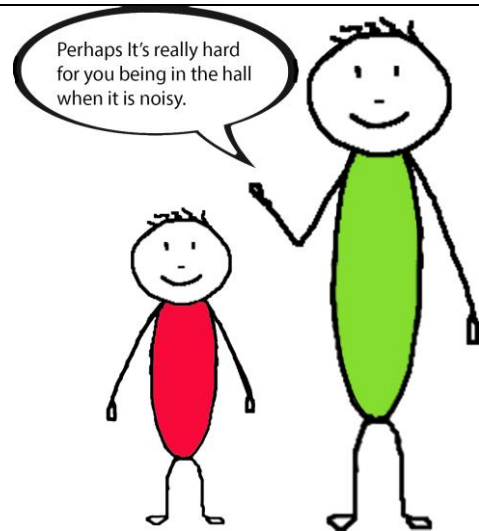
At the beginning of the school day



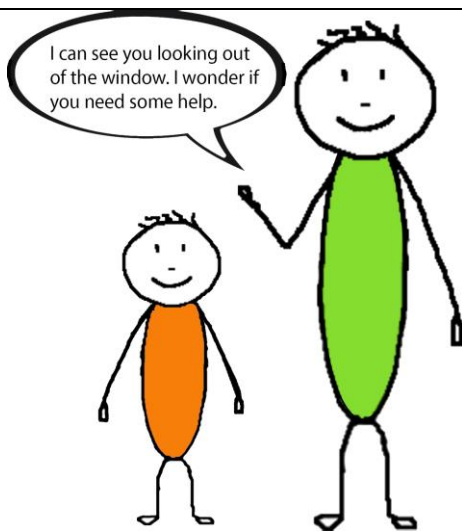
At break time



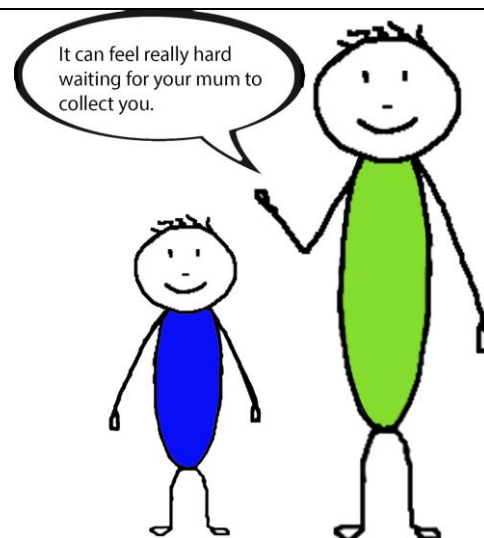
In P.E.



At Lunchtime



During a lesson



At home time

Examples of reflective language:

- “I can see by your face you are unsure about that”
- “ I can see you by your face you look a bit confused”
- “Sometimes it can feel really hard when I am not in class”
- “I can see you really want some help with that, and I know it’s hard to wait, but I will come over to you after I have finished doing this”
- “It can feel difficult to wait your turn, but remember we are practising listening to each other in class”
- “I can see you are trying to fit those pieces together”
- “I can see you looking at that, maybe you are unsure what to do with it”
- “It can feel frustrating when we try and do things and it doesn’t work”
- “I can see you are looking at the, maybe you are wondering what it is”
- “ Sometimes it can be difficult to ask for help, remember I can help you if you need me to”
- “I can see you are trying to understand how the iPad works”
- “I can see you really like having the blu tac to hold when we are on the carpet”
- “It can really help if we have something to fiddle with if we are feeling worried”
- “It can feel very frustrating when you are finding it hard to understand the maths we are doing”
- “It can feel disappointing and upsetting when we lose at a game, but everyone loses sometimes”
- “It can feel frustrating when we get things wrong”
- “I’m wondering if you would like some help with that, everyone needs help sometimes”
- “It can feel disappointing when we do something wrong, but everyone makes mistakes sometimes”
- Wondering aloud “I’m wondering if you would like some help with that”