



Reframing – responding to what is beyond, beneath and before a behaviour.

1. Introduction

Reframing is about looking at a behaviour, situation, thought, or feeling from another angle.

It is easier and more lasting to adopt a positive behaviour than to stop a negative one.

Reframing helps work to adjust, perhaps long standing, behavioural and emotional patterns with a view to being more able to self-regulate and adopt a more positive identity.

It isn't by itself an answer to everything, and you will need more theories and practices in your Residential Child Care Worker toolbox.

Children's identity may have been developed from many previous encounters and experiences. Over years it may be that they have had their immediate behaviour responded to rather than the unmet emotional need that lies behind it. It may be that no one had recognised what lies behind, beneath and beyond what is perceived as negative behaviour. We can make a link to Attachment behaviour here, it is only seen when there is insecurity, it is not seen when a child feels secure.

Reframing first requires that we are able to identify and understand the unmet need and the emotion that drives the behaviour.

It requires we reflect on ourselves in order to recognise what is going on for the child. It requires we reflect in the moment on what may have been perceived as a negative behaviour and addressing the unmet need behind it articulate a positive way of understanding what is going on, emotion and behaviour.

By our reframing response we are seeking to support the child to gain self-reflection and self-awareness.

We are aiming for a child to be able to spot what is going on from their behaviour and to communicate their unmet need in a different way.

2. Two important underlying aspects

Validate Emotions

Don't try to deny or invalidate the child's feelings or behaviour.

For example

"I know you are nervous that your social worker hasn't come yet. I know when I feel nervous, I always imagine the worst-case scenarios but often, those things I imagine aren't true."

Empathy

Say that you think you know how they are feeling, perhaps "Sometimes I get to feel like this too."

You also might help yourself or your child stay mentally strong by asking, "What would you say to a friend who had this problem?" You may find that you're more likely to speak to others in a kinder and more compassionate way than you talk to yourself.

Acknowledging a feeling does not mean endorsing it. It is a step towards considering other ways of understanding.

3. Examples of reframing in action – connecting and communicating

Ineffective "You're not good at this".

Effective "You're still learning. Let's make a plan of how to get better".

Ineffective "You're not really scared".

Effective "It's understandable to be scared. Let's think about this as excitement instead".

Ineffective (when a child is upset) "You shouldn't be sad".

Effective (acknowledging the emotion then reframing) "I can see you're sad, you're missing your friend. Let's think of a way you can be in contact with her".

Ineffective "You're overreacting"

Effective "I can see you're getting angry and that is understandable. Let's deal with what's happening here and now, deep breaths and start to make a plan".

Ineffective “Don’t be jealous”.

Effective “I can see you wish that you had/done that too. Let’s think of some ways we can make it happen”.

Ineffective “There’s no need for that”.

Effective “I can see you’re worried. Let’s talk through what is making you feel like this and come up with a plan (reframing the worry into problem solving)

Ineffective “Don’t be shy”.

Effective “I can see you’re hesitating about getting going, let’s think about how you can make this a chance to take and meet new friends”.

Ineffective “Stop complaining” (about unfairness)

Effective I can see that you feel it’s unfair. Let’s look at it from their viewpoint too. Remember what we say here fairness is about everyone getting what they need. Let’s concentrate on you getting what you need.”

Ineffective “Don’t be dramatic” (when a child is intense)

Effective “I can see you have big feelings about this. Let’s channel that passion...”

Ineffective “You should know better” (about recklessness)

Effective “I know you are excited. There’s a difference to excitement and dangerous. I love you and don’t want to see you get hurt. Let’s talk through some choices you can make to keep everyone safe and feeling safe”. Or maybe “I can see that you want my attention. How can I give you may attention?

4. From a Negative to a Positive

Instead of	Say this
Stubborn	Committed
Defiant	Principled
Destructive	Passionately curious
Spoiled	Used to certain things
Rude	Honest

Manipulative	Communicating needs
Whiny	Expressive
Out of control	Highly energetic
Clingy	Loves company
Demanding	Having high standards

5. Reframing – seeing behind, beneath and beyond the behaviour.

“Children do well if they can” (Ross Greene)

“See a child differently and you see a different child” (Stuart Shanker)

Changing our mindset about a child – ‘won’t’ to ‘can’t.’

Won’t	Can’t
Judgemental	Curious
Wilful	Too many stressors
Defiant	Skills deficit
Lazy	What’s got in their way?
Attention seeking	How can I help?
Reward & Punishment	Find/remove barriers
Frustration	Support
Guilt/shame	Strengthen

**When children exhibit challenging behaviour
it is because we have placed them in a challenging situation.**

We can change the situation.

Find and remove barriers.

Be stress detectives.

**FIND STRESSORS – REDUCE THEM
FIND UNMET NEEDS – MEET THEM
FIND SKILLS DEFICITS - TEACH THEM**

6. Making every child a ‘What if ...? Child’

Use What if? To be curious - trauma informed thinking reframing behaviour

Remember children take the Attachment we make.

“They’re just attention seeking”.

What if

- the child has been starved of attention? (perhaps an avoidant parent)
- the child wants to be remembered? (perhaps a disoriented/disorganised parent)

Try

- Regular check ins
- Plan for each separation from one place or person, or transition from one activity to another, even small ones – if it is a routine then let them know the times before starting then signal when 5 minutes before the end. Let them know what happens next. The experience needs to be that you are thinking of them, before during and accompanying into the future. If there is to be a return to of a person or activity state when that will be.
- Giving them an object to hold on to – to keep the thought of you close

“They have no respect for authority”.

What if

- the child has experienced a lack of respect and dignity in past relationships.
- they need to learn to trust you (Trust is achieved not seized. Reflection: first you need to find a way to role model that you trust the child and then they can mirror it?)

Try

- Making time to talk about their interests
- Finding moments of shared humour
- Recognising, communicating and empathy for their feelings

“Praise and reward never seem to work”.

What if

- the praise you are giving is too abstract for a child with a younger developmental age than their chronological age.

- the child feels shame about feelings or actions to gain a reward.

Try

- Non-verbal methods of showing warmth and approval
- Take time to play together.
- Learning to relax together as a means of getting better at emotional regulation

“This is just manipulation”.

What if

- the child is using behaviours that got them noticed in other places (even negative attention is attention!)
- they have learned to prioritise their own needs.

Try

- Giving them opportunities to exert control
- Providing responsibilities which help them feel valued.
- Using reassuring commentaries or visual schedules to make daily routines structured and predictable.

“Every day is constant disruption”.

What if

- the child can't regulate their emotions as well as other children of their age.
- they have lacked the sensitive and attuned interactions needed from carers.

Try

- A regular morning routine that settles a child
- Cueing transitions from one activity to another (see above)
- Reducing demands when stress is elevated.
- Breaking down all steps into smaller steps (when you think you have made it smaller, then make it smaller!)

“They want everything done for them”.

What if

- the child has missed out on healthy dependency from a care giving adult.
- what if attachment taking has been affected by neglect, abuse or separation

Try

- Get alongside to convey safety and encouragement.
- Small steps = success
- Be a role model talking through what you're thinking and doing – remember that old residential saying “Show me, don't tell”.

The ECCRN collaborating together.

If you already have something similar let us know

If you have something to contribute let us know

If you want to work with others to make something new like this – let us know.