

# Managing Challenging Behaviours

## Introduction

As carers we sometimes need to respond to behaviour that may be unpleasant, challenging and socially unacceptable. This information is provided to carers as an aid to learning an interactional method of teaching and adapting to behaviour.

There are many different approaches to successfully managing (and changing) behaviours we might find challenging. This brief resource is intended to give carers a basic understanding and clues to achieving this. It is not a replacement for talking with someone skilled in this area regarding a complex situation you may be involved in.

Critical to this approach is the recognition that there has to be the creation of good and fair relationships between the carer and the individual. The way this is done varies from person to person, depending on history, ability, etc.

Since this is an interactional approach, the behaviour of all significant individuals is considered to be of importance. That means, the 'problem' behaviour is not seen in isolation, but rather in social context, where the behaviour of each individual affects every other person in the group (including family).

If we wish to alter a person's behaviour, we generally have to change what we do ourselves to some extent. We look at the carers behaviour, how it may be altered by the challenging behaviour of the person, and the difficulties we may encounter in controlling our own behaviour under trying circumstances, etc. We examine a few of the necessary personal requirements for working with someone whose behaviour may challenge us. Then we look at what measures can be taken to prevent the development and build up of behavioural difficulties.

## Key assumptions associated with this approach

- People have a need for physical and emotional stability. The stability of some people is easily upset, or hard to establish in the first place because of their intellectual or sensory disabilities.
- People do what they do for reasons that may not be apparent to others, but which are important to the individual.
- People will change their behaviour in response to changes in the environment and changes in the behaviour of the people around them.

Our **attitudes, values** and **beliefs** are what help us to make decisions and judgements in any situation.

What happens in any interaction is the result of actions decided by the **attitudes, values** and **beliefs** of each of the people involved.

Teaching new behaviours that may be more accepted, requires that we try to influence another person towards our beliefs.

Our **attitude** decides the **Why, What, When** and **How** of the interaction. If we aren't aware of what our **attitude** is before we begin an interaction, we may allow things which happen during the interaction to change our **attitude**.

### Some beliefs about behaviour

1. Behaviour is often learned.
2. There are reasons behind people's behaviour.
3. What happens around a person is likely to determine whether they maintain a behaviour or try and change it.
4. Behaviour is affected by environment.
5. We are often able to teach and support people to learn new behaviours that increase their enjoyment of self, others, and are socially acceptable.
6. What happens before, during and after a behaviour gives us clues in understanding the person and their behaviour.
7. The origin of some behaviours may be difficult to discover as it is to do with another event – time, place or people.
8. Some behaviours directed at other people or things are really part of a person's internal world – it is not really about you.
9. Behaviours may be out of a person's direct control (eg, chemical reactions, hormones, illness, history, past experiences), but we can still support the person to find more effective ways of managing these things.
10. Behaviours are most easily changed when a person discovers that something else works better for them.

11. It can be better for you and the person to focus on the new behaviour and not the “problem”.
12. Behaviour is a form of communication – what is the person trying to say?

## Principles of working with a person

### Key words – Respect, Tolerance, Dignity, Optimism, Growth and Fairness

- Do no harm
- Interfere as little as possible
- Be clear about goals and methods
- Check out how effective you are

## What happens when you have to deal with challenging behaviours?

### Try to find out what is going on

What happens **before** a behaviour (clues to the origin and meaning of the behaviour, what might the person be trying to communicate, how to change the environment, types of interactions that don't work, the internal state of the person).

What happens **during** the behaviour (clues to how to replace the behaviour).

What happens **after** the behaviour (clues to why a person does something – what may be in it for them).

### What to do when challenging behaviour is happening

- Step 1. **Ignore** (the behaviour – not the person)
- Step 2. **Redirect** (teach the new behaviour)
- Step 3. **Reward** (something meaningful to the person to reinforce the new behaviour)

or

- Step 1. **Interrupt** (if a person is at risk to self or others)
- Step 2. **Redirect** (teach the new behaviour)
- Step 3. **Reward** (something meaningful to the person to reinforce the new behaviour)

## Twelve tips to teaching a new (more acceptable) behaviour

1. Look at ways to **change the environment** so that things that trigger (start) an unwanted behaviour can be reduced or taken away.
2. Break the new behaviour/task down into **small steps**. Make it so that the person cannot help but achieve something. Give heaps of encouragement when the person succeeds.
3. **Give one direction at a time** (keep it really simple).
4. **Show the person** – teach by example.
5. **Physically assist** the person.
6. Teach when you have the **most energy and patience**. Don't wait until the "problem" behaviour starts and you may become exhausted (and maybe irritated or angry).
7. If you have worked out that there are 12 steps to a new behaviour, **you do the first 11** then get the person to do the last piece. The next time do 10, then nine, etc.
8. To start with, reward the person with something that is **immediate and meaningful** to them when they do the thing (behaviour) you are wanting. Sharing time, achievement and a positive experience may be what is most meaningful.
9. **If you make a promise keep it**. The closer the "good thing" is to the new behaviour the more likely the person will link the two things.
10. Ask **others to try and follow the same approach**.
11. Discover **safe ways for you to get some free time**.
12. Find ways to **reward yourself** – teaching new behaviour is hard work.

## Communication and challenging behaviour

### All people deserve to have:

- 1) A means of communication
- 2) Other people to communicate with.

Communication is a basic need and a basic right.

### **Our ability to communicate affects our:**

- Experience of relationships
- Ability to make choices
- Ability to express needs personal identity
- Self esteem
- Control over experiences
- Work and recreation.

### **Communication is the way we express our:**

- Thoughts and emotions/likes and dislikes
- Goals and frustrations discomfort and enjoyment
- Abilities and challenges questions and contributions.

People try to communicate the best way they know how to.

### **People communicate in different ways:**

**Verbal** single words/phrases, repetitive words and phrases (with and without apparent meaning)...

**Vocal** scream, shout, laugh, cry, 'noises' (some sound like words)...

**Non-Verbal** facial expression, eye contact, body language, gestures, signs, pointing, use of objects, physical contact with others...

**Behaviour** hugging, withdrawal, throwing objects, etc.

Behaviour has a purpose.

What we see as challenging behaviour is a form of communication. If a person has no other effective means of making requests or indicating a preference, it is possible that challenging behaviour may have been developed to “fill the communication void”.

### **What to think about when challenging behaviour may be linked to communication:**

- When people appear to communicate by unusual (socially different or unacceptable) behaviour, the first step is to try to work out **what is being said** (listen) and attempt respond to this.
- Any new way to communicate must be **as effective** as the one thought to be “challenging”.
- Any replacement communication must be **easy**.