

# BEHAVIOURS THAT CHALLENGE

Supporting children and young people who display behaviours that challenge: A guide for parents, carers and professionals



The information within this guide is based upon 'Positive Behaviour Support'.

Positive Behaviour Support is an evidence-based intervention for supporting individuals who display behaviours that challenge. It focuses on understanding why the behaviour is being displayed.

Positive Behaviour Support is based upon values of supporting children, young people and individuals around them to lead a 'good quality of life'. Quality of life can be improved by supporting children and young people to be as independent as possible, be involved in activities they enjoy and have choices and control in their life. As a result, behaviours that challenge reduce in severity and frequency.

This resource will hopefully help you to consider the function of behaviours and identify triggers, whilst suggesting ways to support a child to remain happy and calm.



# BEHAVIOURS THAT CHALLENGE

## ALL BEHAVIOUR HAPPENS FOR A REASON

Behaviours that challenge are a form of communication and they serve a purpose. The behaviours can be difficult for the person displaying them and also difficult for others around them.

Behaviours can be an attempt from a child or young person to control their environment and/or communicate a need that has not been met.

The behaviours that others see is the 'TIP OF THE ICEBERG'



It may be that there are emotions underlying the behaviour that the child or young person does not know how to interpret and/or are unable to verbalise and communicate these emotions

If a child or young person finds it difficult to tell someone how they are feeling or what they need, they are more likely to use behaviour to get their needs met.

# BEHAVIOURS THAT CHALLENGE

## BEHAVIOURS THAT CHALLENGE MAY INCLUDE...

Any behaviour that may negatively impact an individual's life:

**HURTING OTHER PEOPLE**

**VERBAL AGGRESSION**

**HURTING THEMSELVES**

**RUNNING AWAY**

**BREAKING OBJECTS**

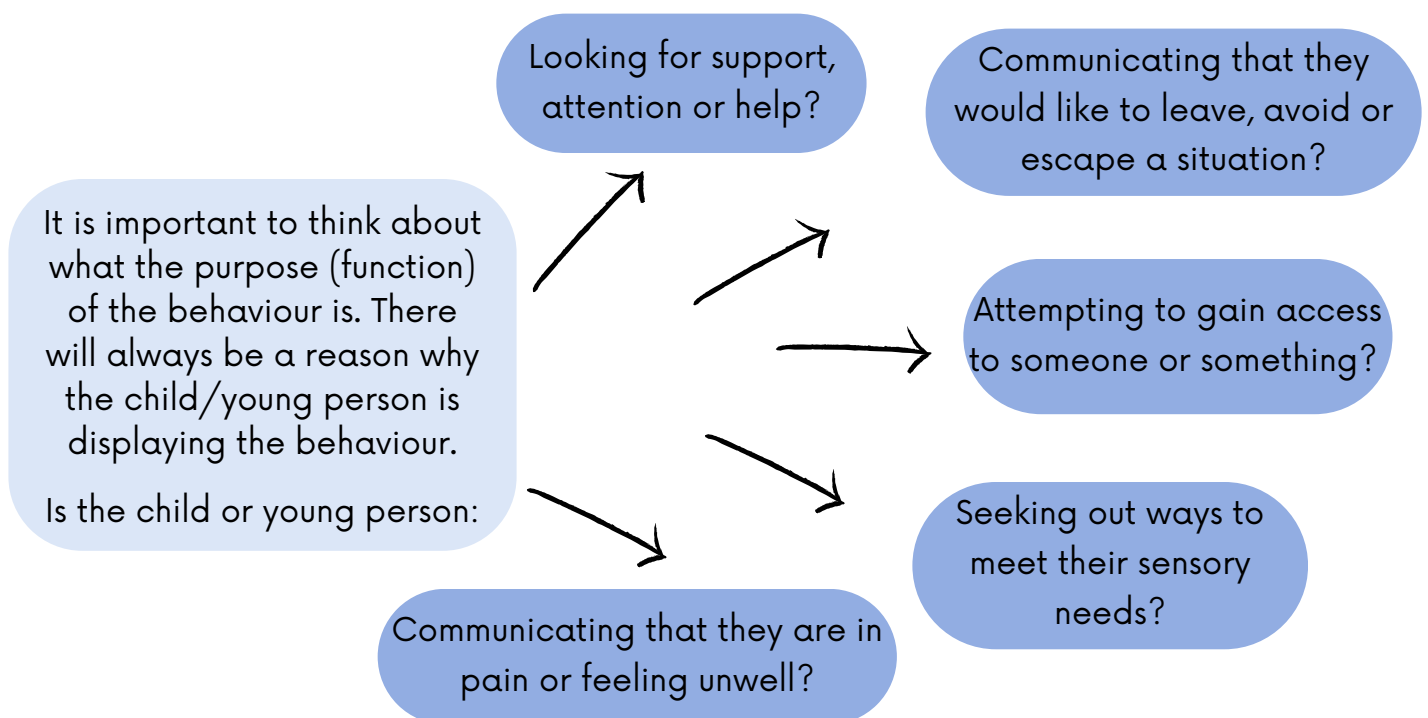
**DROPPING TO THE FLOOR**

**PROPERTY DESTRUCTION**

**SOCIALLY INAPPROPRIATE BEHAVIOUR**



## WHY ARE THESE BEHAVIOURS DISPLAYED?



# BEHAVIOURS THAT CHALLENGE

## IDENTIFYING TRIGGERS

### WHAT?

What are the specific behaviours that the child or young person is displaying?

### WHO?

Who is the behaviour directed towards? Who is usually supporting the child at the time or who is nearby?

### WHEN?

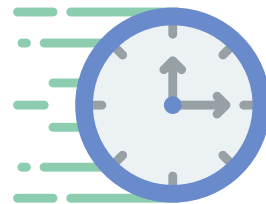
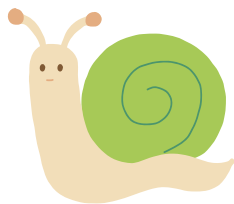
What time of day / what day of the week do they occur? Are there any specific activities where the behaviour is likely to occur?

### WHERE?

Where are the behaviours being displayed? Are there different behaviours at home or at school?



## SLOW AND FAST TRIGGERS



Slow triggers = something that occurs a while before the behaviour is displayed

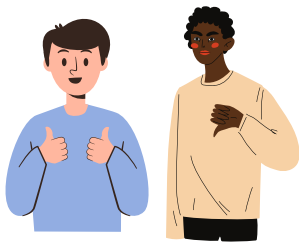
Examples: hormone fluctuations, pain or feeling unwell, life events (loss or change), waiting for a long period of time and lack of meaningful activities

Fast triggers = something that occurs just before the behaviour is displayed

Examples: being told 'no', a demand being placed on the young person, someone else screaming, feeling ignored and a change in routine

# BEHAVIOURS THAT CHALLENGE

## SUPPORTING A CHILD OR YOUNG PERSON TO REMAIN CALM AND HAPPY



Teach them a way to communicate their feelings or need, e.g., hand gestures, visual scales or pictures.



Offer regular scheduled time in the day to talk to them about how they are feeling. Maybe introduce a book or box where they can write to you how they are feeling.



Support them to have choice and control in their life. This could include choosing what they'd like to wear at the weekend or choosing a meal.



Consider your communication style and adapt it for who you are supporting. Do they respond well to humour? Do they prefer you to use short sentences?



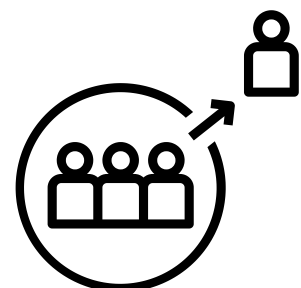
Use praise and rewards to highlight behaviours you would like to see again.



Adapt the environment to the child or young person -  
Does the lighting need changing?  
Does the room need to be quiet?  
Is there a certain smell they enjoy?



Set boundaries around expectations on behaviour. Pictures could be used to support understanding.



Encourage independent behaviours and building new skills - vacuuming, brushing their own teeth and baking.

# BEHAVIOURS THAT CHALLENGE

## SUPPORTING A CHILD OR YOUNG PERSON WHEN YOU RECOGNISE 'EARLY WARNING SIGNS'

Make a list of 'Early Warning Signs' for when a child or young person is becoming unsettled. Once you recognise these occurring, you can attempt to support them to calm. Think of this like an amber traffic light, we need to be cautious.

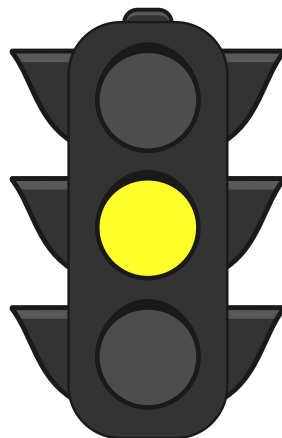


Attempt to remain calm and do not rush into supporting someone. Take a deep breath.

Think of what the child or young person is attempting to communicate. What is the purpose of their behaviour? What could you do to support them to meet their needs?



Remove anything that could be causing them distress.



Keep your communication brief and simple.



Adopt a calm tone of voice and relaxed body language.



Attempt to distract them. This could be with an activity or something you know that helps them to calm.

# BEHAVIOURS THAT CHALLENGE

## SUPPORTING A CHILD OR YOUNG PERSON WHEN THEY ARE DISTRESSED

When behaviour has escalated, think of this as a red traffic light. We need to stop and regain control of our emotions. Approaches used to support a young person should always be the least restrictive approaches possible. Being 'least restrictive' means **minimising use of restraint**. Every behaviour displayed should be approached by attempting to de-escalate them as soon as possible (strategies listed below) to keep everyone safe whilst calming the situation as quickly as possible. Each situation will need to be risk assessed in the moment by who is supporting them, and not every strategy will work every time.

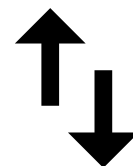
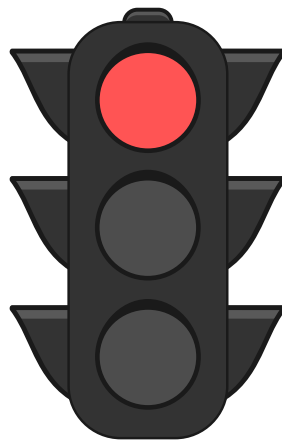


Attempt to distract them, or redirect them to another activity.

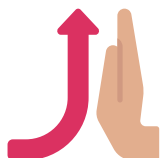


Remind them that they are safe.

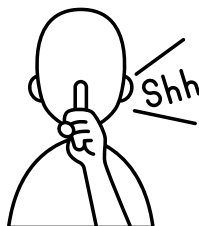
Use humour to support them to de-escalate.



Reduce (or increase) stimulation.



Redirect other people away.



Create a low arousal environment - reduced touch, noise and eye contact. Observe them from a distance.



Where possible, ask someone else to take over supporting to provide a 'change of face'. Take a break if you need to and take some deep breaths

# BEHAVIOURS THAT CHALLENGE

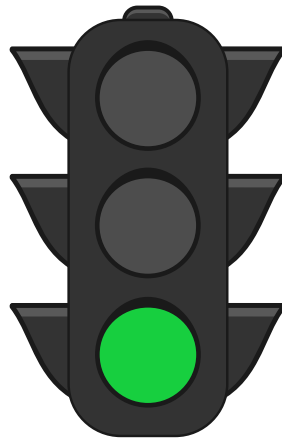
## SUPPORTING A CHILD OR YOUNG PERSON TO DE-ESCALATE AND RETURN TO FEELING HAPPY AND CALM

During the period of time after a child or young person has felt distressed and they are calming, they can be easily re-triggered into distress. It can take a prolonged amount of time for some children and young people to calm.

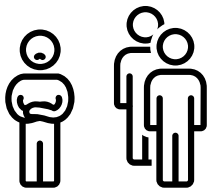
Providing the right support for a young person after they have been distressed is important to help re-build relationships with them.



If they would like to talk, use active listening skills and provide them your full attention.



Discuss what happened, what they were thinking at the time, who was affected by their behaviour and what strategies they could use next time to help them communicate differently.



Some children and young people will prefer being left to calm. Any interaction during this can cause them to escalate.

Support them to 'turn over a new leaf' for the rest of the day and distract their attention elsewhere.



NEXT



# BEHAVIOURS THAT CHALLENGE

## WORDS OF SUPPORT FROM PARENTS

Now I understand why my child behaves the way he does, my approach is more sympathetic and I am more aware of how to avoid him escalating. I have more realistic expectations and plan our day accordingly. Life seems a lot more balanced and I am enjoying spending time with my son. We now have quality time together.

When I notice early warning signs, I know to ask open questions with curiosity to understand what they are experiencing and what they are worrying about. This prevents behaviour from escalating by stopping myself from overwhelming them in the moment. Recognising early warning signs has been very important.

Knowing that I can use planned ignoring when my child is struggling has been helpful to myself and my child. I feel more equipped to 'ride the wave' of emotions and notice that the feelings both of us are experiencing will pass.

My words of advice are to talk openly with your child after an incident to reflect on what strategy they could use next time. This has improved our relationship after an incident.

## WHERE CAN I FIND MORE RESOURCES AND SUPPORT?

If you are seeing this resource digitally, click the links below to be directed to the resource. If not, type the links into your search browser.

[YOUNG MINDS](http://www.youngminds.org.uk) [www.youngminds.org.uk](http://www.youngminds.org.uk)

[THE CHALLENGING BEHAVIOUR  
FOUNDATION](http://www.challengingbehaviour.org.uk) [www.challengingbehaviour.org.uk](http://www.challengingbehaviour.org.uk)

[NATIONAL AUTISTIC SOCIETY](http://www.autism.org.uk) [www.autism.org.uk](http://www.autism.org.uk)

