

Supporting Adaptive Behaviour in Children with Complex Disabilities



Unit 6: Key Elements of a Behaviour Plan

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In this unit, you will learn:

- Why it is important to have a Behaviour Support Plan to guide practice
- The key elements of a Behaviour Support Plan:
 - Proactive strategies to avoid/prevent challenging behaviour
 - A plan to teach an alternate behaviour/skill
 - A reactive plan
 - A data collection system

Topic 1: The Importance of Behaviour Support Plans

The purpose of a Behaviour Support Plan is: prevention, accommodation, and teaching appropriate replacement behaviour or skills. When behaviour becomes a danger to the child or others, or if it interferes with the child's ability to learn or participate in activities, then it is recommended that a "plan" be developed, put in writing and implemented.

Behaviour problems are often the primary concern to families of children with developmental disabilities. Problem behaviours can be disruptive and stressful to the family, interfere with learning new skills, and impact meaningful inclusion in the community. Many families find that traditional discipline methods – those that worked when they were children, and those that seem to work with typically developing children – don't seem to be as effective with children and youth with complex disabilities.

Some challenging behaviours are a direct result of a skill deficit. You also learned that children and youth with complex needs often require intensive and individualized strategies to learn new skills. Therefore, behaviour management involves much more than simply having a procedure to follow when a challenging behaviour is displayed. Behaviour Support Plans outline how to avoid challenging behaviours by teaching new skills and using proactive strategies, as well as what to do when such behaviours are displayed.

Behaviour Support Plans should be developed through a collaborative process involving the significant people in the child's life. Such a plan is especially critical when children display behaviours that have the potential to cause harm to themselves or others (e.g., repeated aggressive, destructive or self-injurious behaviour). In such cases, it is recommended that the plan be put in writing as quickly as possible and evaluated on a regular basis. Later in this unit, we will go into greater detail about what should go into a Behaviour Support Plan and provide examples and a written template.

Behaviour Support Plans are designed to implement strategies in a consistent manner across all of the key people in the child's life and across environments. For example, if it is decided that planned ignoring of a behaviour, such as screaming, is the most appropriate intervention for a child, then it is important that all key people in the child's life are following through in a consistent manner.

When addressing challenging behaviours, it is important to remember that *one size does not fit all*. Behaviour Support Plans should be individualized and based on the individual strengths and areas of need of the child, as well as the apparent function of the challenging behaviour. Plans should always reflect an understanding of the characteristics of the child's complex disability.

A Behaviour Support Plan should include:

- key understandings/theories about the child's behaviour,
- conditions or **antecedents** that are most likely to trigger the behaviour and the proactive strategies that can be employed to avoid it ,
- warning signs that the child is experiencing difficulty,
- a plan for defusing the situation,
- positive supports to help teach the child adaptive skills, and
- a reactive plan, which may include strategies for crisis management.

Topic 2: Key Elements of a Behaviour Support Plan

The theoretical framework of positive behavioural supports should be used when developing Behaviour Management Plans. This process begins with identifying a child's strengths and areas of need, the conditions that trigger and maintain challenging behaviour, and the conditions that trigger desired behaviours.

Key elements of a Behaviour Support Plan:

1. An understanding of **the function of the child's behaviour** and contributing factors.
2. **Positive behavioural supports**, including **proactive strategies** (e.g., adapting the environment or changing how we interact with the child to reduce the likelihood that the challenging behaviour is displayed) and a plan to **teach specific skills** in order to increase the frequency of more desired behaviours or replacement skills.
3. The use of **reinforcement strategies** to motivate the child to display adaptive behaviour and/or refrain from displaying challenging behaviours.
4. A procedure or **reactive plan** to employ when proactive strategies have been used, but the targeted behaviour still occurs.
5. A description of how the plan will be monitored and **evaluated**.

Topic 3: Developing a Behaviour Support Plan

Remember, the most important factor in developing a Behaviour Support Plan is to identify the function of the challenging behaviour. If you can think of one word or phrase that could replace the child's behaviour, you would be well on your way to finding an alternative behaviour that might replace the challenging behaviour.

As described in Unit 1, once you have collected information, understand the function of the challenging behaviour, know what triggers the behaviour (antecedents) and what reinforces the behaviour (consequences), it is time to think about a plan for intervention. The Behaviour Support Plan needs to include the following:

- interventions to avoid having the behaviour occur in the first place (proactive strategies; see Unit 3),
- what to do when the behaviour occurs (reactive strategies; see Units 4 and 5), and
- a plan to teach a replacement behaviour (see "Teaching Adaptive Behaviour").

Keep in mind that all of the components of your Behaviour Support Plan have to relate to the function of the behaviour.

When we talk about replacing challenging behaviours, we need to assess the child's current skills. Here are some situations you might encounter:

- The child does not have the skill
 - If this is the case, break the skill down into teachable units, and teach steps (e.g., through direct instruction) and then ensure that skills are generalized (e.g., through rehearsal and feedback within routine activities and whenever the need for the skill arises)
- The child demonstrates the skill but does not use it functionally
 - If this is the case, analyze the barriers to the child using the skill and teach when and how to use (e.g., through direct instruction) and then ensure that skills are generalized (e.g., through rehearsal and feedback within routine activities and whenever the need for the skill arises)
- The child has the skill but chooses not to use it
 - If this is the case, identify conditions that relate to use of the skill (i.e., modify antecedent and consequence circumstances to increase the child's motivation to display the skill)

Involving the entire team

When developing a Behaviour Support Plan, it is vital to work with the family and treatment team.

Topic 5: Example of a Behaviour Support Plan

Chynna (insert picture of child)

Chynna is 8 years old and has a developmental disability. She loves colouring books. Although she doesn't colour in them, she really likes to look at the pictures and flip through the pages. Chynna can verbally request a limited number of familiar, preferred objects such as "book" or "banana" using single words. She often displays tantrum behaviours when her parents say "no" to her. She can become upset quickly and seemingly without warning. When this occurs, she tends to scream and bite the collar on her shirt. If others are close to her at this time, she will attempt to scratch or bite them. Chynna's parents don't know what to do. They would like to work on expanding her vocabulary or work on toilet training, but Chynna's behaviour seems to interfere with learning.

The following is a Behaviour Support Plan that was developed for Chynna:

Name: Chynna - 8 yrs old

Objective: To reduce aggressive behaviour and maintain a healthy, safe environment for all parties.

Rationale: Chynna, on occasion, will display aggressive behaviours (e.g., hitting, biting or scratching those in close proximity to her).

Key Understandings:

- Chynna has difficulty coping with change.
- Chynna has difficulty with loud noises or when in distracting environments.
- Chynna tends to become frustrated with complex verbal instructions.

Plan:

Be aware of antecedent events:

- Chynna most often displays aggressive behaviour when:
 - arriving home from school,
 - there is a great deal of noise or distraction around her, and/or
 - she is denied a request (such as a request for snack food).

Be aware of warning signs (escalating behaviour):

- Chynna often displays the following when she is distressed:
 - she starts to rock and whine,

- she drops to the floor, and/or
- she begins to bite her shirt collar.

These behaviours should be considered communicative in nature and indicate that Chynna is having difficulty.

Immediate measures (list plans to defuse the situation)

- Use a picture schedule to describe upcoming changes in routine.
- Avoid using a loud voice when speaking to Chynna.
- If denying Chynna a request, let her know *when* she may receive the item she is asking for (e.g., “Cookies after supper”).
- Only one person should be speaking to Chynna if she is displaying warning sign behaviour.
- Maintain a safe distance between you and Chynna if she is displaying warning sign behaviour.
- Make sure instructions and requests are short and allow time for processing.

Implement positive behaviour supports (proactive strategies and a plan to teach appropriate/alternative behaviour).

- Intermittently direct Chynna to her beanbag chair in her room and/or drink from a water bottle as these activities appear to have a calming effect on her.
- When Chynna first arrives home from school, direct her to a less distracting area first for a few minutes (e.g., her room to look at a book).
- Teach Chynna to use the words “too noisy” in conjunction with “too noisy” picture symbols to request an environment change.
- Provide frequent opportunities for choices in her routine to give her a sense of control.
- When denying a request, use a “first-then” contingency where possible (i.e., inform her when she can have the desired item). Also, try to incorporate picture symbols or a timer to make expectations concrete. For example, first you need to hang your coat up and then you may have a drink.
- Throughout the day, practice a calming routine with Chynna (e.g., taking deep breaths and counting to five).

Help peers/siblings learn to:

- Encourage Chynna’s brothers and sisters to give her space after school and to use their “indoor voices”.

Reactive Plan:

In spite of positive behavioural supports, if aggressive behaviours are displayed, the following plan should be implemented (i.e., a procedure for dealing with escalating behaviour that includes steps and responses for each level of escalation).

- If Chynna scratches, hits or bites, say “hands down”.
- Direct her to sit down in the immediate environment (e.g., a nearby chair).
- Use a point prompt to indicate where you would like her to sit.
- Move at least four feet away from her.
- Avoid making eye contact with her at this time.
- If Chynna is screaming or biting her shirt, do not speak to her or comment on her behaviour, although you may provide her with a toy she likes to chew on.
- When she shows signs of calming (e.g., she is quieter and is chewing less), intermittently provide her with **model prompts** from her calming routine, such as taking deep breaths. If she imitates the modeled calming behaviour and sits for 30 seconds without screaming, crying or biting her shirt, she should be neutrally directed to her usually scheduled activities.

Team members’ signatures:

Date: _____

Review date: _____

Here is a template you can use to develop your own Behaviour Support Plans (Adapted from Alberta Education. (2003). *Teaching students with Autism Spectrum Disorders*. Edmonton, AB: Author).

Behaviour Support Plan

Re: _____

OBJECTIVE: To ensure that caregivers and Aides working with _____ are aware of behaviour support procedures in place to maintain a healthy environment for all parties.

RATIONALE: _____, on occasion, will _____

KEY UNDERSTANDINGS ABOUT _____

PLAN:

1. _____'s caregivers will read and sign this plan.
2. BE AWARE OF ANTECEDENT EVENTS. This behaviour is most likely to occur when:

- A) _____
- B) _____
- C) _____
- D) _____

3. BE AWARE OF WARNING SIGNS (escalating behaviours).

- A) _____
- B) _____
- C) _____
- D) _____

THESE BEHAVIOURS ARE COMMUNICATIVE IN NATURE AND INDICATE THAT
_____ IS HAVING DIFFICULTY AND MAY ESCALATE.

IMMEDIATE MEASURES WILL INCLUDE: (List plans to defuse the situation)

- A) _____
- B) _____
- C) _____
- D) _____

IMPLEMENT POSITIVE BEHAVIOUR SUPPORTS: (Describe proactive strategies to use consistently to support the student and that will increase his/her ability to communicate his/her wants and needs, and that will teach alternative, more acceptable responses to frustration.)

- A) _____
- B) _____
- C) _____

- D) _____
- E) _____
- F) _____
- G) _____

ASSIST PEERS/SIBLINGS LEARN TO:

- A) _____
- B) _____
- C) _____

ALL CAREGIVERS/AIDES WILL: (Include any other measures that the staff will need to take, and include a referral to the IPP).

- A) _____
- B) _____
- C) _____
- D) _____

REACTIVE PLAN: (In spite of proactive strategies, if aggressive or unsafe behaviour occurs, the following plan is in place: List a plan for dealing with escalating behaviour that includes steps and staff response for each level of escalation).

- A) _____
- B) _____
- C) _____
- D) _____

I have read this plan and am aware of support procedures to be followed when working with

_____ .

Note: A copy of this plan should be retained by all caregivers/Aides.

Signed: (Have all team members, including parents or guardians, sign the plan.)

_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

Date: (date plan was signed) _____

Date to review this plan: (Date that the team has agreed to meet): _____

Resources

Alberta Education. (2003). Teaching students with Autism Spectrum Disorders. Edmonton, AB: Author.

Alberta Education. (2008). Supporting positive behaviour in Alberta schools: An intensive individualized approach. Edmonton, AB: Author.

Horner, Robert H. and George Sugai. Developing Positive Behavioural Management Systems for Students with Challenging Behaviours. (Reston, VA: Council for Children with Behavioural Disorders, a division of The Council for Exceptional Children, 1999) pp. 15-23

Martin, G. & Pear, J. (2006). Behaviour modification: What is it and how to do it (8th ed.). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall.

Special Education Council of the Alberta Teachers' Association (2007). BOATS: Behaviour Observation Assessment Teaching Strategies (2nd Edition). Edmonton, AB: