

Challenging Behaviour

Note: the information in this document is general information and it is recommended that when a student is engaging in challenging behaviour a thorough behavioural assessment is conducted to provide behavioural recommendations.

What is “Challenging Behaviour”?

Behaviour may be considered challenging if it:

- Limits a person's ability to be part of a more enriched environment
- Causes harm to the person or others
- Causes disruption to the environment

Why is the Behaviour happening?

Behaviour always happens for a reason. It has a function. A person may engage in challenging behaviour for any or all of the following reasons:

- To get something. Examples include: gaining social attention, preferred items or a sensory experience.
- To escape or avoid something. Examples include: social situations, demands, people or negative sensory experiences (crowds, loud noises, etc.).
- There may also be situations when the behaviour is occurring as a result of a medical or biological issue.

It is not always obvious as to why the behaviour occurs, but there are techniques that can be used to find out this information. One way is to observe events that occur *before* (antecedent) the behaviour occurs. Another way is to look at how others respond *after* (consequence) the behaviour occurs. Also, consider the time of day, what is happening in the environment and the expectations and routines. These observations can provide insight into when and under which circumstances the behaviour occurs.

Paradigm Shift

Behaviour is communication and it is important we don't always assume that a student engages in challenging behaviour to be disruptive. Review the table below to consider some possible paradigm shifts.

From seeing the person as...	To understanding the person as...
Won't	Can't
Doesn't care	Shut down, can't show feelings
Won't sit still	Over-stimulated
Not trying, bad attitude	Can't remember, can't start
Mean/defiant	Defensive, stuck
Inappropriate	Misses social cues

Measuring Behaviour

By measuring the behaviour, we can see if it is improving or getting worse. These observations can provide some insight into how often, and how disruptive the behaviour is to the child, youth or family.

- Duration can be measured by timing how long a behaviour lasts from start to end.
- Frequency can be measured by counting specific behaviours within a set time frame.
- Intensity of behaviours can be rated on a simple scale.

Teaching Alternative Behaviour

When behaviour is considered challenging, reducing the behaviour is important. In addition to this, since the challenging behaviour meets a need for the child, teaching them an alternative behaviour to meet the same need is a key component in decreasing problem behaviours. Examples may include: teaching a child or youth to say, "It's too loud" or "I want a break" when in a noisy environment rather than flop to the ground or run away, or teaching a child or youth to make a simple snack rather than grab whole food items.

In order to be successful, the alternative behaviour being taught should:

1. Meet the same needs as the challenging behaviour
2. Be easier to do than the challenging behaviour

Some Preventative Strategies

- Develop predictability by being consistent with routines and expectations
- Priming can be used to increase the likelihood of success for students by providing them with reminders of the expectations as well as the reinforcement (for example if a child does not like going to cubby have a conversation with him about the expectation and have him choose what he is going to do first such as take boots or hat off first)
- Environmental cues such as visuals can be helpful *if* the individual understands their meaning
- Incorporate preferred activities into daily routines to motivate the student
- Offer choices, such as choice of activity, or sequence of tasks
- Mix easier expectations with more difficult expectations to build confidence and cooperation
- Be mindful of sensitivities to sensory aspects of the environment. Where possible, and within reason, minimize unpleasant items or activities
- Set up the physical environment in a way that reduces the possibility of harm to the individual and others
- Consider use of crisis management techniques as per your agency's protocols



Reference

- Cipani, E., & Schock, K. E. (2007). Functional Behavioral Assessment, Diagnosis and Treatment. New York, NY: Springer Publishing Company, LLC.
- Cooper, J. O., Heron, & T. E., Heward, W. L. (2007). Applied Behavior Analysis (2nd ed.). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Education, Inc.