

# POSITIVE BEHAVIOUR SUPPORT

Find out how this approach enables people with disability improve their quality of life, have better relationships and participate more fully in the wider community.

Positive behaviour support (PBS) is more than just an approach to behaviour management – it's also been shown to **improve a person's quality of life** by decreasing the frequency and severity of challenging behaviours.

## What are challenging behaviours?

Challenging behaviours are defined as actions that threaten the quality of life and/or safety of individuals, such as self-injury, aggressive outbursts or breaking property. Individuals who engage in challenging behaviours may be trying to communicate that something is wrong or missing – and that they need help. What's tough for families, carers and support workers is to identify what exactly has caused these behaviours. PBS can help us find the answer by looking at the person's needs, their home environment and overall quality of life.

## Benefits of Positive Behaviour Support

PBS assists in improving quality of life in a number of ways:

- Helping individuals understand their daily life through clearer communication (i.e. picture schedules)
- Changing the environment to make where they live and work better for them (i.e. reducing high noise levels)
- Improving the person's lifestyle so they have more interesting and enjoyable activities to keep them involved and connected with their community (i.e. helping an individual get a job, supporting recreational activities)
- Changing the environment so the person is involved in meaningful and positive relationships with others.

## Tackling multiple challenging behaviours

When several challenging behaviours exist, it is important to establish priorities. You may want to first target behaviours that are particularly dangerous, and remember to set goals that are realistic and meaningful. Start with small steps that can build over time. A non-verbal person with autism is not likely to speak in full sentences overnight, but if they can learn to hold up a 'take a break' card when they need to leave the table rather than resort to challenging behaviour, that is a huge success.

## PBS in practice

Here are some helpful strategies to help you put PBS in practice:

### Celebrate and build strengths and successes –

Tell your client what they do well. Strive to give positive feedback more frequently than any correction or negative feedback. **Example:** 'Great job putting your dishes in the sink!'

**Respect and listen –** You may have to look for the things your client is telling you, whether verbally or through their choices or actions. **Example:** 'You keep sitting on that side of the table. Is the sun in your eyes over here?'

**Validate concerns and emotions –** Do not brush aside fears or tell your client not to worry. Emotions are very real. Help to give language to what he is feeling.

**Example:** 'I can see that you are angry that our plans have changed.'

**Provide clear expectations of behaviour –** Show or tell your client what you expect of them using visual aids, photographs or video models.

**Move on from the challenging behaviour** – Do your best to keep the challenging behaviour from serving as your client’s way of communicating. This can be hard to do, but in the long run it is effective. Make sure all family and team members are consistent in this approach and that you pair this with other positive strategies.

**Alternate tasks** – Do something that is fun, motivating or that your client is good at. Then try something hard. They will be less inclined to give up or get agitated if they are already in a positive frame of mind.

**Offer choices within parameters** – Everyone needs to be in control of something, even if it is as simple as which activity comes first. **Example:** ‘Do you want to eat first, or paint first?’

**Provide access to breaks** – Teach your client to request a break when they need to regroup (e.g. use a visual card that represents “break”). Be sure to provide the break when they ask so they learn to trust this option and do not have to resort to challenging behaviours.

**Set up reinforcement systems** – Use simple, predictable processes that reward him/her for desired behaviour. **Example:** ‘I love that you stayed with me during our shopping trip. You earned a ride on the airplane toy!’

**Reward flexibility and self-control** – Acknowledge when your client has made an effort to remain flexible. **Example:** ‘I know you wanted to go to the pool today and we were surprised when it was closed. For staying cool about that change in our plans, let’s go get some ice cream instead!’

### Positive Behaviour Support sample plan

Here is a sample PBS plan for you and your team. When using PBS, you should aim to meet four essential elements:

**1. Clarity** – Ensure that information about the PBS plan, expectations and procedures are clear to the individual, family, staff and any other team members.

**2. Consistency** – Aim to have everyone including family members and support staff on the same page with interventions and approaches, and strive to apply the same expectations and rewards.

**3. Simplicity** – Ensure that supports are simple, practical and accessible so that everyone on the team, including the family, can be successful in making it happen. If you don’t understand or cannot manage a complicated proposed behaviour intervention plan, speak up!

**4. Continuation** – Even as behaviour improves, it is important to keep both teaching and positive supports in place to encourage continued development.

### Things to avoid

Avoid using aversive, restrictive, or punishment approaches when addressing challenging behaviours. These approaches often result in a reduction of dignity and quality of life – the opposite of what we are trying to accomplish. Instead, through PBS, we should help develop the skills of the individual by helping them experience success and personal satisfaction through a variety of settings.

### Useful links

To find out more, check these useful resources:

- [www.autismspeaks.org](http://www.autismspeaks.org)
- [www.autismsa.org.au](http://www.autismsa.org.au)
- [www.autismspectrum.org.au](http://www.autismspectrum.org.au)
- [www.amaze.org.au](http://www.amaze.org.au)



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