

Managing Challenging Behaviour

A Guide for The Parents & Carers of people within the Autistic Spectrum of Disorders

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Introduction -

I have been a teacher in both primary & secondary classes focusing on Autism at Whitefield Schools & Centre, and supporting the parents of those children for the last 20 plus years. During that time I have attended many in-service training workshops on the management of behaviour as well as taking a degree in Emotional & Behavioural Difficulties in Special Education at Birmingham University. I have been associated with Autism London since its inception and have worked there supporting adults with autism and their families for the past three years.

This booklet is intended to pass on some of the tactics I have found most helpful to the Parents and Carers who find themselves challenged every day to find a way of coping positively with autistic person in their care.

I will start off by asking you some questions!

What is Behaviour?

Behaviour is an action you can see and hear - observe. Some behaviours are automatic, breathing et. others are made consciously by the person such as dressing and walking.

“All Behaviour is learned and maintained as a result of the persons interaction with the environment.” Skinner

Most behaviour has been taught intentionally by others such as dressing - or is learned by trial and error - walking. Such behaviours include learning how to get what you want from a carer - asking nicely - playing with other children and toys - expressing our emotions - joy = laughter , sadness = crying.

What is Challenging Behaviour ?

Challenging behaviour is behaviour in others that we find difficult to cope with, that we do not like or want to happen. (Refusal to comply - Tantrums - Destructiveness - Aggression - Self Injury)
Behaviour that tries to achieve acceptable goals in unacceptable ways.
Behaviour that challenges the Service Provider - schools, respite, health.
Behaviour which limits or precludes access to society. (shopping, clubs, parks)
Behaviour that challenges us to find a way to deal with it - to stop it and effectively replace it with a more suitable and socially acceptable behaviour that perhaps fulfils the same need for the person challenging us.

Behaviour as Communication !

Often by closely observing someone's behaviour a familiar person can tell what is wanted - what is the matter.

Mothers with young children rely on this observation and model the words for their young child while meeting their needs. This is the way children learn to communicate more effectively - verbally asking for a drink - something to eat instead of crying and Mum guessing - learning to replace a behaviour with language.

We all use body language and facial expressions to communicate with others as well as the spoken and written word. An Autistic person, with a severe difficulty in receptive and expressive communication is as likely to have difficulty understanding this as the use of the spoken word. But - they will also use body language and facial expression but not always in the way we would expect or in a context where their needs can be understood or met - hence the development of the more challenging behaviours.

What is the function of challenging behaviour?

It communicates to us that something has / is upsetting the autistic person - Unfulfilled expectation - The swimming session has been cancelled - dinner is not ready on the table therefore what was expected has not happened.

Thwarted intention - he wanted a biscuit but could reach them - he wanted to watch TV but had to have a bath.

Undelivered communication - he wanted to tell you he remembered something sad, she wanted to tell you she was cross because she couldn't wear her new dress - but they didn't have the language or means to tell how they felt.

Observing and Describing the Challenging Behaviour.

Sometimes we see a behaviour that does not immediately mean the same to all concerned. Often these behaviours are intended to communicate something to us that we may not understand-

Screaming :- is he pleased to see you

is he unhappy

is he hurt,

is he hungry

is he angry and irate

is he full of energy

is he joyful and excited

does he want something or not want it

does he want to do something or not do it ?

The same behaviour can be used to express all of the above - it is the quality and intensity that can vary with the situation in which it occurs - therefore only minute observation can give the clue to the reason as well as deep intimate knowledge of the child, like that of a parent or a very familiar carer.

What was actually happening ?

How do you describe the difficulties you are having to cope with - Tantrums - having a turn - driving you mad - getting at you - wrecking the place -

All these give an idea of the frustration caused but not a clear picture of what was

actually happening.

Are you being good?

What are you actually doing?

What does that mean?

What can you see?

A description of the whole situation using clear words that have the same meaning to everyone are what is needed.

Not Fuzzy words that can be interpreted differently by different people in the light of their own experience. One persons tantrum is stamping feet and crying another persons tantrum can mean all the furniture is wrecked!

Which of the describing words below could you see or hear ?

Which are FUZZY? Cross out the fuzzys.

sit down know mutter listen like laugh
clap think jump scratch understand
cry react badly have an outburst stamp
appreciate means well shake aware

Only clear and careful observation and recording can tell us what is actually happening and give us a clue as to how to help the person in our care to do something more appropriate to let us know what they want or feel.

Recording the Challenging Behaviour

Have you ever tried to change your own behaviour - eating - smoking - nail biting et. Was it easy, how did you do it, did it work, - for how long ?

(Weight watchers - initial weigh in - eating program - next weigh in - praise - carry on - mini target - big praise - carry on - goal weight - new clothes. success over time when keeping to the program!)

Using an A B C Observation & Recording form for a set period of time - possibly one week- in a set place - at home, in order to get clear picture and provide a base line for changing the behaviour is the first and most important step. (see attached sample form).

Date & Time The day of the week and the time of day can often give a clue to an intermittent behaviour. The day you go shopping! Just before a certain program comes on the TV! Therefore giving you the opportunity to address the situation - prepare for it in a different way.

Antecedents What was happening immediately before the undesirable behaviour? Was a demand made on him - was he being ignored - was a change imminent - (the table being laid for a meal) or had a change just occurred (visitors - the phone rang) what was going on in the vicinity. What do you think may have provoked the behaviour?

Behaviour Describe what he actually did - ran to you biting his hand - picked up a chair to throw it etc.etc...

Background Where did this all take place - the bathroom - at the supermarket - who was there? This will give a clue as to whether he dislikes the place / activity or needs help or is afraid.

Consequences How did you or other people present react? What did you do to

stop the behaviour? Sometimes the consequences of an action can be reinforcing the behaviour or even the reason for it - e.g. gaining attention, creating a fuss, getting you to turn red and shout! (what fun) Therefore changing how we react can sometimes eliminate the behaviour.

Aftermath What happened as a result of your efforts - how did he react?

What do you think he may have been trying to communicate to you?

Thought for the day -

It is often the case that by changing our own behaviour we effectively change the behaviour of others.

Identify the desired behaviour -

What do you want to happen instead of what is happening - what action would be more appropriate and effective in the situation?

Incompatible behaviours - if you sit on your hands you cant be biting your nails. Modelling and encouraging the desired behaviour as we eliminate the unwanted behaviour prevents a vacuum in which another unwanted behaviour can occur.

e.g. When Fred tries to throw the chair don't shout 'NO' this leaves a vacuum to be filled with even more difficult behaviours but firmly say - 'put that down' while going to him and calmly 'helping' him to put it down under the table where it goes. This models the desired behaviour - prevents the unwanted one and gives the opportunity to praise his co-operation.

The emergence of a more appropriate behaviour gives us the chance to give praise and move the whole situation into a more positive one.

Making Changes.

(Sometimes - just stopping to observe & record what is happening changes the behaviour - because you have not become involved)

From the information on the ABC form decide what changes to make to first in order to decrease the Challenging Behaviour and replace it with a desirable Behaviour. Look for the easiest change to make - at least for the start, it may need more than one aspect to be changed e.g. change what happens before and how you react to the targeted behaviour.

Tools for Change

Note - If you want to change somebody else's behaviour then you will probably have to change yours first and get agreement from everyone else in the situation to change theirs as well.

Antecedents -

What could you do to change what was happening before the behaviour that might improve the situation?

Give advance warning of a change of activity / place / person

Put good news with the warning - "Hey, Guess what, Fred is coming to visit, isn't that nice!"

Change the routine altogether to avoid setting off the behaviour.

Change the other person or persons actions.

Describe to him what you want to happen - model or physically prompt the appropriate behaviour and praise (and reward) even the tiniest sign of co-operation e.g..

“You closed the door quietly - that was good, I am pleased, thank you.....”

Background

What could you do to change the background to the behaviour that might improve it?

Use a different room for the activity (a quieter place perhaps eat in the dining room away from the TV).

Alter the environment - move the furniture, lock certain doors, turn off lights et.

Change a piece of equipment - turn off electrical motor noises (washing machines or tumble dryers - use plastic plates (they do not break when thrown).

Change the time of the activity (after dinner instead of before)

Consequences

Ignore it - remove your attention from the person, walk out of the room, pay positive attention to something else. This can be extremely effective especially when the challenging behaviour has been to get your attention BUT this will need to be carried out very strictly by everyone every time. It will also need you to be very aware of the First sign of appropriate behaviour so that you can immediately respond to that and praise it before the unwanted behaviour can escalate.

Interrupt and if necessary, physically stop the behaviour then redirect the person to another incompatible activity with a verbal or gestural prompt. - praise the slightest co-operation towards the desired behaviour. (Head banging - re direct to washing up - water play)

If needed and possible physically restrain until he is calm and then redirect to another activity with no reference to what has just gone on, praise when calm and co-operative) Unless a child is very young and can be held in a firm cuddle until calm some training in safe ways to contain physical behaviour will be needed from a qualified trainer - e.g.SCIP.

Note - Restraint is NOT a punishment.

Time Out - Remove the person from the situation. Calmly and without eye contact take them away from any attention from others or yourself. (Their bedroom - the hall way, another room et.) Tell them they will stay away for x minutes (as short a time as to be effective) or until you can hear/see they are calm. (This implies that you will stay within close proximity in order to respond immediately to the desired behaviour). Then bring them back in with praise for their now appropriate behaviour. If the unwanted behaviour occurs on return to the situation repeat the time out.

Overcorrecting - Putting things right again only more so with apologies. If things have been thrown to the floor then insist that they and every thing else out of place is returned to its correct position.

Punishment - unpleasant consequences can reduce repetition - e.g. No

compliance = No TV program - No Sweets - NO Discussion - just stick to it.

Differential Reinforcement - Notice and reward all the times that the undesirable behaviour does not occur. Perhaps set a time scale say 15 minutes and then notice and TELL the person that they have been performing desirable behaviour, perhaps build each 15 min comment up into a reward for 1 hour of desirable behaviour.

Response cost - If the person gets an allowance of sweets or pocket money this can be seen in advance and each time the unwanted behaviour occurs one sweet / coin is removed.

Whenever you find a difficult or challenging behaviour emerging use the ABC formula to clarify what is happening - a sample form is enclosed. Then use the information you have gathered to talk over with someone either your family or the appropriate professional, analyse the situation and plan for change again. Once you have developed the skills you can always find a way forward. If the same behaviour emerges again, just revert to the tactics you used before.

OK! HAVING DECIDED WHAT WE ARE GOING TO CHANGE HOW ARE WE GOING TO LET OUR CLIENT KNOW HE IS DOING THE RIGHT THING ?

Rewards (Not Bribery)

A reward is something any person will work to get - weekly wages - attention from a particular young man etc.etc..

Remember different people find different things rewarding. What your client finds rewarding may not be what you expect or even think of as rewarding!

Rewards Autistic people often like

FOOD Verbal Praise Attention

Sweets Well Done Hug / hand shake

Crisps That is Lovely Eye Contact

Coke Just write Smile

Biscuits Good lad >>> Applause

Tokens Special Activity

Money Visit Mc Donald's

Watch a video Star

Washing up Sticker

Happy Face Go to for a train / bus ride

It is important to find out what are rewarding to your client in order to use them to reinforce and encourage desirable behaviour. Watch him and try things out - add them to the list, the more you have the less he is likely to get board with and the more he is likely to work for them. It may be food or drink treats (but this can be counter productive e.g.. weight gain). It may be an activity such as washing up or having a bath.

Whatever it is it must be possible at the time of use.

Do Not offer something that is not possible.

Decide the size /quantity/ time scale of the reward to be offered before using it. e.g. one tiny sweet or 5 minutes washing up or half hour in the bath - every

time or after a collection of stars (5 stars = a bath for 30 min.)

Initially use only the most effective rewards to make them worth while - offer the same reward for the same targeted behaviour.

Rules for using a reward

It must be immediate

The reward must be given consistently

The reward must be possible

Pair it with social / verbal praise

Fade it - gradually lessen the tangible reward by size or frequency but continue the social praise.

Be specific with verbal / social praise (say what is being praised).

Action Plan

What behaviour you are going to work on to change.

What changes are you going to make.

What rewards are you going to use.

When you are going to start and for how long.

Who is going to support you / join in.

Write down clearly what you are going to do and when.

Remember to carry out the agreed action EVERY time EVERY one.

e.g. Sample program

Aim to stop Fred shouting / screaming and banging when the everyone is watching TV. (and every one shouting back to atop him)

When the TV is on the sound will be as soft as possible.

Fred's favourite occupation activity will be close by (colouring /cards).

When Fred starts to make a noise and join in the action-

a) the TV sound will be immediately reduced &

b) he will be signed to shshsh by one person present who will then re direct him to his favourite occupation.

When he is engaged in his occupation the TV sound can be gently increased.

All to agree who is the one person giving the instruction to re direct him at any one time, e.g. decide who is in charge.

When Fred watches a program all through without disturbance he can have a packet of crisps.

This program must be followed at all times for the next 3 weeks.

Conclusion

After carrying out the changes in approach to the challenging behaviour for a given period of time - say 3 weeks, stand back and record them again - see if there has been any improvement in frequency duration or intensity. Even the slightest improvement will show that you are on the right track, Think if there is anything else you can change and get everyone to agree to continue to carry out the new approach until the undesirable challenging behaviour has been eliminated and a socially acceptable way for the person to get their needs met is in place. This can take quite a long time but every little improvement is your reward and the changes you have made become easier to live with and in the end you dont even think about them. That is the time to look at changing another unwanted behaviour.

GOOD LUCK