



Positive Behaviour Support Information for Disability Sector Organisations

What is Positive Behaviour Support?

Positive Behaviour Support is an evidence-based approach with a primary goal of increasing a person's quality of life and a secondary goal of decreasing the frequency and severity of their challenging behaviours.

Challenging behaviour is often attributed to the person demonstrating the behaviour but the challenge often belongs to those surrounding the person. Family, carers and support people are often challenged to find out why the person has a need to engage in that behaviour. They want to know what they can do to support the person so they no longer have a need to engage in challenging behaviour.

Difficult behaviours are messages that can tell us important things about a person and the quality of his or her life. People who sometimes engage in challenging behaviours are actually telling us something is wrong or missing—and they need help to make it better. The challenge is for people to build support for the person with disability and the people who care for them.

Positive Behaviour Support is a comprehensive approach to assessment, planning and intervention that focuses on addressing the person's needs, their home environment and overall quality of life. Positive Behaviour Support is about working with families and carers to develop a shared understanding about why the person has a need to engage in challenging behaviour.

How does Positive Behaviour Support do this? Some of the ways it can assist includes:

- helping the person understand their daily life using clearer ways of communicating with them such as introducing a picture schedule
- changing the environment to make where they live and work better for him or her (such as 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, such as helping the person gain employment and supporting recreational or other activities of interest
- changing the environment so the person is involved in meaningful and positive relationships with others.

What does Positive Behaviour Support look like in practice?

Positive Behaviour Support has a number of key components:

1. Person-centred approaches

Positive Behaviour Support uses person-centred approaches. Challenging behaviour often reflects a history of difficulties in relationships and negative experiences in relating with other people. When planning for positive change into the future, it is important the person, their family and other significant supports are involved in person-centred planning.

A person-centred plan helps identify the needs and goals of the person and emphasises community participation, meaningful social relationships, more opportunities for choice, the creation of valued roles respected by others and ongoing development of personal competencies. The person-centred plan aims to address any unmet needs of the person through supporting positive engagement and enhancing quality of life.

2. Inclusion of relevant stakeholders

Positive Behaviour Support concentrates on a person's quality of life and is most effective when implemented across all settings of that person's life. Positive Behaviour Support works best when the relevant people who live and work with the person in different environments are involved in the assessment, planning and implementation of positive support strategies. The awareness of what needs to change, and how to bring about that change, needs to occur within the broader system and this can only occur when the person and the relevant people are involved and actively participate in the process.

3. Assessment-based intervention

Positive Behaviour Support uses assessments that look beyond the behaviour itself and more towards the social, emotional, cognitive and/or environmental factors influencing the behaviour. A functional assessment offers a better understanding of the function or purpose behind behaviour. It contributes to a behaviour support plan by providing an understanding of why a person may engage in a particular behaviour and identifying what support is required to address the person's unmet needs. A functional assessment may ask the following types of questions:

- What is the behaviour of concern?
- When and where does this behaviour occur?
- What happens before and after the behaviour occurs?
- How did the behaviour develop over time?
- What is the person communicating with their behaviour?
- How do other people view the behaviour?
- What gaps in this person's life does the behaviour suggest? For example, is it limited social interactions?
- What positive support strategies might work to address the unmet needs?

4. Behaviour support plans

Following a comprehensive assessment of the person's needs and their environment, a behaviour support plan may be developed. The plan aims to summarise the supports the person and their carers, staff and family need to make positive changes to address unmet needs. It should include strategies for improving quality of life through systems change, skills acquisition and environmental redesign. The plan should also provide information to all staff working with the person on what they need to do to help the person to address the challenging behaviour.

Behaviour support plans often include the following areas of focus:

- **Primary prevention:** putting in place support strategies to meet the person's unmet needs. This may involve making changes to the person's environment, improving communication, supporting positive relationships and enhancing active engagement in meaningful activities. The idea is that making positive changes to the person's environment results in their needs being better addressed, leading to less of a need to engage in challenging behaviour.
- **Responding to early signs of behaviour:** early signs of behaviour are an initial indication a person's needs have not been met. This part of the behaviour support plan aims to clarify what the person is attempting to tell others through their behaviour and provides a prompt for people to quickly put supports in place to:
 - respond effectively to the early behaviour before it escalates
 - put in place strategies to address the unmet need.
- **Reactive strategies:** these strategies aim to identify how to effectively respond to the challenging behaviour once it occurs, using positive behavioural management techniques designed to:
 - ensure the safety of the person and others around them
 - ensure that least restrictive practices are used
 - help the person develop new skills and re-engage in positive behaviour and interactions as quickly as possible.

5. Reduction in aversive/restrictive/punishment approaches

These types of approaches include strategies such as exclusion and social isolation, physical injury, abuse and neglect. These approaches often result in a reduction in dignity, reduced access to health services and supports, reduced quality of life, strong negative reactions from others and so on. These approaches are not consistent with Positive Behaviour Support, which is underpinned by a strong commitment to human rights and a focus on quality of life, citizenship and participation within a family/person-centred approach.

6. Skill building

Positive Behaviour Support develops the skills of the person displaying the challenging behaviour to help them:

- experience success and personal satisfaction across a variety of settings, including recreational, educational, work, social, community and family settings
- develop more appropriate ways to communicate their needs
- develop skills in daily living that meet potential gaps in being able to engage in meaningful activities.

Positive Behaviour Support also enhances the knowledge and skills of people who support the person with disability so they can implement effective environmental and systems change.

7. Staff development

Working in knowledge and skills-building for all staff, supervisors and managers in an organisation is fundamental to Positive Behaviour Support. Education and training also helps staff develop effective behaviour management plans and build a better understanding of a person's behaviour. Management practices shown to be important in Positive Behaviour Support are:

- establishing adequate procedures
- supporting staff training and access to professional advice
- providing high levels of supervision and peer support for staff
- ensuring adequate staffing levels.

On-the-job training in the workplace, which clearly presents information, is sensitive to the values and attitudes of staff, shows how to apply methods and allows staff to practice and evaluate their progress, is most likely to be effective. According to Lucyshyn et al. (2007), staff need to see the following to believe in and participate in Positive Behaviour Support:

- **Practicality:** do I understand what I need to do and do I have the resources, time, energy, material and support (professional, managerial) to carry out the strategy?
- **Desirability:** is this approach actually worth implementing?
- **Goodness of fit:** am I comfortable with this approach?
- **Subjective effectiveness:** is the outcome in the person's best interests and worth the effort involved?
- **Subjective evaluation of quality of life:** is this leading to the person having a better life in terms of inclusion and participation?

8. Environmental re-design

Carr (2007) emphasises the centrality of a positive and supportive environment in promoting positive behaviour:

‘Our chief concern is not with problem behaviour, and certainly not with problem people, but rather with problem contexts. Our job is to redesign the counter-productive and unfair environmental context that so many people, with and without disabilities, have to contend with in their everyday lives.’

Behaviour is influenced by the environment of the person. Positive Behaviour Support is a way of looking at the goodness of fit between the person and the environment they find themselves. It could include changing factors such as staff attitudes, physical factors such as reducing noise levels or ensuring increased choices to the person with disability.

9. Systems change

There is a broad range of issues that may influence the implementation of Positive Behaviour Support that may need to be addressed in a systems change process. Changes may include reviewing the mission, vision and values of the service, using administrative support for buy-in and accountability, changing policies and procedures, developing and educating staff, promoting collaboration and ensuring consultation and technical assistance is available. Service designs that enhance positive outcomes include factors such as access to on-call staff when required, shorter working shifts, access to staff counselling after difficult experiences, regular meetings, incentives and rewards for working with people with challenging behaviours (National Disability Services 2009).

Where can I get further information?

In addition to the reference list below, the Disability Services Commission’s website has further information about Positive Behaviour Support at www.disability.wa.gov.au/for_individuals/PBS.html, as well as the following links:

- Information about Positive Behaviour Support and families (www.disability.wa.gov.au/forindividuals/pbs/pbs_services_pwdfc.html)
- Information about what is happening in the disability sector broadly in the implementation of the Positive Behaviour Framework (www.disability.wa.gov.au/For_individuals,_families_and_carers/Positive_Behaviour_Strategy/PBS_Minutes.html)
- Positive Behaviour Support Information for Families (www.disability.wa.gov.au/forindividuals/pbs/pbs_services_pwdfc.html)

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