

## **UNIT 8**

### **WORKING WITH PEOPLE: PART 2: POSITIVE TECHNIQUES TO ADDRESS CHALLENGING BEHAVIOR**

## **UNIT 8 OUTCOMES**

**The following outcomes will be completed in the classroom:**

1. Describe ways to stay gentle in the face of challenging behavior.
  - A. Understand why behavioral challenges occur.
  - B. Develop ways to create supportive and positive interactions within a person's life.
2. Understand why punishment and contingencies are not proactive options.
3. Reaffirm commitment to methods of creating a gentle environment.
4. Understand how to respond effectively in handling challenging behavior.
5. Be able to look at a challenging behavior from that person's point of view.
6. Learn ways to help an individual make positive change in their behavior.
7. Understand that there are always reasons for an individual's behavior.
8. Develop ways to create dreams and visions for the people we serve.

**The following outcomes will be completed through the reading material:**

1. Understand that a combination of support, structure and fairness help you and the individual deal effectively with challenging behavior, and find ways to interact that are more positive.
2. Realize that safety security and dignity for the individual and others in the residential community is your first consideration.

**The following outcomes will be achieved through on the job training:**

1. Demonstrate proactive options when challenging behavior interrupts teaching.
    - a. Be able to select pro-active options in dealing with challenging behaviors.
    - b. Recognize times when teaching is not likely to occur and have an alternative plan of action.
  2. Demonstrate an understanding of the Four Pillars of care giving through the following **four** tools: Hands, eyes words and presence.
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## **INTRODUCTION**

We all have behaviors we would like to change. Some of us bite our fingernails, smoke, eat too much, lose our tempers, and so on. No matter how unusual or extreme challenging behavior may look, similar types of behavior occur in almost everyone. Nearly all challenging behavior serves a purpose for the individual. Persons with severe disabilities may not currently have the skills to get what they need any other way.

Developing a positive, trusting relationship with people, and providing many opportunities and support for activities and friendships at home and in the community, can go a long way toward avoiding conflict and addressing challenging behavior. For our purposes here, challenging behavior is any action, which interferes with forming companionship and community

In the past, many strategies have been tried to eliminate challenging behavior. Most have involved unpleasant or painful strategies to force the person to stop or change their behavior. Many of these approaches have produced only temporary relief or have failed altogether.

In this unit, you will discover some reasons why challenging behavior occurs. Then, you will learn some strategies that work in supporting a person while they learn new skills that allow them to reduce or eliminate their challenging behavior. This occurs because new learned behaviors help them achieve their own goals. You will also learn about some things that can be changed in a person's life that will prevent or reduce the occurrences of challenging behaviors.

You will learn to recognize when challenging behavior is likely to occur, and what to do to prevent it. You will learn what to do if challenging behavior does occur. You will discover that efforts to change challenging behavior succeed only with lifestyle change and enrichment, and active community participation.

## UNDERSTANDING BEHAVIOR CHALLENGES

### Some Reasons for Individual Behavior Responses

THERE ARE ALWAYS REASONS WHY PEOPLE BEHAVE AS THEY DO. It is true the reasons or causes of a person's behavior cannot always be identified. Causes for behavior can be very complex and difficult to understand. However, we begin by assuming there are reasons for the behavior, and that by asking the right questions, we can learn the reasons and help the individual make positive changes in their behavior.

Physical conditions sometimes account for a person's challenging behavior. For example self injury, such as head-banging, can be the result of earaches, chronic headaches, dental problems, or other situations causing pain and discomfort. If a person shows a dramatic, rapid change in behavior, it makes sense to see whether or not a physical exam should be recommended.

There are many reasons one is happy, bored, confused, interested, angry, depressed or satisfied. We are not all the same - what bores one person may interest another. What makes one person mad may make another person laugh. For people with disabilities, challenging behavior can be the result of many different circumstances. For example, many individuals with autism are extremely sensitive to differences in touch, taste and noise. Temple Grandin, a person with autism, is now able to talk about how she felt as a child, and how she feels as an adult.

She describes birthday parties as torture for her. Noisemakers and confusion of the situation were startling and could cause her to panic. She found that changes in her schedule or unexpected events overwhelmed her. Different voices, even different odors such as cigars and perfume, could be overwhelming. She remembers reacting by hitting another child or throwing something, whatever was handy, across the room.

Often, challenging behavior may be the result of a combination of environmental factors. Problems may arise when an individual discovers that –

### **DISRUPTIVE OR AGGRESSIVE BEHAVIOR OFTEN WORKS.**

This is when learning must play a powerful role in shaping behavior. We all learn from experiences and tend to repeat behavior that works for us. Behaviors that work are strengthened (rewarded/reinforced), and those that don't, or which result in pain or discomfort, are weakened and eventually disappear. The result of our behavior is important in determining our behavior.

**EVEN THOUGH DISRUPTIVE BEHAVIOR OFTEN WORKS ON A SHORT-TERM BASIS, THIS BEHAVIOR OFTEN CAUSES SERIOUS PROBLEMS FOR THE PERSON IN THE LONG RUN.**

## **IDENTIFY FACTORS THAT INFLUENCE CHALLENGING BEHAVIOR**

Medical problems often are a significant variable in how a person behaves. Unfortunately, many individuals with severe medical conditions frequently have difficulty communicating their medical condition to staff. It is important when assessing behavior that staff always review possible medical factors affecting behavior. Staff must be familiar with an individual's case history, current medical conditions and medications. This information can serve as a guide in determining possible causes for a behavior. Staff need to watch for new behavior, changes in frequency, duration or intensity of old behaviors, or abrupt discontinuance of old behaviors. Some common examples are:

<b>BEHAVIOR</b>	<b>POSSIBLE MEDICAL CONDITION</b>
injury to own face or head	toothache, ear infection
constant pacing	back problem or sprain
inability to sleep	adverse reaction to medication

## **CONTROL OVER INDIVIDUAL CHOICES**

Another major variable that can determine a person's behavior is the degree of control they have over choices available to them on any given day. The importance of this seemingly simple idea cannot be overestimated.

By offering an individual the opportunity to make his/her own meaningful choices, the individual feels more of an equal partner with staff in making decisions. When we do not offer opportunities for people to make choices, the staff can be viewed as oppressive, authoritarian, or out of step with the needs of a particular individual. However, when a person is offered opportunities to make his/her own decisions and choices, they feel a sense of control over their life. Self-esteem rises and individuals are usually easier to get along with when treated as adults.

## **EVENTS OR CIRCUMSTANCES THAT MAY COME BEFORE CHALLENGING BEHAVIOR**

In this part, we will look at actions staff can take prior to a behavior being exhibited. These actions typically have the biggest impact on getting an individual to change behavior. Generally, there is not much staff can do after a behavior has occurred. Staff can also play a positive role if they analyze a situation before it becomes a problem. The benefits include thinking and deciding how to act, rather than being caught without knowing how to handle certain situations.

As a staff person, you will know the individuals you work with extremely well. Staff usually know what has preceded a behavior incident. Individuals can send indirect signals they are about to carry out a certain behavior. Those signals, though, may be difficult to understand.

For example, a person begins to pace around the room. This could indicate boredom, too much room noise, a medical problem, or that the individual just likes to pace. In understanding each individual under your care, you will learn the signals individuals use before serious behavior is shown.

**Below are signals you may observe which may indicate a problem is about to occur**

Pacing	Self injury
Repeating things over and over again	Talking excessively
Yelling	Some signal that is usually unnoticed
Staying in the bedroom	Not wanting to go outside
Making faces	Rocking
Not talking or communicating	Refusing to participate
Crying	Any noticeable change in behavior

The list above is not complete. Only careful observation will reveal which signals are important for specific individuals.

Do not wait for a signal before interacting with an individual. By knowing the individuals you work with and being sensitive to their individual needs, you can help them plan their day. A good plan can help your day and theirs go more smoothly because they have had a role in the planning process, and you will be more sensitive to their needs that day.

Our definition of a precursor is "a sign that happens before a challenging behavior occurs to indicate the onset of the behavior." This is our signal that something is changing in the attitude of the learner. Unfortunately, we may not recognize these signals readily. Even if we can clearly identify precursors when we are watching a teaching session, we may not be in the best position to recognize them when we are in the middle of one.

In the next section, we will look at some specific techniques that can be used to avert, avoid or cope with challenging behavior.

## PROACTIVE OPTIONS

### This May Not Be an Optimal Time to Teach

We may often push on with our teaching plan in spite of challenges that arise. This may result in a lack of alertness to minor changes in the learner's mood. Our focus may be more on the task instead of the person. We may feel some pressure to show results. If we rely on teaching patterns of the past, we may think moving from the task activity means rewarding the learner's challenging behavior. The challenging behavior is, however, a clear signal that we have to change something in our teaching plan. Failure to change may result in a different lesson than we intended. Pressing on with the task can communicate that the task outweighs the value of the people involved. Failure to acknowledge needs of the learner can cause the challenging behavior to increase to a point where closure in a friendly, trusting atmosphere is impossible. Our failure to adapt may also be interpreted as an exercise in control over the learner. In our model, we do not exercise control over the learner. The learner is included in the planning process.

\* Without a framework for changes on-the-spot, we might respond to an energetic challenge with our emotions. When this happens, it is almost certain our posture will change from solidarity to an attitude that devalues the learner. Unless we make a serious effort to establish an accepting posture when challenging behavior is shown, we will react in an overprotective, authoritarian, cold and mechanistic way.

**ABANDON THE TASK TO FOCUS  
ON THE PERSON  
CHANGE YOUR EXPECTATIONS  
IMPROVE AND VARY REWARDS  
VALIDATE FEELINGS  
MODIFY YOUR TONE  
CHANGE ENERGY LEVEL**

**IMPROVE THE INTERACTION**

**HANG IN THERE ("GUT IT OUT")**

**CHANGE THE PACE OF ACTIVITY  
INVOLVE CHOICES  
MODIFY THE ENVIRONMENT  
IMPROVE PROMPTS  
TAKE A MINI-BREAK  
BAIL OUT OF THE INTERACTION**

**REDUCE THE DEMAND**

**We'll cover the options relating to the quality of interaction first:**

**Change your energy level:** Increase or decrease the animation with which we are rewarding (and prompting) and find a level to draw the learner into participation. If the learner is not caught up in enthusiasm, an increase in vitality may spark that

enthusiasm. If the person is already upset or is scared off by the volume or by more frenzied activity, we may have to tone things down to get nearer the person physically, as well as emotionally.

**Modify Your tone:** This option is similar to the first. We may have to raise or lower: the tone of voice to a level the learner recognizes as friendly, encouraging and supportive. Too high a tone of voice may be harsh to the learner; too low a tone of voice may relate the same lack of enthusiasm as physical lack of energy.

**Validate the learner's feelings:** In order to use this option effectively we have to identify the learner's feelings that caused the challenge. The more familiar you are with the learner on a personal basis, the greater the likelihood of recognizing those feelings. Additionally, validating the learner's feelings implies a big "BUT." That is - we recognize the feelings and their importance, but we can carry on. We legitimize the feelings and incorporate them into our shared interaction with the learner. For example, "I know you miss being with your friend. I miss my other friends, too. BUT, you and I can have a good time doing this together!"

**Improve and vary rewards:** And remember - interaction between teacher and learner makes the learning occur, and the trust, mutual respect and liking for one another grow from this interaction.

**Change your expectations:** Sometimes we may look for more interaction and more enthusiastic reciprocation of reward from the learner than he or she is prepared to give. Here, we assume more responsibility for rewarding ourselves, as well as the learner. For now, we ask for less back, and look for less back from the learner.

**Abandon the task to focus on the person:** The person is "what it's all about." There may come a point where it is better for the teacher just to toss the task out and just "hang out" with the learner. The new "task" becomes learning to be close to that person.

The other category of options reduces demand on the learner, and de-emphasizes the task activity. Any of these options may enhance the quality of interaction with less time and effort being spent on the task to be done.

**Change the pace of activity:** If we are moving too quickly through the steps or with our prompts, we may be the cause of agitation. The slower we go through the activity, the longer we spend interacting. Going too slow, on the other hand, may not provide the person with enough activity. "Keeping the flow going" from our structure of teaching requires a delicate balance.

**Involve choices:** In using choices as a strategy for getting past challenging behavior, we have to look for aspects of the activity that lend themselves to learner options. Where shall we sit? Which piece first? Do the task for five minutes or six minutes?

**Modify the environment:** What is distracting in the learning area for us may not be so for the learner. Conversely, distractions to the learner may be physical elements of the room, or people, or environmental factors like light, temperature, humidity, and textures of the chairs, table, and activity pieces.



**Improve the Prompts:** Our prompts can lead the learner to success with few or no errors. If challenging behavior gets in the way, we can use more specific prompts. This reduces demand on the learner by making the learner less responsible for the successful outcome.

**Take a mini-break:** This option accomplishes an effect similar to "abandoning the task" under our "interaction improvement" category. Taking a break lets the learner (and the teacher) have a change of pace from the activity for the moment. The focus can be on the individual, or another activity.

**Bail Out:** When all else fails, this option remains. If the challenge is not relieved by any other option, we can back out gracefully and let the upset learner calm down. Nothing is gained for the present or future when we insist on finishing no matter what. Our interaction with the person doesn't necessarily end entirely, but we back off and give the learner some space. Then we look at what happened, what we learned from this episode, and how we can apply that learning next time. Our optimism is based on continual improvement in our relationship with the individual, rather than on task success.

**Hang in There:** Our last option is the opposite of "bailing out" and "abandoning the task to focus on the person." The option of simply "hanging in there" means to see the person through the difficulty. With great familiarity, we may have a good feel for how long and how far the challenge will go before it subsides. We can be looking for those precursors to a subsiding challenge. And when we see the faintest hints of a return to participation, we can be ready with a delicately-placed reward: a smile, words of encouragement, having a cup of coffee or a snack together

Although we have covered our formal options in working past interactional challenges, we haven't yet discussed how to apply those options. In each teaching event, we can do no more than rely on our experience and that of others. We have to turn those experiences into a formal part of our plan for teaching.

## DREAMS AND VISIONS

### DREAMING FOR YOUR COMPANION

Community centered celebrations are about collective dreams, and breaking the dreams down into dreams that are possible. They are a moment in time when friends come together in a spirit of openness and understanding - not to look at problems, but to dream about the future. At each celebration, those who love the person help him or her describe where he or she wants to be in the future - *dreams* about feeling **safer** in the world, **with a wide circle of friends**, more **loved** by more people and more **loving** toward others.

Dreams are made of a circle of friends who come together, sit in a circle in a place that is safe and comfortable for the person, and with the help of a good friend, begin picturing the future.

#### **PICTURING THE FUTURE FOR YOUR COMPANION:**

*Picture your companion feeling safer with caregivers, neighbors, work or school mates, people in the community and family members.*

*Your pictures should revolve around four key words, safe, loved, loving and being with others.*

*Pictures of feeling safe might look like - "I see Elaine running toward her three favorite care givers when she comes home from work. I see her sitting with her house mate eating supper . . . I see her smiling when she comes home from her family's home . . ."*

*Pictures of feeling good with others might look like - "I see her playing games with her house mate . . . and serving her at meal time . . . I see her and her house mate washing the dishes together . . . I see her at work learning her new job with her favorite care giver . . ."*

*Pictures of feeling loved and loving might look like - "I see Elaine with her head held high, with a smile on her face . . . I see her hugging her care givers, her house mate and her mom and dad . . ."*

*Dreams are pictures. When anyone actually dreams, we see expressions of joy, and happiness. We see faces, hand, and eyes. We feel movement. We hear voices. We can describe these when we awaken from our dreams.*

Dream making is a no-holds-barred process. There is no room for "That's impossible!" There is no place for complaining or criticizing. There is only room for looking into the future as we would gaze at a rainbow and wish for . . .

Perhaps the hardest part of dreaming is choosing words that are not "Program Plan" words such as, "Elaine will learn to write her first name." The words are correct, but they are distancing. The words separate us from feelings and seem mechanical rather going for the heart.

We need to conquer Elaine's heart. When someone in Elaine's circle says, "she needs more activities!", think deeper and ask, "What do you see Elaine doing in these activities? Who is she with? What is she saying? What do her eyes say? What is she doing with her hands"? These questions will make your dreams more real and more personal. As long as you and Elaine are companions, you are her future, be in it and picture it. Use your imagination.

### **PICTURING THE FUTURE THROUGH THE CIRCLE'S IMAGINATION . . .**

#### **Questions to Ask:**

***We are here in this same place and it is a year from now.***

*What do you see?*

*What do you hear?*

*What do you feel?*

#### ***If someone in the circle says:***

*"Happiness" Continue by telling the circle what that is. What do you see her doing?*

*"Liking her care givers." Tell the circle what that is. What do you see?*

*"No hitting." Tell the circle what Elaine is doing instead. What do you see?*

*"Not feeling miserable!" Tell the circle what you see that tells you that she does not feel like crap!*

*"Friendship." Tell the circle what that is. Whom do you see her with? What are they doing?*

*"Independent." Tell the circle how this makes her feel safer and more loved!"*

*"Making money and working." Tell the circle how that will make Elaine feel as though it is good to be with others.*

When dreaming for the present, look at the problem and ask the same question listed above. For example, "Elaine chooses to be a loner and just deal with her care givers!" The response would be, "How can we start to help her feel safe and loved with both her care givers and her house mates. Who could help her right now? As we dream, we have to be realistic and understand that there are many barriers but with asking the right questions, we can move beyond those barriers.

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