# Positive Behaviour Support

All students can behave in ways that parents and teachers find difficult or challenging to manage. Students with a Language Disorder are more likely to demonstrate challenging behaviours because they have difficulty understanding what is happening around them and find it difficult to communicate their needs and emotions. A positive behaviour support plan is an effective strategy that can be implemented to discourage negative behaviours while understanding and supporting the needs of students.

*Keywords: Positive Behaviour Support Plan, behaviour, change, challenging*

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

Positive Behaviour Support is student centred as it develops the skills of the student displaying the challenging behaviour to help them:

- Experience success and personal development
- 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 student with Language Disorder so they can implement effective environmental and systems change.

Behaviour is largely influenced by a student's environment. Positive Behaviour Support is a way of assessing the fit between a student and the environment in which challenging behaviours occur (e.g. the playground) and making adjustments to support more positive interactions. Adjustments to the environment could include changing factors such as staff attitudes, physical factors such as reducing noise levels or ensuring increased choices to the person with a disability.

Students with language disorder are more likely to experience challenging behaviours as a result of not being able to communicate their needs effectively. These students may demonstrate the following challenging behaviours:

- Refuse or ignore requests
- Behave in socially inappropriate ways
- Act aggressive or have tantrums
- Hurt themselves or other children
- Act impulsively

- Distract others

## Activators, Behaviour and Consequences (ABC)

The first step in tackling a problematic behaviour is to figure out what is causing the behaviour. This can sometimes be referred to as the "*antecedent*" or "*activator*". When considering what the activator is, it is also important to look at what the immediate consequences of the behaviour is, i.e. does a student get to miss out on work because they have been removed from the classroom. Often the consequences are the reason why the behaviour continues to occur. A simple way to determine these patterns is to use an "ABC Chart" as illustrated below.

| Date / Time of Behaviour | What happened before the behaviour began? ANTECENDENT / ACTIVATOR | Describe the Behaviour BEHAVIOUR | Response to the Behaviour CONSEQUENCE | What happened Then? |
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Keeping a record over a period of days or weeks should identify a pattern to the events that are causing the behaviour to occur. Once you are aware of the potential triggers of an undesirable behaviour you can take steps to either avoid those triggers or slowly desensitise the person to those things. Similarly, if you have identified consequences that are inadvertently rewarding the person then you can make a determined effort to change these consequences.

The next step is to determine what function or motivation the **behaviour** is serving for the person.  Behaviours displayed by any person always serve a purpose, the trick is finding out what that purpose is. Common functions that behaviours support include:

- Communication – I'm tired, I'm confused, I don't like this, help!
- Attention or other positive reinforcement
- Reduction of frustration or stress
- Escape from demands
- Lack of understanding
- Sensory stimulation
- Loss of control

Once you know what function the behaviour is fulfilling you can set about trying to find a more appropriate alternative.  For example, if an undesirable behaviour is providing sensory stimulation then an alternative behaviour can be selected which will provide the same input for the child but in more appropriate manner that is suited to the environment.

## Rewards Systems

Using a rewards system can be a simple strategy to influence positive behaviours in the classroom. Using a reward system involves rewarding students with a highly desirable item when positive behaviours or attempts at positive behaviours are observed.

**Positive Behaviour Support Example**

*Consider a child who bites their hand when in a supermarket.*

You have assessed that supermarkets make him anxious due to the overwhelming sensory input (antecedent). Once the hand biting (behaviour) begins you usually get out of the supermarket as quickly as you can (consequence). The consequence (you leaving the supermarket in a hurry) is actually reinforcing the hand biting behaviour because the child has learnt that if he bites his hand you will take him away from the offending environment.

It is possible that the hand biting is achieving two functions - a reduction in stress levels and oral stimulation. You may decide to teach the child a more acceptable form of relaxation, such as deep breathing, rubbing his hands, or thinking of a favourite object or activity. You could also teach him to bite on a more appropriate object (soft toy, teething ring, piece of fabric) instead of his hand (appropriate alternative).

**Considerations for Positive Behaviour Support**

It is important that the teaching of new behaviours is carried out when the student is calm and not feeling anxious. Consider the use of social stories and roll play to teach the student new strategies and behaviours initially and continue to monitor for any signs of anxiety. Eventually the student will become familiar with the new strategies and behaviours and they will begin to supplement them for previous challenging behaviours.

**Consistency is key**

Any behavioural strategy must be implemented consistently each time the behaviour occurs, and must be used by each individual that has contact with the student. It is also important to be patient as this process may take several days, weeks or even months before results are apparent. Here are some other useful strategies to incorporate into parenting and teaching styles:

- Provide a predictable environment and routine – a routine board or daily calendar can be helpful to establish this.
- Prepare the child for changes in advance. Where possible introduce changes gradually and with visual information.
- Use visuals to aid comprehension.
- Make instructions brief and concrete.
- Incidental teaching - use everyday situations to teach appropriate behaviour. Encourage and praise appropriate behaviour, pairing this praise with an immediate reward if necessary.
- Use obsessions/preferred activities as rewards if more acceptable rewards fail to motivate.
- Differentiate between odd behaviours  and those that are interrupt learning.
- When multiple behaviours occur it is important to develop separate behaviour plans. This is key, as differing environments can have a different impact despite a similar antecedent.

Remember that when a new strategy is put in place, the behaviour may get worse before it improves. This may be because the child is resistant or uncomfortable with change in general, or because they simply want their own way!

# LANGUAGE DISORDER AUSTRALIA

**Want to learn more?**

To learn more about Language Disorder and how to support children and young people for whom language is their primary disorder, please **contact us**. Language Disorder Australia provides holistic, innovative and effective therapy, education and support services and has a transdisciplinary team of speech pathologists, occupational therapists, educators, psychologists and physiotherapists.

Contact: 1300 881 763 or **hello@languagedisorder.org.au**

Website: **languagedisorder.org.au**

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