



baptist
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MANAGING
CHALLENGING

behaviour

Working together to find a solution

*“When we build on the strengths the
weaknesses naturally disappear.”*

Always be gentle with others.... Don't worry about anything, but pray about everything. With thankful hearts offer up your prayers and requests to God... God will bless you with peace that no one can completely understand. And this peace will control the way you think and feel.

Philippians 2:4, Holy Bible (GNT)¹⁰



Many people behave in different ways. It is only a behaviour of concern when it causes problems for the person or people around them.

Josie, a woman with Down syndrome, is an enthusiastic singer and dancer during church services. Her church has grown to love and appreciate her passion and joy and the early mumbles have been replaced with gratitude for the gifts she shares.

“Her joy in God’s love inspires others. I love coming to church knowing I will see Josie dancing.” Joanne

What is challenging behaviour?

‘Challenging behaviour is persistent behaviour that can cause difficulties and limit a person’s ability to have a good life. It’s called ‘challenging’ because it challenges everyone who supports the person to understand why it is happening and to work together to find a solution.’¹

Challenging can include harming themselves or others, breaking things, refusing to do things, or doing things that others don’t like. These behaviours can be stressful and upsetting.²

“Some behaviour is biologically driven (you eat when you are hungry) or reflexive (you cover your ears when a noise is too loud). But for the most part, behaviour occurs because it serves a function and/or produces an outcome.”³

Behaviour that is confronting and disruptive can create barriers for inclusion. Parents and family may feel that other people don’t understand, and for the person themselves, it can be frustrating and confusing.

It is not uncommon to feel concerned or overwhelmed about working in a group when a person presents with behaviours of concern.

It is important to consider the person’s gifts and strengths. Show respect for their feelings and don’t speak about the person in their presence, because it is likely that they understand more than they show. Talk with them and provide them with information, even if you are not sure if they can comprehend what you are saying. It is important to build trust in your support and shape their motivation and purpose into more acceptable behaviour.⁴

An individualised plan (sometimes known as a Behaviour Support Plan) can make challenging behaviour easier to understand and manage. Following a plan can assist a church to best support an individual by being proactive to prevent behaviours from happening, and prepared to react appropriately if challenging behaviours occur.

A BEHAVIOUR SUPPORT PLAN

A Behaviour Support Plan can be written by a health professional, or be an informal document created by church leaders in consultation with the person and/or their family.

TIPS TO MANAGE CHALLENGING BEHAVIOUR

Jed occasionally presents with challenging behaviours. His mother explains some tips to manage Jed's behaviours that have broader application.

Get to know the person: Have a conversation with our family and involve us as Jed's carers. We are the experts on our family member.

Set expectations: Jed is more likely to follow the expectations when he knows them. For example, in Children's Church you may get the class to help develop a few simple 'rules'. Use pictures if you can and put them up each week so everyone can see them every time. Always state the expectations positively E.g. "Treat others with respect and kindness."

Establish routines: When Jed knows what to expect, it helps to reduce his stress and triggers. If routines have to change, it helps to let us know in advance so we can work with Jed and prepare him for the change.

Identify desired behaviours: Use positive reinforcement and effective support options to increase and strengthen helpful behaviours.⁵ Look for positive behaviour and recognise it, praise it and reward it.

Support: A "buddy" can provide extra help if it is needed. A church can enlist a volunteer to serve as a "buddy" to someone like Jed. The church leaders provide supervision and support and enable Jed to remain with his peers.⁶

Understand behaviour and triggers: Don't make assumptions about the motives of the behaviour. They can vary. E.g. in Autism challenging behaviour can serve several functions:

- Obtaining a desired object or outcome
- Escaping a task or situation
- Getting attention, either positive (praise) or negative (yelling)
- Trying to self-calm, self-regulate or feel good
- Blocking or staying away from something painful or bothersome
- Responding to pain or discomfort or attempting to gain control over a situation.⁷

Be aware of possible trigger situations for Jed and avoid or address those situations.

Jed, a 13 year old boy with Autism was not invited to participate in some roles in the youth group as a result of some noisy and disruptive behaviour. After a meeting with Jed's family and the youth leaders, a plan was developed. They discovered that Jed was frustrated and bored. The strategy was to give Jed more responsibility and within months he was thriving and his challenging behaviour subsided.

Stan, in his 40s has a mental health disorder. He has a tendency to call out loudly during church which can make people uncomfortable. James, is his "buddy" at church, and reminds Stan about appropriate behaviour and can warn him what the consequence will be if he keeps calling out during the message. Stan is allowed to call out and respond during announcements but not during the message. With reminders and consequences, Stan's behaviour has improved.

If you can't avoid the situation anticipate what may go wrong and put strategies into place to prevent the problem.

Work together on strategies: Create an agreed plan with strategies to manage inappropriate behaviour. Sometimes there is an easy fix, so ask us what would work best. E.g. during Sunday school, Jed would react to loud noises and bright lights. The Sunday school leader hung curtains to make the room darker and turned the volume low when they had music. The family worked with Jed and the leaders to teach him coping skills by offering him sensory toys to self-soothe and stay calm.

Avoid a power struggle: Always be respectful and calm. Speak in a calm, slow voice. Do not respond with anger, criticism, threats, or punishment. Help Jed learn to express his needs in appropriate ways.

Consequences: When Jed makes poor behaviour choices, it is important that there are clear and consistent consequences. They should not be punitive, they should be constructive. If limits are needed they should be proportionate to the risk posed by his behaviour. Jed and our family should be informed about the limits and an option for review should be provided.⁸

Stick to your boundaries and rules: If Jed has not understood the acceptable behaviour of the church/group, this needs to be clearly explained, with visual prompts if needed. If Jed knowingly disregards the instructions, this is considered challenging behaviour. If the behaviour escalates, Jed needs to be guided to leave the situation with supervision and supported to calm down. In rare and extreme cases where there is a risk of harm to people or property, the police should be called.

RESOURCES

Baptist Churches of NSW & ACT, Children and Family Ministries resources and links for children with special needs <http://baptistcfm.org.au/children-and-families-at-church/children-with-special-needs/>

Positive Behaviour Support information and resources

- Autism Spectrum Australia, <https://www.autismspectrum.org.au/content/fact-sheets>
- Scope, <https://www.scopeaust.org.au/service/positive-behaviour-support/>
- Fact Sheet for supporting People, <https://www.scopeaust.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/ChallengingBehavior-fact-sheet.pdf>
- Positive Behaviour Supports for Children, http://pbsc.info/family/PDFs/Positive_Behaviour_Supports_for_Children.pdf
- Positive Behaviour Framework, http://www.disability.wa.gov.au/search-page/?q=Positive+Behaviour+Framework,&cx=004775467321686825730:byrwtgln_ku
- Challenging Behaviours in children with intellectual disability, https://www.anglicare.org.au/media/2848/anglicaresydney_caringforachildwithanintellectualdisability_2013.pdf

John has an intellectual disability and he loves the routines of church.

Church volunteers planned to move the coffee station to a more convenient location.

Understanding that a switch in routine could trigger a strong response from John, simple efforts were used to assist him to manage the change.

John was given advanced notice and was showed where the table was moving to. Then, John was asked to help move the coffee station.

Communicating clearly with John enabled him to adjust to the change in routine and avoided a situation that may have caused him to react.

REFERENCES

- ¹ Autism Spectrum Australia web site, viewed 6 March 2019, <https://www.autismspectrum.org.au/content/positive-behaviour-support-introduction>
- ² Scope (Vic) Ltd, Fact Sheet 5: Behaviours of Concern (Challenging Behaviour), Scope Australia, Victoria, 2009, viewed 6 March 2019, <https://www.scopeaust.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/ChallengingBehavior-fact-sheet.pdf>
- ³ Challenging behaviors tool kit with autism, viewed 3 April 2019, p.3. https://www.autismspeaks.org/sites/default/files/challenging_behaviors_tool_kit.pdf
- ⁴ ibid
- ⁵ Autism Spectrum Australia, op. cit.
- ⁶ Family and Children's Ministries Baptist Churches of NSW & ACT, Setting up a Buddy program for children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), Baptist Churches of NSW & ACT, viewed 6 March 2019, <http://baptistcfm.org.au/wp-content/uploads/sites/22/2016/03/2.-PDF-Setting-Up-a-Buddy-Program.pdf>
- ⁷ Op cit. Challenging behaviors tool kit with autism, p5.
- ⁸ Good practice guide to dealing with challenging behaviour 2018, viewed 4 April 2019, <https://www.ombudsman.vic.gov.au/Publications/Parliamentary-Reports/dealing-with-challenging-behaviour>
- ⁹ Holy Bible, Contemporary English Version, Second Edition (CEV®)© 2006 American Bible Society.