



## CHALLENGING BEHAVIOUR HANDOUT

- ✚ Challenging Behaviour describes the difficult or problem behaviours exhibited by children or adults with a learning disability
- ✚ Challenging behaviour is not however limited to people with learning disabilities

### Carers

- ✚ These behaviours present significant challenges to carers:
- ✚ The person's own health and safety is at risk
- ✚ They place others in jeopardy
- ✚ *Challenging behaviour often starts in early childhood and may continue into adulthood*

### Research

- Who is most likely to be affected?
- ✚ Males
  - ✚ People with specific syndromes (e.g. autistic spectrum disorder)
  - ✚ People with more severe learning disabilities
  - ✚ People who have additional disabilities (e.g. hearing problems or communication disorders)

### Reasons for Challenging Behaviours

- ✚ In most cases challenging behaviour occurs when a person who has little control over their life, tries to exercise some power
- ✚ E.g. screaming to attract attention
- ✚ E.g. pushing someone away if they do not want to be with them
- ✚ Challenging behaviour also occurs when there is frustration at the inability to make others understand what the person needs
- ✚ Challenging behaviour is sometimes linked to mental health problems such as depression or to neurotransmitter abnormalities

## Helping People with Challenging Behaviours

- ✚ The most important way is to talk to the person themselves, find out what is bothering them and see if you can put it right
- ✚ Offering help can be difficult if the person you are trying to talk to has no speech or has other communication problems
- ✚ You may need to change the way you communicate
- ✚ E.g. using an object of reference like a cup to indicate a drink
- ✚ Specialist health professionals (e.g. clinical psychologists) can be involved in supporting people to develop more appropriate and acceptable ways of behaving
- ✚ These can be effective in the short- to medium-term

### Social Attention

It is not *bad* to want attention from others.

For a variety of reasons (e.g. limited communication skills, boredom, and poor self-occupation skills) some people may learn that behaving in a particular way is a reliable way of attracting others' attention, even if it is negative.

### Tangibles

The desire for certain things (e.g. food, drink, objects or activities) which is providing the motivation for the behaviour.

Problems arise when an individual learns to act inappropriately to get these things.

### Escape

Rather than behaving in a particular way to get people's attention, particular behaviour can be to avoid situations or activities that they do not like, or do not find particularly rewarding (e.g. a child that does not like group activities may learn that hitting the child nearest to them results in them being moved to a quiet corner on their own).

## Sensory

Behaviour is internally rewarding (or self reinforcing).

What is happening around the individual (externally) is not as important as what is happening inside the individual.

A person may behave in a particular way simply because of the sensation (e.g., rocking back and forth or banging their head) because it is stimulating (e.g., flapping a hand in front of a light or 'twiddling' a piece of string) or because of the way it sounds (e.g., grinding teeth together or clicking their tongue repetitively).

These behaviours may appear pointless, annoying or distressing to the observer. However, for the person themselves, the behaviour may serve the function of helping them cope with uncomfortable negative feelings such as boredom or anxiety.

Although a challenging behaviour may appear negative to us, the behaviour may serve as a positive coping strategy for the individual who has adopted it.

Working with service users who exhibit challenging behaviours is not easy – members of staff need to be dedicated, sensitive and consistent.

The priorities must always be:

- + To prevent such behaviours
- + Or stop them from escalating

## General Life Situation

- + Challenging behaviours often result from the feeling that control has been taken away
- + Settings and staff need to be sensitive to this
- + Provide an environment that offers the greatest control possible
- + Provide the best possible opportunities for communication of needs and feelings
- + Maintain a balance when addressing general lifestyle
- + Too much stimulation can be as damaging as a lack of stimulation
- + E.g. social contact
- + E.g. performing tasks
- + Finding the right balance involves getting to know the person
- + Challenging behaviours can be eradicated or reduced

## Diffusing a Situation

- ✦ A thorough and effective needs assessment, service user planning and risk assessment are essential
- ✦ Techniques for diffusing a situation should not be used without agreement (a planned management strategy)

## Managing Your Behaviour

*How members of staff appear and behave is paramount in the prevention of and escalation of challenging behaviours.*

## Principles of Personal Management Behaviour

- ✦ Recognise and acknowledge your own personal prejudices, emotions and feelings
- ✦ Be calm and confident
- ✦ Do not appear as arrogant, challenging or aggressive
- ✦ Reflect on the causes of previous challenging behaviour incidents
- ✦ Keep movements slow and purposeful
- ✦ Identify a safe exit
- ✦ Keep proper space and distance
- ✦ Speak clearly and calmly
- ✦ Remain relaxed and breath normally
- ✦ Maintain eye contact (do not stare)
- ✦ Remain in control of your facial expressions