

# What is Positive Behaviour Support?

Note: Please also see the 'What is Challenging Behaviour?' information sheet at [autismspectrum.org.au/pbs#Resources](http://autismspectrum.org.au/pbs#Resources)

There are some 'quick fix' approaches that aim to stop challenging behaviours – a student is stopped from hitting peers at school once they are expelled, a person cannot take food from others at a cafe if they are locked in their home and don't go out or they can't scratch their arms if they are forced to wear gloves. Although these strategies do stop challenging behaviour, they also do not explain why it was happening and result in people with disabilities having poor quality lives (as well as their human rights denied). Australia signed up to the UN Convention on the rights of persons with disabilities in 2008 which promotes that every person of any age with a disability, for example, has the right to make choices, full participation and inclusion in society, respect for difference and acceptance as part of a diverse humanity, equality of opportunity. One goal for PBS is to increase the quality of life for all involved and to respect a person's human rights. Unfortunately, there is often no quick fix for challenging behaviour and PBS is an approach that takes commitment and time for results to be sustained.

## Positive Behaviour Support (PBS)

PBS is based in the science of learning and there is strong evidence for PBS as an effective approach for challenging behaviour. PBS is both positive and proactive. Positive means increasing and strengthening helpful behaviours through 'reinforcement' (not using punishment or negative consequences to reduce the challenge). Proactive means anticipating where things may go wrong and preventing that from happening rather than just reacting when things go wrong.

PBS understands that **all challenging behaviour has a purpose** or reason (this is called the 'function') it is not random or meaningless. All behaviour aims to get or get away from something. Research lists three categories which are 'attention', 'activity or object' and 'sensory'. It is important to complete an assessment of the behaviour to work out why it is happening and then to teach an appropriate behaviour that replaces the challenging behaviour and gets the same need met.

There is a process we go through in PBS and this is often written up in a Support Plan. A priority is to build **collaboration and consultation** with all of those involved. Each person has unique knowledge to bring to help understand the situation and develop and implement consistent strategies once they have been agreed.

The team does an **assessment** of a person's quality of life, individual strengths, abilities and support needs and how well these are being met. Carrying out an assessment of a person's quality of life, individual strengths, abilities and support needs will help you to identify which services may be helpful in your situation. The team also completes an investigation into the challenging behaviour, often through observation and data collection. This information is reviewed to help understand why the behaviour happens (the function) and keeps happening. It is essential to complete an assessment before agreeing strategies.

Following the assessment PBS develops a support plan that has a number of parts. These include: developing an environment that minimises and removes the things that make challenging behaviour more likely as well as promoting positive behaviours; developing and reinforcing an appropriate behaviour that replaces the challenging one (this might be a new communication skill, learning to wait or to manage anger appropriately); a plan to respond to the challenging behaviour and teaching other new skills as needed. The intervention plan needs to be implemented across settings consistently over time and its effectiveness reviewed and evaluated.

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