



**Down's Syndrome
Association**

A Registered Charity No. 1061474

Behaviour Series



Supporting behaviour positively

1. Understanding behaviour: where to start

Our Information Team are here to help

Please see our website for up-to-date information: www.downs-syndrome.org.uk

If you would like to talk about the activities or where to start, then please get in touch with our helpline by calling 0333 1212 300 or by emailing us on info@downs-syndrome.org.uk.

Helpline Monday - Friday 10am-4pm | Telephone: 0333 1212 300

Understanding behaviour

What do we mean by behaviour?

Behaviour really refers to everything that human beings (and animals) **do**. We all react to situations and communicate through our behaviour. For people who have difficulties with other forms of communication, behaviour - things that they do - can be the most effective form of communication.

To call something behaviour you need to be able to see it, count it and describe it. So, a behaviour (running out of the building) is different from an emotion (feeling scared) and also different from a thought/motivation "get me out of here!"

Behaviour can be positive, helpful and useful to the person. We sometimes call this **adaptive behaviour** and it can include skills like asking for help, waiting in a queue, getting on with work, doing chores, going on the trampoline to work off energy, listening to music to calm down.....and many other things.

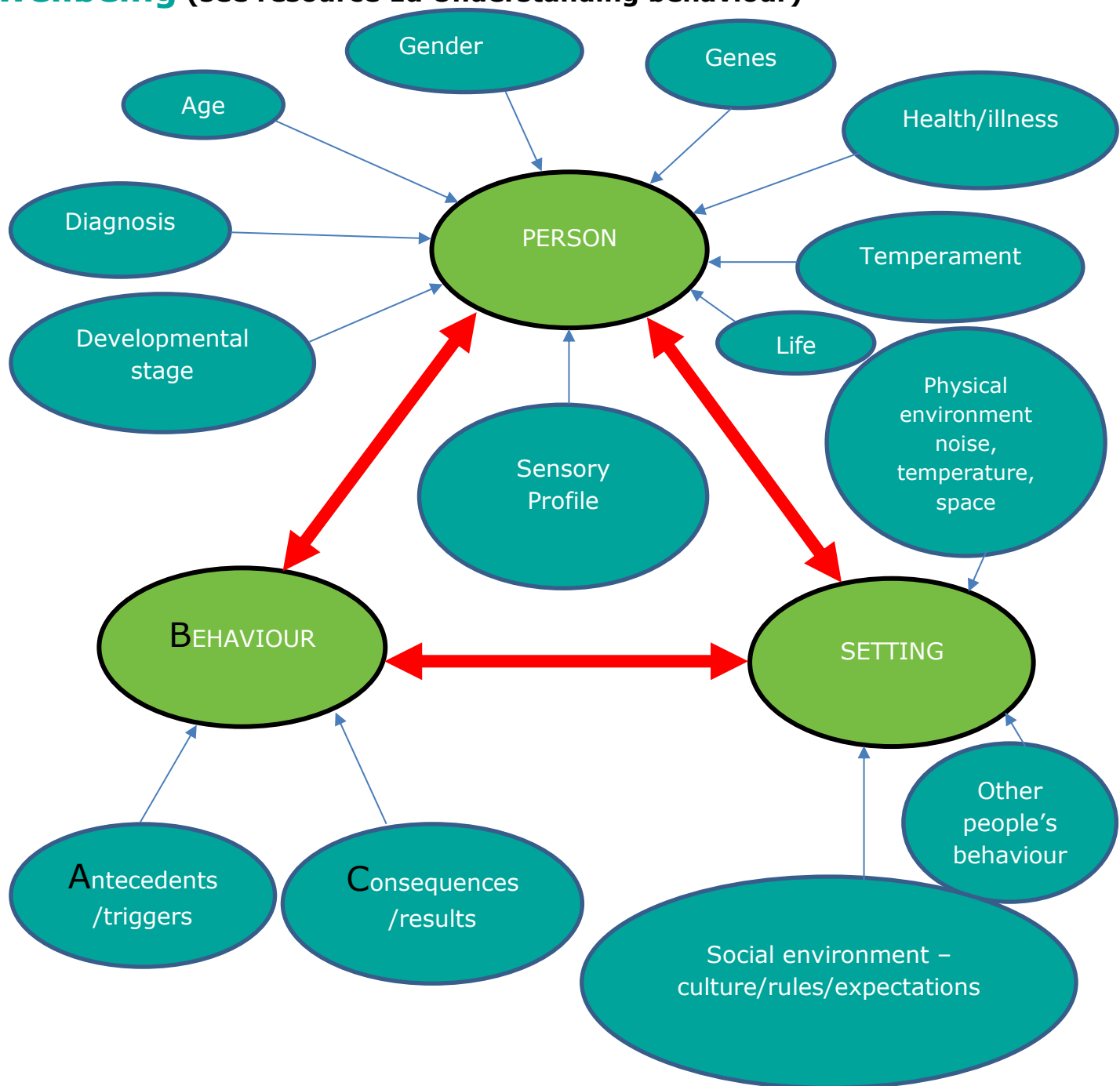
However, behaviour can be problematic to the individual or to other people around them. This is sometimes called **maladaptive or challenging behaviour**. So-called challenging behaviours are often more extreme versions of quite ordinary behaviours. These behaviours may occur for the first time by chance or by imitating others. The person may continue the behaviour because it is reinforced, or useful to them. We call this **learned behaviour**.

The following factors influence whether behaviour is seen as acceptable/appropriate, or not: -

- The **strength** of the behaviour (a heavy shove, rather than a gentle nudge; a tantrum that lasts an hour rather than a minute)
- The **situation** in which it occurs (jumping up and down and shouting out in a cinema rather than at a football match)
- The **consequences** of that behaviour (banging a toy on the window as opposed to rearranging the sofa cushions)
- The **degree of tolerance** of other people - (a baby yanks your hair as opposed to your 15-year-old daughter)

The diagram below shows the many factors that influence our behaviour and that of the people we care for. You will see that some of these are fixed - age, gender (usually), life experiences for example - but that others can be changed - expectations, physical environment, others' behaviour and reactions, triggers and results of behaviour. These are the ones we need to use in managing, changing and supporting behaviour positively.

Framework for understanding behaviour and emotional wellbeing (see resource 1a Understanding behaviour)



Flow chart of steps in Behaviour Support Planning



Deciding
where to start
?

Understanding behaviour Complete ABC Record

A

Antecedents
settings &
Triggers

B

Clear
description of
behaviour

C

Consequences
/ Results: what
happens next?

Working out
what the
behaviour means
(**Functional
Analysis**)

Choosing possible strategies and creating an individual behaviour support plan

Antecedent/
Prevention

New skills and
behaviour

Consequence/
Changing the
results

Deciding where to start

First be **clear about the behaviour**, or behaviours that you are concerned about. If there is more than one, you may need to prioritise and decide which to tackle first.

Where ever possible use 'doing' words – hitting, kicking, spitting, sitting down in the middle of the pavement, and so on – rather than thinking in terms of being 'aggressive', naughtiness or "having a meltdown".

Secondly ask the question - **does this behaviour need to change?**
You can use this questionnaire to help you decide/answer these questions.

Does this behaviour need to change?

Behaviour may be challenging because it:

- makes you feel unable to manage the situation
- is contrary to social norms
- interferes with everyday activities
- causes stress to others
- happens a lot
- seems to last a long time
- happens when it is hard to deal with – in public or at difficult times
- is risky and puts others in danger

Questions to ask:

- *Does it interfere with the person's ability to learn?*
- *Does it restrict his or her access to important experiences?*
- *How much stress does it cause and for whom?*
- *How frequent is it, how intense and how long does it last?*
- *Is it typical behaviour for the person's developmental age/stage of development?*

The next step is to complete an ABC observation record

Print and complete resource 1b. ABC chart

See completed example ABC records 1c & 1d

Guidance for completing the ABC record

A Antecedents

Antecedents are things that proceed the behaviour/happen before the behaviour or are contributory factors. They can be divided into **SETTINGS** and **TRIGGERS**.

SETTINGS - these are things like the environment ...time/place/number of people around but can also be things that affect the person like being tired or hungry.

TRIGGERS are more immediate, temporary antecedents...the things that seem to spark off the behaviour, or happen just before. These could be:

- noises
- another child or adult's behaviour
- being asked to do something
- an activity coming to an end

B Accurate description of the behaviour

- What did you see?
- How many times?
- How long for?

C Consequences/results: what happens next?

- When we think about the consequences of behaviour, we are trying to work out what happens as a result of the behaviour. What happens directly after or what happens because the behaviour occurred.
- Does the person get attention? Are they given something they might like? Are they given more space to themselves?
- Does the behaviour stop something from happening? Is there a specific task, activity or demand that is avoided?
- How do other people react or respond to the behaviour?

After completing your ABC chart go to resource 2. Functional analysis