



**Down's Syndrome
Association**

A Registered Charity No. 1061474

Behaviour Series



2. Functional Analysis

Working out what behaviour means

Our resources and 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

Functional analysis - Working out what the behaviour means?

Before planning what to do about a behaviour you want to change, **Positive Behavioural Support** suggests that you need to spend a bit of time thinking and working out what function or purpose this behaviour is serving for the person. The ABC records should help you to do this and will be useful in answering some of the questions below. This will help you to work out the “communicative function” of the behaviour, in other words what is the person trying to say or what need do they want to be met? It is important to remember also, that the reason a behaviour started in the first place may not be the reason it continues.

“Most develop a range of communication and social skills which enable them to get what they want and need more easily. Many children with learning disabilities do not develop these skills and are left with the same needs as other children, but are much less able to get them met.” (Peter McGill, Tizard Centre).

This step in behaviour support is sometimes missed out as people are anxious to get on with management strategies. That risks trying out strategies, on a trial and error basis, that are not appropriate so will not work, leading to frustration and disappointment.

That is not to say that there are not some general “good practice” guidelines/ hints and tips for managing behaviour in people with Downs’s syndrome. A Functional Analysis will be needed where behaviour is more complex, entrenched or difficult to understand what is causing it and keeping it going.

Working out the function of a behaviour

See our communicative functions questionnaire resource to help you decide

Basic functions of behaviours that challenge include:

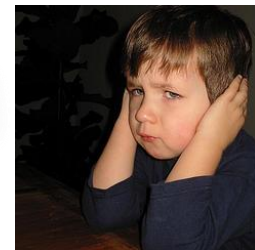
Social attention



Getting things



Escape/avoidance



Express emotion



Sensory



A bit more about functions of behaviour:-

The same behaviour can serve different functions for different people or different functions for the same person at different times. Pamela Lewis gives the following example:-

One child (or adult) might scream because she likes the sound. Another child might scream because she likes the attention that results from screaming. Another child might scream to express frustration at what is being asked of her, with no interest in the resulting sound or attention. A child might scream for all those reasons at different times.

(Pamela Lewis, 2005, Achieving Best Behavior for Children with Developmental Disabilities: A Step-by-Step Workbook for Parents and Carers, Jessica Kingsley.)

Some more common functions of behaviour are listed below – bear in mind that these can overlap:

- Discomfort - physiological or environmental (hunger, pain, temperature etc.)
- Developmental levels (expectations are either too high or too low)
- Seeking rewards – in general this is often involved
- Escape/avoidance of a task or a demand
- Seeking sensory stimulation e.g. likes the sight of spinning objects, or the feel of water
- Avoiding sensory stimulation e.g. dislikes certain sounds, or the feel of tags on shirts
- Difficulty with organisation needed to initiate an appropriate activity
- Attention seeking/wanting to interact and not knowing how to do this appropriately
- Getting a reaction/making something happen (function is control, rather than social attention)
- Expressing frustration/anger
- Expressing fear
- Difficulty waiting
- Expressing "Wait! Let me finish!"
- Expressing "No!"
- Other communication e.g. "I need some help", "I don't understand", "Go away"

Making sense of behaviour

Analysing the ABC charts or other records, and thinking about the possible functions described above should help you to get an idea of what is going on, why the behaviour is happening, what it means to the person with Down's syndrome. Often it is good to discuss this with others in the family, or school.

It is also helpful to think about exceptions; situations and circumstances where the behaviour does not occur, or where the person manages to respond to triggers in a different way. **Resource 2a Questionnaire can help you to decide on communicative functions. After identifying functions go to resource 3. Strategies and interventions.**



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