



**Down's Syndrome
Association**

A Registered Charity No. 1061474

Behaviour Series



3. Strategies and Interventions

ABC strategies

Learning profile

Do's and Don't's tips

A Down's Syndrome Association publication

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

Strategies and Interventions

Proactive and Reactive Strategies

Proactive strategies are intended to make sure the person has got what they need and want on a day to day basis and also includes ways to teach the person appropriate communication and life skills.

Reactive strategies are designed to keep the person and those around them safe from harm. They provide a way to react quickly in a situation where the person is distressed or anxious and more likely to display challenging behaviour.

A good behaviour support plan has more Proactive strategies than Reactive ones.

Antecedent (preventative) strategies

Antecedent strategies are those which prevent the behaviour from happening. Over time this leads to new behaviours being practised and old (challenging) behaviours disappearing as they are not being practised.

Some prevention strategies to consider include: -

- Keeping the person engaged with positive activities
- Avoiding some situations for now e.g. busy supermarkets; crowded tube stations
- Removal or avoidance of triggers e.g. make changes to the environment or manage sensory input e.g. ear defenders, use of quiet areas
- Reducing the demands placed on the person
- Giving more structure to the day
- Giving clearer expectations/rules using visual supports, planners and timetables, 'now' and 'next', visual guides and social stories
- Giving advanced warnings and preparation
- Desensitisation - gradual supported exposure to triggers
- Give the person more praise, attention and rewards as a matter of course
- Pre-specified reinforcer – reminding person of rewards to follow e.g. a fun activity
- Preferred item as distractor – a task or item that takes the focus away from the trigger e.g. responsible for carrying something into class after playtime

- Offer choice
- Embed the action that the person is reacting to or finding difficult in a sequence of things you know they like.
- Indirect requests...offer of collaboration e.g. "Let's go and....." "You first, then me..."

Replacement (new skills and behaviour) strategies

To do this, we need to ask, "What do we want the person to do instead?"

The focus of this step is on helping the person learn new skills and encouraging more acceptable or constructive behaviours. It is important to find things for them to do which are adaptive, but which also meet the same needs as the challenging behaviour (i.e. they obtain the same result).

Here is a suggested list of skills that you might consider teaching the person to help them to cope with challenging situations: -

- Functional communication training - help/escape/finish/bored/attention.....
- Skills in making and communicating meaningful choices
- Social skills – situations relating to others, doing things together, friendships/relationships. The right thing to do with the right person in the right place.
- Sensory activities - Support to find alternative ways of gaining the sensory input needed
- Play skills -new ways to play, have fun and keep busy
- Emotional literacy – teach understanding and communicating feelings
- Coping and emotional regulation skills - worries/anxiety, anger/frustration e.g. use of safe place

When helping people to develop and learn new skills to replace unwanted behaviours it is important to think about their developmental age and stage of development, level of understanding and communication skills. Bear in mind how people with Down's syndrome learn best so provide lots of visual supports, modelling, developing personal books and films with lots of practice and repetition.

Consequence (changing the results) strategies

Using rewards and reinforcement

Rewards are one of the most powerful tools we have for changing behaviour.

At some level, each of us is aimed at getting more rewards/satisfaction. How long would you carry on going to work if you stopped getting paid at the end of the month? If you smile and say hi to your new neighbour and they turn away and ignore you, are you likely to do it again?

A reward is anything that tends to increase the behaviour that precedes it. We know that challenging behaviours continue to happen because they are being rewarded in some way (even if we can't see it immediately). In Positive Behaviour Support, we sometimes like to call rewards reinforcement.

There are two types of reinforcement – positive and negative reinforcement. Both will increase the likelihood of behaviour that they follow, occurring again in the future. So, both act as rewards for the person, making that behaviour more likely to occur again in the future.

Positive reinforcement is when something desirable (e.g. food, drink, attention, activity, star, smiley face etc.) arrives following the behaviour.

Negative reinforcement is when something undesirable (pain, demands, noise, unwanted social attention) is removed following the behaviour.

For example:

Child is screaming and banging her head on the table. Dad picks her up and starts tickling her. She stops crying and starts to giggle.

The child's behaviour is rewarded by a cuddle and tickle from dad. (Positive reinforcement)

Dad's behaviour is rewarded as his daughter stops crying and hurting herself. (Negative reinforcement).

In order to be effective, rewards must be:

- Meaningful and desirable for the particular person, or motivating
- Given frequently, especially at first
- Given at the right time, immediately after the desired positive behaviour is best
- Given with enthusiasm
- Changed if cease to be motivating or person's preferences change.

Choosing rewards

Selection of reinforcers (rewards)

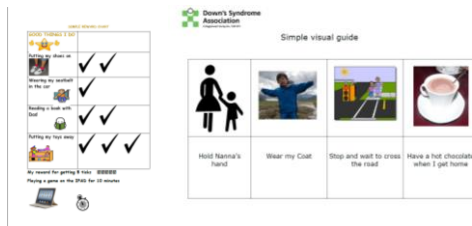
- Need to be individualised, meaningful to the person
- Need to be more powerful than those maintaining the challenging behaviour
- Need to be readily available
- Need to be affordable - stars, stickers can be exchanged for treats like a trip for McDonalds or a toy, or a trip to a play park
- Often, **praise and attention are enough** but sometimes people need something more tangible
- May need to be changed sometimes, as can lose power over time.

Occasionally it can be hard to work out what exactly motivates a person, especially if they have very limited communication skills.

Resource 3a is checklist of all sorts of possible rewards to use.

It is a good idea to develop a "Reward Menu" of things that can be used to motivate a particular person with Down's syndrome.

See resources 3b and 3c for rewards list and visual guide examples.



Changing the Consequences (results) of undesirable behaviour

As well as noticing, and providing rewards/reinforcement for positive behaviours, it may be important to change what happens after an undesirable behaviour.

It is important that undesirable behaviours are not rewarded or reinforced by our reaction, or the person getting the thing they want, or getting out of, or away from a task or situation they don't like. The ABC records should help to show if this is happening.

- Removing or stopping a reinforcing consequence from a behaviour is called **extinction**. If the behaviour stops "working" for the person it will eventually extinguish, or fizzle out.
- Planned ignoring is a form of extinction, very powerful if we think the behaviour is maintained by the reaction it gets, though sometimes easier said than done!
- "Time Out", which may be directing the person to sit in a particular place (chair or step) with no interaction for a few minutes, or turning the TV off for a few minutes, is also a form of extinction. It is saying to the person "you are not going to get anything good out of this behaviour". NB> it is different from, for example, sending someone to their room, or outside to calm down. Bedrooms and gardens usually have toys/things to do in them. This might be a good strategy for redirection (see below) but it is NOT Time Out.
- If a behaviour is not getting the result it used to, a person may often try harder, at first, to get the result so you may see an increase in behaviour to start with. This is called an "extinction burst" and will not be disheartening if you are prepared for it. So sometimes you can expect the *behaviour to get worse before it gets better* - clearly this would not be appropriate where there are safety issues e.g. hurting self, or running off.

Putting Consequence Strategies together - INTERRUPT -IGNORE- REDIRECT- REWARD

Interrupt – Ignore – Redirect- Reward

The first rule is that no harm should come to anyone. Therefore, aggression, self-injury or severe destructive behaviours should not be allowed to continue.

Interruption means

- Not reprimanding the person
- No particular attention should be given to the person about the problem behaviour
- Redirect at the earliest opportunity with the goal of providing reward for any approximation to positive/desired behaviour.
- Interrupt in an 'ignoring' manner as much as possible
- Do the minimum to manage the behaviour to stop injury to anyone. This can be achieved by raising forearms to block/protect yourself or quietly 'shadowing' the hands of the person who self-injures.

How to Ignore

- No consequences are given which relate directly to the behaviour
- Activities continue, do not stop what you are doing
- Do not ignore the person only the behaviour
- Continue as if behaviour has not taken place

Its purpose is to defuse undesirable behaviour and take away its power

How to Redirect

- Redirection is a prompt or cue to engage in a behaviour so that a reward can be given
- To communicate alternative means of interaction
- Your message is "DO THIS INSTEAD"
- Purpose is to encourage participation
- It communicates that behaviour, which previously stopped interactions or gained inappropriate attention, is no longer effective
- It is often better to use physical and gestural prompts with brief verbal cues
- Use non-verbal prompts such as pointing, touching materials, touching the person hand/arms to focus the person's attention to the task
- Accept any participation by the person and immediately reward this with a positive response (warm verbal comment, physical contact, smiles) and continue assistance towards desired behaviour or task.

See resource 3d Behaviour Support Plan template

Resource 4 is a guide about how to run a behaviour support workshop.

Learning strengths and challenges associated with Down's syndrome

People who have Down's syndrome tend to learn more easily through 'visual –spatial' information and experiences. They learn particularly well from seeing and doing things and benefit from having language information translated into visual information (e.g. pictures, drawings, photos, visual-spatial grids/sequences, books, films, watching others/a model to copy etc.).

People with Down's syndrome have learning challenges associated with developmental delay (learning disability) and language. For people to change their behaviour, they need to know and remember what they are supposed to do and why, and be motivated to behave in new or different ways. They need to be able to override behaviour they learned in the past. Having a learning disability and language delay makes this even more difficult to do.

We all benefit from support to change behaviour habits. Support can come from the people and the environment around us in many ways. With support, people can learn new behaviours to meet their needs. Over time, these behaviours become their new 'history' of learned behaviour.

Using visual supports, being prepared and practising new behaviours in real situations helps people with Down's syndrome to learn. Knowing about an individual's learning strengths and motivations, and following the steps in this 'Supporting Behaviour' resource will help family members, carers and practitioners understand possible underlying reasons for behaviour and lead to successful outcomes.

Do's and Don'ts of behaviour management – General tips

- Stay Calm
- Notice positive behaviour
- Ignore negative behaviour as much as possible
- Use distraction/redirection
- Be consistent
- Account for developmental rather than chronological age
- Separate immature behaviour from deliberate challenging behaviour
- If you are getting stressed or frustrated take a break/change person dealing with the behaviour (if possible)
- Smile and be enthusiastic
- Give positive praise "Well done", "Nice One", "Good work"
- Make eye contact
- Get down to the child's level, or equal level for an adult
- Do not shout
- Be clear and use simple words