

**WORKING WITH PEOPLE:  
POSITIVE TECHNIQUES TO ADDRESS  
CHALLENGING BEHAVIOR**



# WORKING WITH PEOPLE: POSITIVE TECHNIQUES

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>Introduction</b> .....	<b>1</b>
<b>Understanding Behavioral Challenges</b> .....	<b>3</b>
<b>Proactive Options</b> .....	<b>11</b>
<b>Confrontation Avoidance Techniques (C.A.T.)</b> .....	<b>24</b>
<b>Severe Behavior Challenges: Positive Behavior Support Plans</b> .....	<b>33</b>
<b>Resource Materials</b> .....	<b>47</b>



# **WORKING WITH REAL PEOPLE:**

## **POSITIVE TECHNIQUES TO ADDRESS CHALLENGING BEHAVIOR**

▶ **Expected Outcomes:**

**At the conclusion of this section, the participant will:**

- 1. Understand why behavioral challenges occur.**
- 2. Demonstrate proactive options when challenging behavior interrupts teaching.**
- 3. Demonstrate effective confrontation avoidance techniques (C.A.T.) when behavioral challenges occur.**
- 4. Describe key steps in building a positive behavior support plan for a person with severe challenging behavior.**

### **INTRODUCTION**

We all have behaviors we would like to change. Some of us bite our fingernails, smoke, eat too much, lose our tempers, and so on. No matter how unusual or extreme challenging behavior may look, similar types of behavior occur in almost everyone. Nearly all challenging behavior serves a purpose for the individual. Persons with severe disabilities may not currently have the skills to get what they need any other way.

In earlier sections, you learned how to create a climate where people can learn and grow. Developing a positive, trusting relationship with people, and providing many opportunities and support for activities and friendships, at home and in the community, can go a long way toward avoiding conflict and addressing challenging behavior. When you find yourself working with someone displaying challenging behavior, you may feel frustrated or scared. **For our purposes here, serious challenging behavior is behavior which causes harm, or could potentially cause harm to the person themselves, or to others around them.**

## **Introduction cont....**

Challenging behavior may be difficult for us to cope with, particularly when we try to support the person in improving the quality of their life.

In the past, many strategies have been tried to eliminate challenging behavior. Most have involved unpleasant or painful strategies to force the person to stop or change their behavior. Many of these approaches have produced only temporary relief or have failed.

In this section, you will discover some reasons why challenging behavior occurs. Then, you will learn some strategies that work in supporting a person while they learn new skills that allow them to reduce or discard challenging behavior. This occurs because new learned behaviors help them achieve their own goals. You will also learn about some things that can be changed in a person's life that will prevent or reduce the occurrences of challenging behavior.

You will learn to recognize when challenging behavior is likely to occur, and what to do to prevent it. You will learn what to do if challenging behavior does occur. You will also learn about positive behavioral support plans for people with severe challenging behavior, and your role as a behavior support team member. Finally, you will discover that efforts to change challenging behavior succeed only with lifestyle change and enrichment, and active community participation.

# UNDERSTANDING BEHAVIOR CHALLENGES

► After reading this part, you will:

- Understand that there are always reasons for an individual's behavior.
- Realize that safety, security and dignity for the individual and others in the residential community is your first consideration.
- Understand that a combination of support, structure and fairness help you and the individual deal effectively with challenging behaviors, and find ways to interact that are more positive.
- Be able to look at a challenging behavior from that person's point of view.
- Learn ways to help an individual make positive changes in their behavior.

## Some Reasons for Individual Behavior Responses

THERE ARE ALWAYS REASONS WHY PEOPLE BEHAVE AS THEY DO. It is true the reasons or causes of a person's behavior cannot always be identified. Causes for behavior can be very complex and difficult to understand. However, we begin by assuming there are reasons for the behavior, and that by asking the right questions, we can learn the reasons and help the individual make positive changes in their behavior.

Physical conditions sometimes account for a person's challenging behavior. For example - self-injury, such as head-banging, can be the result of earaches, chronic headaches, dental problems, or other situations causing pain and discomfort. If a person shows a dramatic, rapid change in behavior, it makes sense to see whether or not a physical exam should be recommended.

There are many reasons one is happy, bored, confused, interested, angry, depressed or satisfied. We are not all the same - what bores one person may interest another. What makes one person mad may make another person laugh. For people with disabilities, challenging behavior can be the result of many different circumstances. For example, many individuals with autism are extremely sensitive to differences in touch, taste and noise. Temple Grandin, a person with autism, is now able to talk about how she felt as a child, and how she feels as an adult.

She describes birthday parties as torture for her. Noisemakers and confusion of the situation were startling and could cause her to panic. She found that changes in her schedule or unexpected events overwhelmed her. Different voices, even different odors such as cigars, perfume, could be overwhelming. She remembers reacting by hitting another child or throwing something, whatever has handy, across the room.

**Often, challenging behavior may be the result of a combination of environmental factors.**

**WE REACT IN PART BASED ON HOW WE FEEL AND HOW WE PERCEIVE THE SITUATION.**

### **ATTITUDES FOR CHALLENGING SITUATIONS**

- **The challenging response is adaptive/logical for the person.**
- **The "problem" is jointly-generated and responsibility for the problem is shared mutually.**
- **Focusing on the "problem" often validates the problem as a powerful response for producing change.**
- **Safety, security and dignity is the first consideration in dealing with challenging behavior.**
- **Be a friend and advocate first - this is not the time to be primarily task-focused.**
- **Use a combination of support, structure and fairness to help re-focus the person and your interactions with that person.**

It's not surprising that when people feel frustrated, angry or in pain, they often behave in disruptive, and often dangerous ways. When people are bored or confused, their behavior is often less predictable. Problems may arise when an individual discovers that -

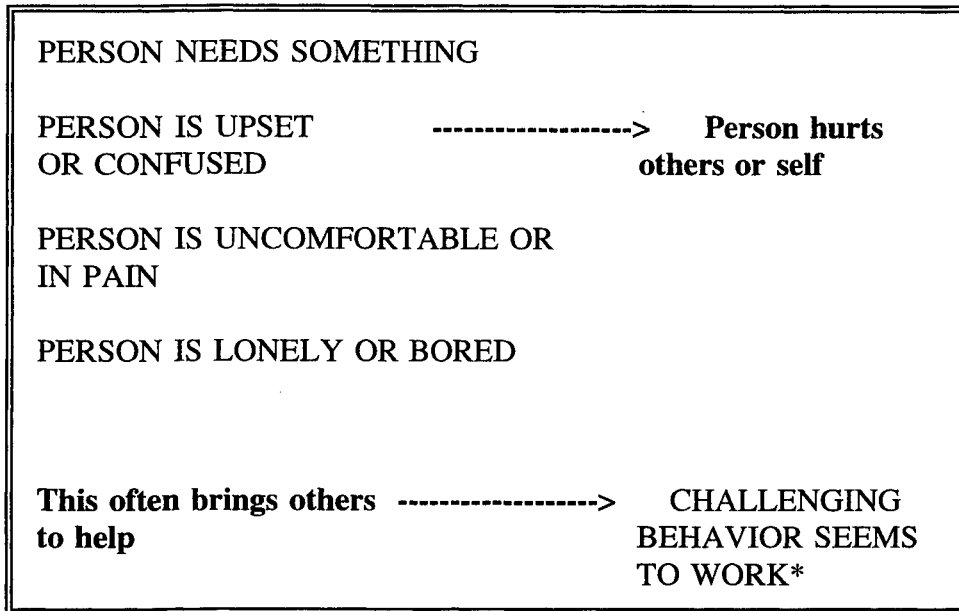
### **DISRUPTIVE OR AGGRESSIVE BEHAVIOR OFTEN WORKS.**

This is when learning must play a powerful role in shaping behavior. We all learn from experiences and tend to repeat behavior that works for us. Behaviors that work are strengthened (rewarded/reinforced), and those that don't, or which result in pain or discomfort, are weakened and eventually disappear. The result of our behavior is important in determining our behavior.



**EVEN THOUGH DISRUPTIVE BEHAVIOR OFTEN WORKS ON A SHORT-TERM BASIS, THIS BEHAVIOR OFTEN CAUSES SERIOUS PROBLEMS FOR THE PERSON IN THE LONG RUN.**

Exclusion from programs, taking away rewards and other actions to change behavior usually make the individual more uncomfortable. Their response may be even more disruptive behavior. The pattern is seen clearly in the lives of many people with challenging behavior.



Can you think of an example of this pattern, that you have seen before?  
Worse yet, imagine what would happen if we focused on just changing the challenging behavior. Then, the person needs or wants something, and can't get the help they need!

**IMPLICATIONS FOR CHANGE IN OUR SERVICES**

Look back at the pattern in the diagram above. If we are able to help a person change his or her behavior, we should consider making changes in two major areas in the diagram above. First, we can try to decrease a person's exposure to situations that are confusing, frustrating, boring or frightening. Second, we can help them learn alternative behaviors that also work, but which are not disruptive, dangerous or confusing to others.

\*Wade Hitzing (1990)

**INTERACTIONAL FOCUS**

*Where does the problem exist?*

**YOU.....RELATIONSHIP.....PERSON**

*Other Variables:*

- *Environment*
- *People*
- *Activity*
- *Disruption/Newness of Activity*

**IDENTIFY FACTORS THAT INFLUENCE CHALLENGING BEHAVIOR**

Medical problems often are a significant variable in how a person behaves. Unfortunately, many individuals with severe medical conditions frequently have difficulty communicating their medical condition to staff. It is important when assessing behavior that staff always review possible medical factors affecting behavior. Staff must be familiar with an individual's case history, current medical conditions and medications. This information can serve as a guide in determining possible causes for a behavior. Staff need to watch for new behavior, changes in frequency, duration or intensity of old behaviors, or abrupt discontinuance of old behaviors. Some common examples are:

**BEHAVIOR**

injury to own face or head  
constant pacing  
inability to sleep

**POSSIBLE MEDICAL CONDITION**

toothache, ear infection  
back problem or sprain  
adverse reaction to medication

## **CONTROL OVER INDIVIDUAL CHOICES**

Another major variable that can determine a person's behavior is the degree of control they have over choices available to them on any given day. The importance of this seemingly simple idea cannot be overestimated.

By offering an individual the opportunity to make his/her own meaningful choices, the individual feels more of an equal partner with staff in making decisions. When we do not offer opportunities for people to make choices, the staff can be viewed as oppressive, authoritarian, or out of step with the needs of a particular individual. However, when a person is offered opportunities to make his/her own decisions and choices, they feel a sense of control over their life. Self-esteem rises and individuals are usually easier to get along with when treated as adults.

When evaluating behavior, staff need to consider whether there are opportunities for an individual to make choices. Can choices be offered to individuals throughout the day, or for specific activities or behaviors?

One problem area can be getting individuals to go to bed at a specific time. This problem is often resolved by letting the individual decide when to go to bed. Another common difficulty is when bath time will occur. Again, if an individual is allowed to choose when they will take their bath, or whether they will take a bath or shower, the problem of getting the person to take a bath disappears.

## **EVENTS OR CIRCUMSTANCES THAT MAY COME BEFORE CHALLENGING BEHAVIOR**

In this part, we will look at actions staff can take prior to a behavior being exhibited. These actions typically have the biggest impact on getting an individual to change behavior. Generally, there is not much staff can do after a behavior has occurred. Staff can also play a positive role if they analyze a situation before it becomes a problem. The benefits include thinking and deciding how to act, rather than being caught without knowing how to handle certain situations.

As a staff person, you will know the individuals you work with extremely well. Staff usually know what has preceded a behavior incident. Individuals can send indirect signals they are about to carry out a certain behavior. Those signals, though, may be difficult to understand.

For example, a person begins to pace around the room. This could indicate boredom, too much room noise, a medical problem, or that the individual just likes to pace. In understanding each individual under your care, you will learn the signals individuals use before serious behavior is shown.

In this instance, talk to other staff about an individual's pacing, and make a mental note of what happens if you do nothing, and consider offering the individual an alternative to pacing. You will soon know if pacing indicates the individual may be having a difficult time. Depending on what happens following the signal and how often and how long the signal lasts, your accurate reporting of the behavior and actions taken can help staff and the I-Team decide on possible interventions. The sooner you recognize the need to intervene, the more likely you are to succeed in changing a person's behavior. The situation is also less likely to become disruptive or destructive if you can recognize each individual's signals.

Below are **signals you may observe which may indicate a problem is about to occur -**

Pacing	Self-injury
Repeating things over and over again	Talking excessively
Yelling	Some signal that is usually unnoticed
Staying in the bedroom	Not wanting to go outside
Making faces	Rocking
Not talking or communicating	Refusing to participate
Crying	Any noticeable change in behavior

The list above is not complete. Only careful observation will reveal which signals are important for specific individuals.

Do not wait for a signal before interacting with an individual. By knowing the individuals you work with and being sensitive to their individual needs, you can help them plan their day. A good plan can help your day and theirs go more smoothly because they have had a role in the planning process, and you will be more sensitive to their needs that day. Later in this section, you will learn the mechanics of developing schedules and incorporating many opportunities for individual choices.

**A good plan is where you help an individual make a daily plan based on meaningful choices and activities. A good plan reduces the need for individuals to exhibit inappropriate behaviors.**

## **GOOD PLANS HELP STAFF AVOID PROBLEM BEHAVIORS**

Elaborate plans are sometimes necessary to cope with complex situations. However, staff can generally handle most situations if they understand the need to PLAN the day's activities. Staff need to rely on good individual program plans, rather than waiting for individuals to "signal" they have urgent needs.

Usually, staff are responsible for more than one individual. It may be necessary for staff to consider how more than one plan or schedule may be accommodated in a given period of time. Begin by ensuring each individual has a schedule or plan.

Some people may only choose and participate in a few activities during a day, while others may be able to schedule their activities with little or no assistance from staff. Staff may find it helpful to write down different schedules on paper and discuss these schedules at staff meetings. Success is mostly due to being organized and giving individuals opportunities to make their own plans. This allows for a much more relaxing environment for both clients and staff.

## **EVENTS OR CIRCUMSTANCES WHICH MAY FOLLOW CHALLENGING BEHAVIORS**

What happens before behavior occurs can be important in understanding why certain behaviors are exhibited. The same is true for understanding and dealing with situations after a behavior has occurred.

If you are able to read signals before behavior occurs, you may be able to prevent what happens after the behavior. This planning can help staff alter their interactions with individuals when similar situations develop in the future. Below is a listing of circumstances a staff person might observe after a behavior has occurred, and possible strategies staff might use if a behavior does occur. Remember - **ALL BEHAVIOR HAS A CAUSE.**

**CHANGE OF SCENE** - After behavior happens, other people may enter or leave the room. The individual exhibiting the behavior may leave the room. Staff may decide to take the person for a walk or a ride [hoping the behavior will not happen again].

**ATTENTION** - A behavior is often used to get others to pay attention, even if that attention is negative. Staff need to question whether attention to the individual increases each time the behavior occurs.

**AVOIDANCE** - Behavior is sometimes used to avoid doing a task, going to day program, school or job, or going for an outing. Staff should note if activities and outings are dropped after a behavior occurs.

**REWARD** - Individuals may receive rewards (coffee, pop, candy) after a behavior. Often, staff do this to get the person in "a good mood," so another behavior does not occur.

The above examples can help maintain challenging behavior, especially if there are few other positive interactions with others in the individual's life. Therefore, instead of waiting for a behavior to happen again, staff need to plan how to do things differently so individual needs are met.

Once a behavior has occurred, staff need to plan how to deal with the behavior, even if they do not fully understand why the behavior happened. The plan should be based on the assumption that our (staff) behavior will have the greatest impact on the individual's behavior. Thus, the following list in dealing with behaviors focuses on the teacher's behavior. Even when a problem occurs, you are still the person's teacher.

**REMAIN CALM** - Staff must communicate before, during and after the behavior that their presence represents safety and reward. Remaining calm takes practice. A good plan can help you learn to remain calm. If you are upset, the individual you are working with is likely to become upset as well.

**RE-DIRECT** - Staff need to re-direct the focus of the interaction to another activity or subject. Ignore the inappropriate behavior, but not the person.

**REWARD** - Reward should begin immediately. Do not wait for the person to calm down or engage in another activity. The individual should get the message you still value them as a person, even though they have just had a problem.

**RE-GROUP** - Think about what happened before, during and after the situation. Discuss the situation with other staff. Make a plan for how to interact with this individual in the future. What will you do differently?

### **Additional tips:**

- Keep it simple. The more complex the plan, the more difficult the plan will be to follow.
- Do not supervise! Interact with the individual. You are not their boss.
- Have a start and finish to activities. Many times individuals do not do well because they have no idea of what is expected of them.

## PROACTIVE OPTIONS \*

- ▶ **After reading this part, you will be able to select pro-active options in dealing with challenging behaviors, including:**
- **Recognizing times when teaching is not likely to occur, and having an alternate plan of action;**
- **Identifying precursors to challenging behavior; and**
- **Understanding how to respond effectively in handling challenging behavior.**

### **Outcome: Recognize that this is not an optimal time to teach.**

\* We may often push on with our teaching plan in spite of challenges that arise. This may result in a lack of alertness to minor changes in the learner's mood. Our focus may be more on the task instead of the person. We may feel some pressure to show results.

\* If we rely on teaching patterns of the past, we may think moving from the task activity means rewarding the learner's challenging behavior. **The challenging behavior is, however, a clear signal that we have to change something in our teaching plan. Failure to change may result in a different lesson than we intended.** Pressing on with the task can communicate that the task outweighs the value of the people involved. Failure to acknowledge needs of the learner can cause the challenging behavior to increase to a point where closure in a friendly, trusting atmosphere is impossible. Our failure to adapt may also be interpreted as an exercise in control over the learner. In our model, we do not exercise control over the learner. The learner is included in the planning process.

\* Without a framework for changes on-the-spot, we might respond to an energetic challenge with our emotions. When this happens, it is almost certain our posture will change from solidarity to an attitude that devalues the learner. Unless we make a serious effort to establish an accepting posture when challenging behavior is shown, we will react in an overprotective, authoritarian, cold and mechanistic way.

\* To avoid this type of reaction, **we must have a plan of action ready to implement.** If we know what challenges we will typically face on the job, we can plan our actions to handle inappropriate behaviors when they arise, and use our experience to improve future teaching sessions.

\*Adapted with permission from John McGee (1990) in  
Group Home Training in Teaching Technology, Macomb-Oakland Regional Center

## **PROACTIVE OPTIONS**

### **Outcome: Identify precursors to challenging behavior**

*Our definition of a precursor is "a sign that happens before a challenging behavior occurs to indicate the onset of the behavior."* This is our signal that something is changing in the attitude of the learner. Unfortunately, we may not recognize these signals readily. Even if we can clearly identify precursors when we are watching a teaching session, we may not be in the best position to recognize them when we are in the middle of one.

\* Part of our strategy is - "learn from experience." Videotape our actions, or ask an observer to notice the precursors we can't detect at close range.

\* A precursor may take the form of some active communication from the learner that his or her attitude toward the teaching is changed. That communication could be verbal, by gesture, or physical expression. The person's words may change with a change in feeling. The words could stay the same, while the tone, inflection or volume change. The facial expression could gradually shift. The learner could begin working faster or slower.

\* The learner's physical position or general bearing could relate the same thing. A precursor may also be hidden in an unconscious action that begins. Tapping, rocking, looking away periodically are all examples. These may indicate a change in mood, or that the learner is thinking about some unpleasant situation that just happened. Lastly, a precursor may be the disappearance of some action or expression in the learner. Each of these possibilities is some kind of change in what the learner is doing. We can easily miss these changes without being alert to every aspect of our teaching interaction.



## PROACTIVE OPTIONS

### Outcomes:

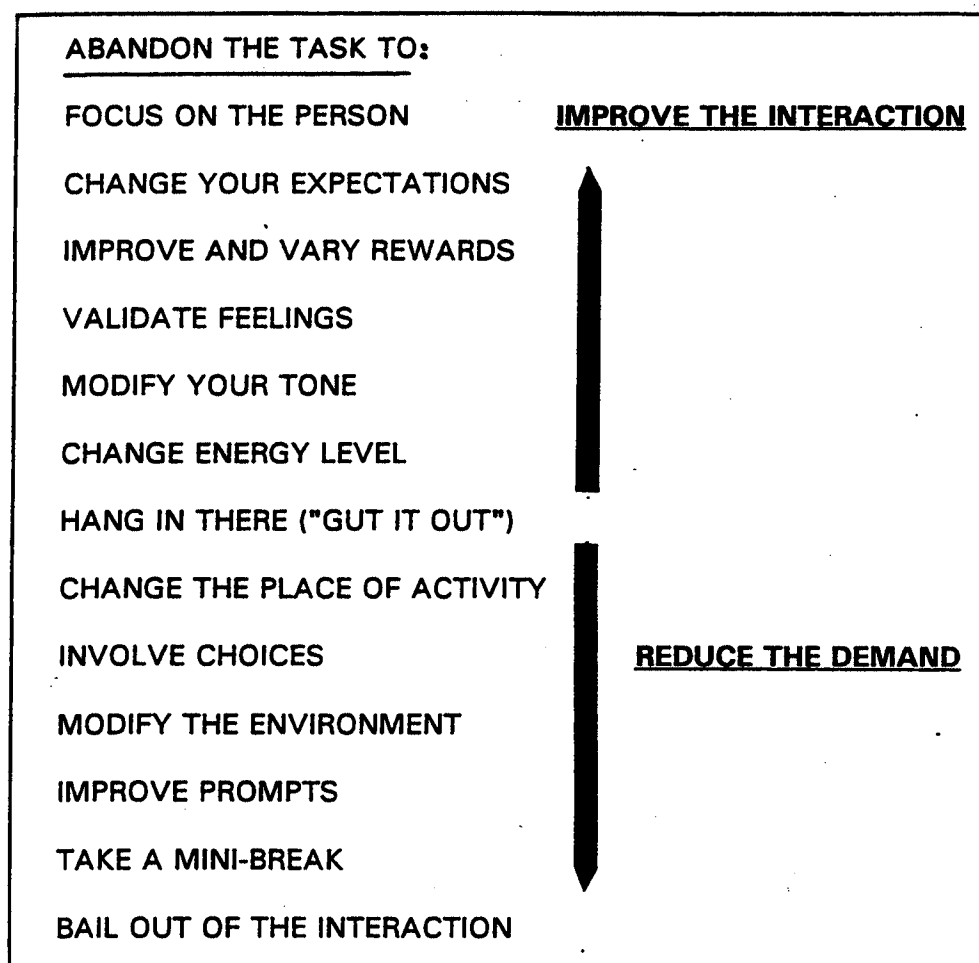
Identify potential responses to challenging behavior.

Maintain an interactional focus

Identify logical reentry points to teaching

Our responses to challenging behavior are listed below: The line serves only to separate our options into two types, with one more option centered between the two types. One category of response is to enhance the quality of interaction between the teacher and learner. The other is to reduce the level of demand on the learner. The option between these two is simply to "hang in there," or sweat through the challenge.

### Problem Solving:



We'll cover the options relating to the quality of interaction first:

**Change your energy level:** Increase or decrease the animation with which we are rewarding (and prompting) and find a level to draw the learner into participation. If the learner is not caught up in enthusiasm, an increase in vitality may spark that enthusiasm. If the person is already upset or is scared off by the volume or by more frenzied activity, we may have to tone things down to get nearer the person physically, as well as emotionally.

**Modify your tone:** This option is similar to the first. We may have to raise or lower the tone of voice to a level the learner recognizes as friendly, encouraging and supportive. Too high a tone of voice may be harsh to the learner; too low a tone of voice may relate the same lack of enthusiasm as physical lack of energy.

**Validate the learner's feelings:** In order to use this option effectively we have to identify the learner's feelings that caused the challenge. The more familiar you are with the learner on a personal basis, the greater the likelihood of recognizing those feelings. Additionally, validating the learner's feelings implies a big "BUT." That is - we recognize the feelings and their importance, but we can carry on. We legitimize the feelings and incorporate them into our shared interaction with the learner. For example, "I know you miss being with your friend. I miss my other friends, too. BUT, you and I can have a good time doing this together!"

**Improve and vary rewards:** And remember - interaction between teacher and learner makes the learning occur, and the trust, mutual respect and liking for one another grow from this interaction.

**Change your expectations:** Sometimes we may look for more interaction and more enthusiastic reciprocation of reward from the learner than he or she is prepared to give. Here, we assume more responsibility for rewarding ourselves, as well as the learner. For now, we ask for less back, and look for less back from the learner.

**Abandon the task to focus on the person:** The person is "what it's all about." There may come a point where it is better for the teacher just to toss the task out and just "hang out" with the learner. The new "task" becomes learning to be close to that person.

The other category of options reduces demand on the learner, and de-emphasizes the task activity. Any of these options may enhance the quality of interaction with less time and effort being spent on the task to be done.

**Change the pace of activity:** If we are moving too quickly through the steps or with our prompts, we may be the cause of agitation. The slower we go through the activity, the longer we spend interacting. Going too slow, on the other hand, may not provide the person with enough activity. "Keeping the flow going" from our structure of teaching requires a delicate balance.

**Involve choices:** In using choices as a strategy for getting past challenging behavior, we have to look for aspects of the activity that lend themselves to learner options. Where shall we sit? Which piece first? Do the task for five minutes or six minutes?

**Modify the environment:** What is distracting in the learning area for us may not be so for the learner. Conversely, distractions to the learner may be physical elements of the room, or people, or environmental factors like light, temperature, humidity, textures of the chairs, table, and activity pieces.

**Improve the Prompts:** Our prompts can lead the learner to success with few or no errors. If challenging behavior gets in the way, we can use more specific prompts. This reduces demand on the learner by making the learner less responsible for the successful outcome.

**Take a mini-break:** This option accomplishes an effect similar to "abandoning the task" under our "interaction improvement" category. Taking a break lets the learner (and the teacher) have a change of pace from the activity for the moment. The focus can be on the individual, or another activity.

**Bail Out:** When all else fails, this option remains. If the challenge is not relieved by any other option, we can back out gracefully and the upset learner calm down. Nothing is gained for the present or future when we insist on finishing no matter what. Our interaction with the person doesn't necessarily end entirely, but we back off and give the learner some space. Then we look at what happened, what we learned from this episode, and how we can apply that learning next time. Our optimism is based on continual improvement in our relationship with the individual, rather than on task success.

**Hang in There:** Our last option is the opposite of "bailing out" and "abandoning the task to focus on the person." The option of simply "hanging in there" means to see the person through the difficulty. With great familiarity, we may have a good feel for how long and how far the challenge will go before it subsides. We can be looking for those precursors to a subsiding challenge. And when we see the faintest hints of a return to participation, we can be ready with a delicately-placed reward: a. a smile b. words of encouragement c. having a cup of coffee or a snack together

Although we have covered our formal options in working past interactional challenges, we haven't yet discussed how to apply those options. In each teaching event, we can do no more than rely on our experience and that of others. We have to turn those experiences into a formal part of our plan for teaching.

- **When challenging behavior occurs during teaching, we must choose one of the following strategies:**
  - **avert and diffuse the challenge;**
  - **work through the challenge;**
  - **stop the teaching in the midst of the challenge; or**
  - **bail out of the interaction before the challenge escalates (see Figure 3).**

### ***Averting and diffusing the challenge:***

We may get past the challenge successfully, diffusing the anger, frustration or fear. When this occurs, we have successfully recognized the need the learner is experiencing, and done something valuable about that need. We can honestly admit that sometimes this happens because we had a good plan beforehand and we put it to use. Sometimes, we succeed on the spot and learn the best response as we go along. Other times, we just avert the problem without knowing for sure how we did it. It may have been intuition, or luck, or the initiation of the learner without our intervention.

### ***Work through the challenge:***

We may go through the brunt of the challenge and still be with the person as he or she calms. In this case, we have to express extreme sensitivity to the person and gently proceed with the interaction to prevent a "U-turn" back to the challenge. If we get through the worst of the challenge successfully, we have gained a wealth of information for use in planning future interactions with the learner. A coach in the background can be very helpful in encouraging us to continue when we are not in the best position to see approaching success.

### ***Terminate teaching in the midst of challenge:***

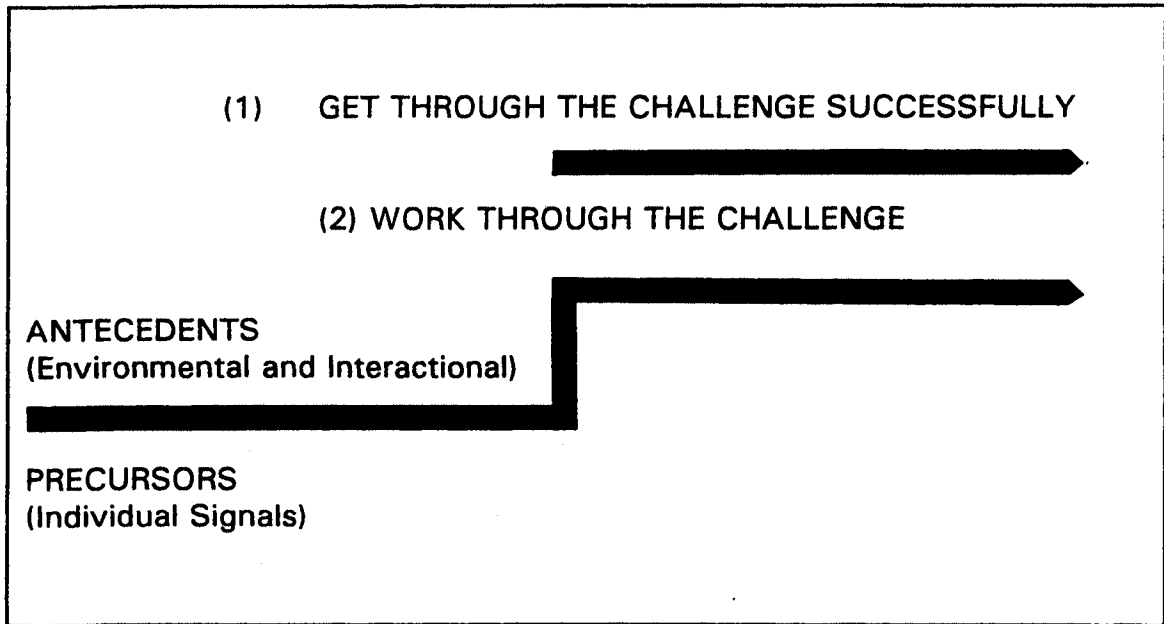
We may get in the middle of a challenge and have no other recourse than to terminate the interaction. This is a judgment call in keeping the focus positive and on the learner. A coach in the background can help us to decide whether the situation calls for terminating the task during a challenge.

### ***Bail out of the challenge before it develops or escalates:***

This may be our best alternative, based on our experience with and recognition of problem situations, or precursors. We have to be honest with ourselves as well when we follow this last alternative, recognizing this may be our own response to fear, frustration, anger or diminishing resources.

## PLAN FOR SUCCESS

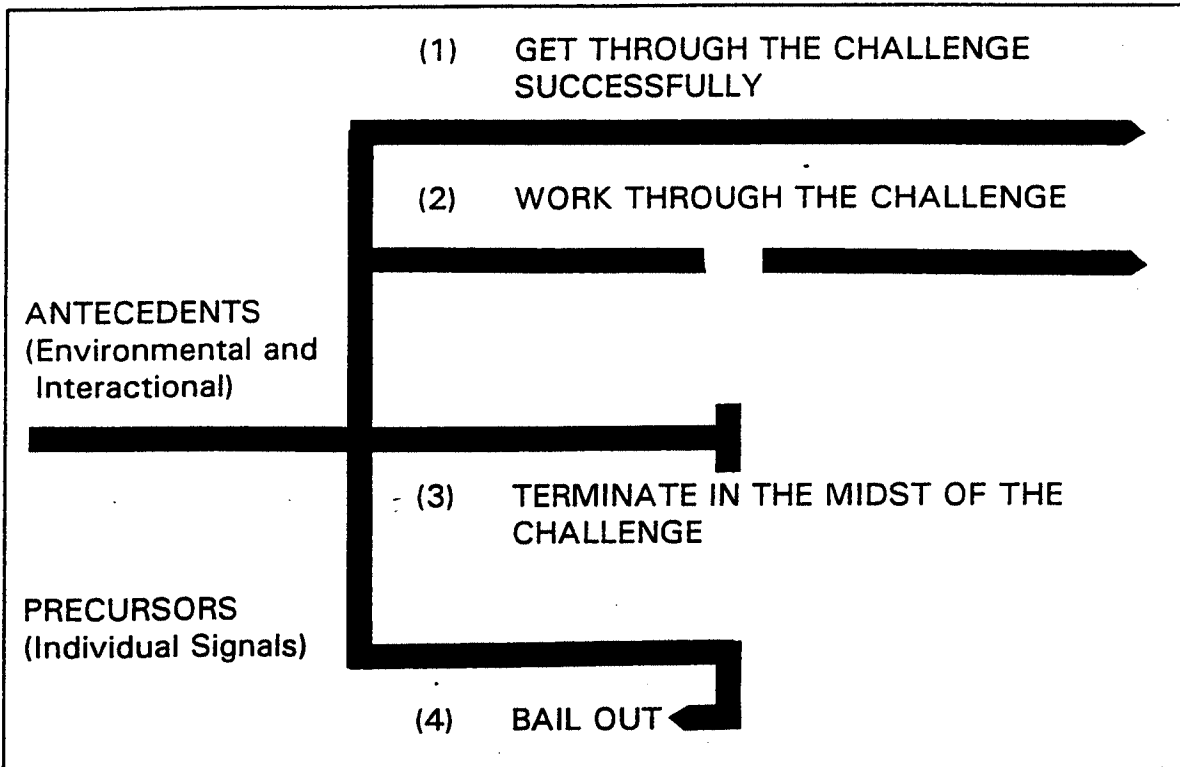
In planning for success in our next interaction with the same learner, we have to learn from experience. We should consider the following approaches, now based on our experience:



Planning our Teaching Outcomes for the Future

**How** are we going to deflect or defuse the challenge before it arises? **What** did we learn from identifying precursors that will allow us to recognize and address the learner's needs before challenging behavior becomes necessary? If we find ourselves in the middle of a severe challenge, what have we found out about interacting with this person? What have we discovered about the learner's tolerance of demand that will help us turn the situation around, calm the room down and get on with the task?

Under no circumstances will we plan in advance to quit in the face of a severe challenge. When we arrive at that next encounter, it may work out that way and be the best action to take. But our goal should not be to quit in the midst of a challenge. Our plan has to be for successful intervention.



Outcomes When Faced with Challenging Behavior

## **PROACTIVE OPTIONS**

### **Outcome: Interrupt only when safety becomes an issue**

We need to make brief mention of the risk of harm. Our plan is not to allow a challenge to go unchecked to the extent that injury results. We cannot allow the person to cause serious harm to themselves, or others.

When self-injuring activity starts, we have to block the blows as unobtrusively as possible, while using our best options for calming the situation as quickly as possible. If we note imminent precursors of physical threat in challenging behavior, we immediately pursue those options which offer the best likelihood of preventing physical challenges. As much as possible, we must try to anticipate this behavior in advance and plan our responses. If we know actively aggressive challenging behavior is likely to be a real possibility, we have to have a realistic game plan ready. We will be discussing examples of how to deal with challenging behavior in the next section.

# **INTERACTIONAL CHALLENGES**

**AGGRESSIVE**

**UNDESIRABLE/NON-AGGRESSIVE  
(DISTANCING)**

**DISTRACTING**

## **DEALING WITH THE DIFFICULT CHALLENGES**

This section deals with those challenges that really bring the teaching session to a halt. These challenges are so energetic, or emphatic, or insistent that we cannot follow through on our teaching plan without some significant changes. We expect these challenges to fall in the aggressive or distancing categories. The changes we discuss below are some of the possibilities we have for helping the person past the challenge this time, and planning for prevention next time.

Our last point deals with problem-solving strategies introduced in previous sections. Some of those strategies are:

- **Increase rewards;**
- **Simplify or change the task;**
- **Modify the environment.**

We'll look at these in more detail and add more specific options. The options we present provide the structure needed to help someone through an immediate challenge and devise a plan for prevention.

Increasing sincere rewards may be the solution when a person does not enjoy the activity, or if the learner has not learned to like and get along with the teacher.

Changing prompts is effective when the learner does not understand what to do, or is doing the step differently from the program plan (i.e., not "successfully"). Changing the task or



simplifying the steps becomes necessary when the learner cannot reach success and reward within the initial structure of the task. This strategy might also be tried when changing prompts does not work. Modifying the environment can remove distractions so the learner's attention stays with the teacher and the interaction.

If you have had previous success with the learner, but are not seeing success now, you may just wait quietly and patiently. This method is for the learner to recognize that reward occurs within the framework of the interaction, and not from "doing one's own thing." If you use the "wait it out" method, it is very important to immediately reward any small movement of the learner back toward participation. These problem-solving methods can be used independently of each other, or in various combinations.

## **PROBLEM-SOLVING**

**INCREASE REWARDS**  
(Number, Type, Intensity)

**CHANGE PROMPTS**  
(Effective Prompt: One Which Brings About Participation  
and Reward)

**LOOK AT THE TASK OR ENVIRONMENT**  
(Simplify the task. Change the task. Remove distractions.)

**WAIT OUT THE DIFFICULTY**  
(Be patient and communicate both acceptance and expectation)

**DON'T BLAME THE LEARNER - OR YOURSELF.**  
(Be objective, but remain involved. Learn from the outcomes of the  
interaction)

**DON'T GIVE UP!**  
(Try, try again!)

## PROACTIVE OPTIONS

### Glossary:

- ANTECEDENT:** Any occurrence or event that happens before a behavior takes place.
- BEHAVIOR:** The way a person acts; what a person does; actions. All actions must be (a) observable; and (b) measurable.
- CHALLENGING BEHAVIOR:** Any action taken by the learner that calls for a unique effort or dedication on the part of the teacher. EXAMPLE: People who do not respond to conversation, or who harm themselves, others or property.
- CON-FRONTATION** Any exchange of words or actions in a bold, defiant or angry manner.
- CONFRONTATION AVOIDANCE TECHNIQUES:** Methods for keeping an angry exchange of words from becoming unmanageable. EXAMPLE: Staying at eye level; remaining calm; talking in a low, calm voice; not demanding, commanding or disagreeing.
- DIALOGUE:** A communication of feelings and acceptance. Genuine physical, verbal and gestural expressions are made with the intention (plan) of creating an equal and sharing relationship. An apparent casual discussion that has a purpose and a goal.
- FADING:** Gradually decreasing the teacher's assistance (prompts, rewards, presence, environmental control) when it is no longer needed to maintain learning.
- FOCUS:** The center of an activity or attention. The real purpose of an activity. The FOCUS is on interaction.
- GOAL:** A written statement that describes the desired learning, resulting from a program plan.
- IMPLEMENT:** To carry out, or put into action the steps of a program plan.

- INTERDEPENDENCE:** To rely on each other for support, help, encouragement and participation.
- INTERRUPT:** To make a break in an event, to stop, or hinder an action.
- MINI-BREAK:** A very small, very short stop in an activity. To be used as a point to regain the focus and strengthen the bonds of the relationship.
- PARTICIPATION:** Taking a part, or sharing with others in some activity.
- POSTURE:** The different ways in which attitudes are communicated; facial expressions, physical position, tone of voice, things said and not said, things we do and choose not to do.
- PRECURSOR:** A sign that happens before a challenging behavior occurs to indicate the onset of the behavior.
- PROACTIVE:** Taking steps or actions to influence behavior toward a preferred outcome.

# CONFRONTATION AVOIDANCE TECHNIQUES (C.A.T.)\*

- ▶ **After reading this part, you will be able to:**
  - **Identify reasons for challenging behavior;**
  - **Be able to use techniques that avoid confronting, challenging behavior;**
  - **Have a better understanding of how to deal with individuals who are likely to show challenging behavior; and**
  - **Understand how to relax in stressful situations.**

## Challenging Behavior

When people become agitated, there is always a cause for the agitation, and the agitation is likely to increase if a solution is not found to effectively deal with the person's agitation. The agitated person may or may not be aware of what is causing the agitation. As a staff person, you may or may not be able to determine the cause. If you can find out the cause of the agitation, you will have a better chance of helping the person deal with his/her behavior.

***In most cases, a very agitated person is acting out of fear, frustration, anger of physical causes.***

**Fear:** brought about by the expectation of danger that is real or imagined, or actual pain. An individual may also be afraid in unfamiliar situations. Signs of Fear: The person may react to fear by withdrawing, becoming quiet or backing away from the situation. Or, they may make an exaggerated, loud display, such as verbal threats, posturing, shaking fists and the like. They will also try to maintain a safe distance from whatever is causing their fear.

**Staff Role:** It is important in dealing with an individual acting out of fear to give the person physical and psychological room. If a person is challenged and forced into a corner, physically or psychologically, he or she is likely to strike out in self-defense. Your role is to provide support and reassurance to the person. By getting the person to talk, you may be able to find out the basis of their fear. If verbal threats and posturing are defensive, give the person space and do not over-react.

\*Adapted from William Ditman (1984) in Group Home Curriculum: Participants Manual  
Michigan Dept. Of Mental Health

**Frustration:** typically the result of being prevented from accomplishing a goal or objective, or from not having a specific need met.

Signs of frustration are: impatience, verbal signs of agitation (swearing, self-degrading statements like "I can't do anything right!"), making demands. Frustration may change to anger if not dealt with effectively.

**Staff Role:** When dealing with a person acting out of frustration, one must be cautious and try to determine what the person needs, or where their basis of frustration lies. If the need is within reason, you may be able to help the person meet that need and avoid confrontation. Listen and be supportive. Help the individual state their feelings of frustration.

**Anger:** a feeling of extreme hostility or exasperation toward someone or something. Anger is usually caused by pain - either physical or psychological, and is a striking out at the source of the pain.

Signs of anger are: flushed or red face and neck area; enlarged veins in the neck and forearms; loud verbal threats and swearing; moving toward or striking out at persons or things nearby.

**Staff Role:** When an agitated person displays signs of anger, it is important to let the person know that feeling angry is OK. The focus needs to be on the way anger is expressed and dealt with. Help the person identify the anger and ways of dealing with the anger. If the level of agitation increases, it is necessary to set clear behavioral limits. Specify what outcomes are expected. Then, let the person choose how to achieve that outcome. If you confront or challenge an angry person, he/she is likely to become even more agitated.

## **AVOIDING RESISTANCE**

**COMPROMISE:** Shared participation and support

### **A BALANCED FOCUS ON TASK AND RELATIONSHIP**

- \* Use primarily physical prompts and assistance to shape involvement and fade assistance.
- \* Use eye contact, facial expression, words and touch to express respect, support and fairness.
- \* Teach the reciprocation of valuing.

**Confrontation Avoidance Techniques (C.A.T.)** is a common sense method to calm down an agitated person before he/she acts out. These techniques also help you deal with high stress situations - situations which are upsetting, yet require you to be calm and supportive in your responses.

If confrontations are to be avoided, you must avoid them. Avoiding confrontations is the staff's responsibility. If the person could avoid such confrontations, he/she would not be living in a residential community. As the adult in control, you are responsible for facing an agitated individual and calming that person down. Every confrontation is potentially dangerous - to you, other staff members, the client and others in the residential community. One of the ways to achieve calm in a potentially dangerous situation is to make the following changes in your behavior:

## CHANGES WE MAKE

### BE MORE

Supportive

Accepting

Tolerant, Empathic

Co-Participatory

Guiding/Directive  
"Let's..."

Flexible

Empowering

A Friend Showing  
Mutual Respect

### AND LESS

Controlling

Contingent

Judgmental

Verbally Directive

Questioning  
"Do you want?"

Rigid

Dominating

"Staff" in Position  
of Authority

## Know the Person You Work With

Success in avoiding a confrontation depends, in part, on how much you know about the individual. You must learn to recognize early signs of a possible outburst:

**(1) Watching the person carefully.** What things upset him/her? Each person is an individual, and early warning signs of agitation will differ from person to person.

**(2) Recognize potential problems - read the person's record.** Know the individual's plan and the special programs they are involved in. Know how the individual has behaved in the past, and what actions have triggered agitated behavior. Be alert in the client record to actions taken in the past that calmed the individual down.

**(3) Success in avoiding a confrontation depends on how you feel and respond.** People sense if you do not like them, and you will be a likely target for any upset. To avoid this, you must have a sincere desire to support the person. That means being **fair**, but **firm**.

If you are a new staff person, or working in a different home, there will be times when you are around clients with whom you are less familiar. Under such circumstances, you must use the lessons from this module and good common sense in watching for situations of potential problems:

- **Watch for signs of agitation** (persons talking loudly, moving about a lot, pacing)
- **Watch for signs of passiveness or withdrawal.** This may be one of the first signs of agitation.
- **Rely on your own intuition.** When you sense a confrontation may be coming, *use your training* in avoidance techniques to head off the confrontation.

### **STRATEGIES: FIND A BALANCE**

- \* **Simplify the activity.**
- \* **Do the task WITH the person.**
- \* **Help the individual be successful in doing the task.**
- \* **Save your interactions for value-sharing.**

## **What To Do When Agitation Is Just Beginning**

At the first sign of agitation, talk to the individual. Be calm in your approach and speak calmly by lowering the pitch and tone of your voice. Speak slowly and clearly so the individual will hear you clearly. At this point, it does not matter if the individual can talk or understand all that you say.

If you can discover and solve the problem, do so. If not, continue to talk to the individual until he/she begins to calm down. A little tender loving care goes a long way in resolving situations of agitation.

Be sure you are at eye level with the individual. If the person is standing, invite him/her to sit down. Don't order the person to sit, or usher him/her to a seat. Sit down at the same time so your intentions are clear. You want to communicate that you are with the person. If this occurs, this is the first step toward successfully avoiding a confrontation.



If the individual does not respond to your invitation to sit down, remain standing and keep talking. Continue until the situation calms down and you can get the individual involved in another activity. Let the individual know by your actions that you are not going to leave. Let the individual know you intend to see him/her through the situation. **Remain calm and friendly and keep your voice down.**

Here's a potential confrontation in the family room. You are playing pool with an individual when suddenly his mood changes and he becomes agitated. When you ask him what the problem is, he responds: "I hate this damn game. Everybody always beats me. I'm a loser." You do not want to reinforce these feelings. If the individual is not to the point of anger, you could respond: "Dan, you are upset. You feel like a loser. It's hard when you don't win. Could we talk some more about how you are feeling?"

### **It is important to show concern and not argue.**

Suppose he indicates he is upset because his parents didn't visit. You might respond: "It's really upsetting when you want and expect something, and it doesn't happen, isn't it? Would you like to talk about it?"

Throughout your talk, don't promise anything you can't deliver, and don't bribe the individual by saying things like: "If you calm down, I'll give you a piece of cake."

When you notice the individual is calming down, **get him involved in another activity. Don't leave him until his attention has been directed away from his own anger.**

If the individual's behavior continues to get worse, **relax. Time is on your side. You are being successful - just continue talking until the individual becomes more calm.**

**To avoid a confrontation, you must control the situation.** How do you do this? The only person you can actually control is you - your behavior, your expression, your feelings. ***If you control yourself, you control the situation.*** If you are calm and appear calm, those around you feel your calming influence. If your voice starts to rise and you begin to look nervous or frightened, you give control to the agitated person.

<p><b>Controlling your own behavior, expression and feelings is the key to successfully avoiding a confrontation! This approach works on the job, at home, in everyday situations. This approach works with the individuals you are serving.</b></p>
--

If you use these techniques correctly, you will rarely become involved in a confrontation. If you find you've waited too long to intervene in a situation, or you come upon an individual who is already agitated, there are techniques to use in these situations.

## What To Do When Agitation Is Increasing

Suppose you come upon a person whose agitation is mounting, or who you believe is about to attack. What do you do?

Again, speak in a low, calm voice. Remove all expression from your face and body. **Assume a poker face and show no emotion.** You must appear to be matter-of-fact. You must not appear friendly, or happy, or sad, or angry, or scared. Any show of emotion at this point may cause an attack. Relax your whole body.

Continue to talk in a low voice - low pitch and low volume. What you say must be very matter-of-fact and emotionless. **Do not argue. Do not command. Do not demand. Do not disagree. Be respectful.** The person is feeling badly, and you must respect those feelings.

Listen carefully to what the person is saying - respond to the problem, not the words. Statements such as: "I know you have a problem," or "I hear and see you are angry" are good responses when said in a matter-of-fact way.

**Continue to talk and listen and wait.** Stay in there with the individual. Stay calm and you will succeed. If you turn to leave or lose your calm, you may be attacked. Be patient. Time is always on your side.

It is important to choose your ground very carefully. There is a correct place for you to be in relation to the agitated individual. **Stand slightly to the side in a face-to-face position.** The distance should be such that if the individual extends his/her arm, your shoulder will be about two inches beyond the person's outstretched fingers. If you stand closer, you could come in contact with the person's fists. A slight step backward and you can avoid being kicked. In the position described above, you will usually be able to avoid any threatening moves if the individual's agitation worsens.

**Be careful not to corner the person.** Look out for walls and furniture. Stand where the person can escape if he/she wishes. If the person has to make the slightest move toward you before escaping, he/she may feel trapped and attack. Let the individual escape if they want to. If the individual escapes, the incident is probably over. You should, however, continue to monitor the individual's behavior to make sure he/she is calming down.

**Don't corner the person psychologically.** If you trap the person into something he/she doesn't want to say or do, the person may still feel cornered. This increases the chance of a confrontation. Cornering any person who is agitated, angry or scared is highly dangerous. Don't do it on purpose or accidentally.

## How To Relax In Stressful Situations

Learning how to relax is the key to keeping calm in a stressful situation. When we are under stress, we tense up certain muscle sets:

- Forearm
- Upper arm
- Shoulder
- Neck (2 ways)
- Face (14 sets)
- Tongue
- Chest
- Stomach

**When these muscle sets are tensed, we begin to lose control.** These sets are made up of muscles that pull in opposite directions. When you tense up, you flex each side of the set equally so no movement results. If you must make a quick, evasive move, you must move against your own muscles! It's much safer to be relaxed because you can move quickly.

To learn what a relaxed muscle feels like, make a tight fist. Squeeze your fist as tightly as you can. Don't let up until your forearm is aching. When you can't stand making a fist any longer, put your arm down at your side and let it relax. Pay attention to what you feel in your forearm. This is what a relaxing muscle feels like.

The next time you get in a heated argument or feel very frustrated or angry, look at yourself in a mirror. What you see is what others see when you are tense. Now relax. Look in the mirror and make a conscious effort to relax your face. Watch the change and feel the change as it occurs. To identify what muscles tense up in your face, look at where the wrinkles are. After you have relaxed your facial muscles, close your eyes and use your mind to feel the muscle sets of your body. **Identify which muscles are tense and make a conscious effort to relax them.**

Now you know which muscles you unconsciously flex when you are tense. Keep those muscles relaxed. Never let them tense up automatically. Your stomach muscle may be tense to protect your belly - but tense this muscle slowly and deliberately.

**The most effective way to relax under stress is to talk to yourself.** This can and should be done even in the heat of confrontation. As you talk to an individual, ask yourself: Is my voice low? Is my body relaxed? Is my face relaxed? Is my concern appropriate in this situation and am I showing it? Am I being polite and matter-of-fact? Am I standing in the right place? Does the individual have an avenue of escape? Be sure to answer these questions. This self-talk is an important part of avoiding confrontations.

**You know avoiding a confrontation is your responsibility.** You know how you feel and how you behave are important. You know you must learn as much about an individual as possible. You know **the key to success is your control** over the situation. **This control means control of your emotions, actions, voice and muscles.**

## When to Use C.A.T.

C.A.T. is considered standard procedure unless there is a program written for an individual that applies when he/she displays agitated behavior. **C.A.T. is a generalized response method to be used if there is no individual program in the person's record.**

When you use C.A.T. correctly, you won't need to physically manage or restrain an agitated person. You will avoid confrontations and the atmosphere will be better for everyone.

### **DOES C.A.T. WORK?**

### **CAN YOU MAKE C.A.T. WORK?**

**C.A.T. works. It's common sense!**

### **REQUIREMENTS:**

**Patience**

**Commitment**

**Feedback/Adjustments**

**Emotional Support/  
Encouragement**

**Confidence**

**Time**

## **POSITIVE BEHAVIOR SUPPORT PLANS FOR SEVERE BEHAVIOR CHALLENGES \***

- ▶ **After reading this part, you will:**
  - **Know how to develop a positive behavior support plan;**
  - **Be able to identify circumstances that contribute to challenging behavior;**
  - **Apply the A-B-C Formula for understanding the purpose or function of a person's behavior;**
  - **Be able to perform a variety of assessments that can help the I-Team develop teaching plans to replace challenging behaviors with positive behaviors that also meet the individual's needs;**
  - **Know how to use reinforcement in an overall plan to address challenging behavior, in the context of an improved lifestyle;**
  - **Be able to carry out direct strategies to prevent or reduce the impact of challenging situations.**

You have been learning many effective positive teaching strategies, and ways to prevent and deal with challenging behavior in the teaching situation. You have also been learning how to prevent or avoid confrontation in potentially threatening situations. These skills will help you deal with most of the situations you face.

However, a few people we work with face severe behavior challenges. People with this kind of severe behavior require a comprehensive positive behavior support plan. These supports may focus on lifestyle changes, changes in the immediate antecedents/triggers of severe behavior, hypothesis testing, skills development, changes in the consequences of challenging behavior, reactive strategies, and long-term support strategies. All will be necessary for long-term success, and must take place in a socially-enriched, positive, supportive atmosphere.

\*Adapted from Anderson et. al.

## **SUMMARY OF KEY STEPS IN A POSITIVE BEHAVIOR SUPPORT PLAN:**

1. **Begin by forming a support team.** This team should include key people in the person's life: family members, direct care staff, teachers, key persons from the work setting, and key professional staff. The team should share information about all aspects of the person's life. They should also be present to carry out the plan in every setting. They need to be in a position to know if the plan is working, needs fine-tuning, or major change. The team also should be able to see the person's strengths and capacities, and be able to picture a future, based on those strengths.
2. **Define the severe behavior(s) as clearly as possible** and collect information on where, how often, and when the severe behavior occurs. Note any high or low risk times for the challenging behavior.
3. **Implement supports as needed while gathering information about the behavior.** Find new ways of praising the individual and giving positive feedback when positive behavior is demonstrated. Enhance freedom of choice and integrate school, home and work activities. Find out what the individual likes and dislikes. At high risk times when challenging behavior is most likely, avoid asking too much of the person. Or, find another activity or place where the challenging behavior is less likely to develop. Following these guidelines make it less likely a crisis will develop, and more likely we can continue to develop a comprehensive support plan.
4. **Begin the process of comprehensive assessment.** Describe the learner and where he/she lives and spends most of his/her time. **Begin to take note of the overall quality of the person's life.** What is the degree of their participation in their community.? Do they have friends outside the residential community? Do they have hobbies they enjoy? Do they like their work or school? What are they good at? What things are most important for them to learn?
5. **Conduct a functional assessment** to identify when behaviors occur and why, and what purpose the behavior may serve for the individual.
6. **Find out what the information you gathered means.** Rule out or resolve illness, pain, or other medical problems as causes for the behavior. What things trigger the behavior? What seems to interrupt the behavior? Why does the individual display the behavior? What can be done or taught so the behavior becomes unnecessary?
7. **Continue gathering information to (evaluate)** and make sure the steps taken have a positive impact on the behavior and overall quality of the person's life. Begin to view success as the overall improvements in the person's life, and not whether challenging behavior ever occurs.

8. **Design a response plan based on what we think is the purpose or function the behavior serves.** The plan needs to address changes needed to reduce the occurrence of challenging behavior. The plan should note the conditions present before or during the behavior, and what happens after the behavior occurs. What specific skills need to be taught to make the behavior unnecessary? What changes need to be made in the environment or schedule?

When making a support plan, we need to teach skills and or provide adaptations to allow the individual to exercise more independence, and to express him/herself in a way that allows others to respond positively. We also need to plan for situations that get out of hand, and know how to address those situations in a safe, positive, beneficial way.

9. **We need to have checkpoints to be sure the plan is working.** An individual's plan can always be changed. Goals need to be written so the individual can realistically meet objectives, while taking into account the individual's own preferences.
10. **We need to make sure the gains achieved by our positive support plan do not stop after the challenging behavior decreases.** Changing challenging behavior is never a quick or simple process. Challenging behaviors will start again if we don't provide the long-term support needed to continue an individual's progress. This can mean coming up with adaptations for the person to gain greater control or independence in their life. This can also mean allowing the individual greater involvement in setting their own goals and becoming involved in their communities.

## **HOW TO DEVELOP A SUCCESSFUL SUPPORT PLAN:**

Programs which seek to reduce or eliminate a behavior rarely succeed unless the person is given another reliable way of meeting their need without undesired behavior being expressed. No one single approach can be expected to succeed with everyone. Only an approach which takes into account each individual's strengths, needs, and preferences - an approach which focuses on the whole person and the circumstances in which they live - stands a reasonable chance of success.

We need to examine or assess the whole person in situations where they live and work, and find out what factors contribute to their challenging behavior. There are many assessment tools we may use - answering questions in a meeting, recording what you see a person do and when they do it, filling out a chart or checklist. Whatever the method, this is an essential part of the process. And, you are an essential part of the team. During this training, you will have a chance to use some of these assessment tools.

# ASSESSMENT

*How do we figure out the purpose or function a behavior serves? How do we figure out enough about the person to develop a successful plan? You learned about the term assessment when the concept of active treatment was discussed. There are many kinds of assessment that can identify successful strategies to address challenging behavior. You may be asked to participate in one or more of the following kinds of assessments as part of a behavioral support team.*

## **Quality of Life**

We begin the process of building positive behavioral support by looking at the present with an eye toward the future. What are the things you value in your own life?

- Where you live
- Having a supportive family
- Having good friends
- Doing activities in your community
- Being independent and in control of one's own life
- Having choices about where you work, live, play and who you choose to be with
- Not being bored; having a variety of things to do, places to go and people to see.
- Feeling secure that your basic needs will be met, and that you can expect certain things to happen on a routine basis, and to share space with a certain core group of people.

Now think about the people we work with - especially someone who often exhibits challenging behavior. How much choice do they have over things that happen in their everyday lives? Did they choose where they live, who they live with, who their roommate is, whether to live with others, where they work, what kind of job or career they have? Do they plan when they will get up, when to bathe or shower, what to eat? Do they choose how to spend their free time? Do they get to spend as much time as they choose with their family, to take part in regular community activities, to have friends outside their home?

## **Lifestyle Assessment**

As part of a team working on a behavioral support plan, you may be asked a number of questions about someone you work with, or be asked to complete a form or list which covers some of the areas just described. By gathering this kind of information about a person's lifestyle, and trying to measure their *quality of life*, we can begin to think about how to improve things for the person. We can plan how to give them greater choice or control over their own lives and the ability to meet their own needs.



By measuring the person's quality of life now, we can begin to plan for the future. We can think about how to support a future for the person, based on their preferences and things they do well. This is the start of a personal future plan--a key part of the positive behavioral support process. This might also help us figure out some things to change right away.

What does this have to do with challenging behavior? Just think - if other people always told you what you had to do, where to live, when to take a bath, maybe even when to go to the bathroom...wouldn't you try to figure out how to get some control over your life? Might you take your frustration out on someone near you? Or on yourself?!!!

So if a person is displaying challenging behavior, we need to figure out what important things might be missing in their lives. What needs are not being met? What choices or decisions are they not being allowed to make?

## **The Setting**

You may be asked some questions, (or to fill out a form or list) about the setting that a person lives in.

- Is it quiet or noisy?
- Do they get along with housemates or roommates?
- What is their daily schedule like?
- How do they get to work or school?
- Does the person seem to like home, work, or school?
- Does the person seem to do especially well at certain activities, or in certain places?

All of this information is important in the planning process.

## **WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OR FUNCTION OF THE BEHAVIOR?**

This is a very important question. If we try to help someone change their behavior without knowing what is behind their challenging behavior, we probably won't be very successful. At least, not for long. If the behavior serves an important purpose for the individual - getting attention, getting out of an uncomfortable situation, or communicating fear, anger or frustration - we need to teach or provide the person a positive new behavior that meets their need. Even if we are successful in getting them to stop their challenging behavior through some type of behavior management, they will eventually go back to their challenging behavior unless they have learned a more successful way of meeting their need. Teaching new behaviors that meets individual needs provides a "win-win" situation for all - the person's needs are met and self-esteem improves, and the challenging behavior ceases.

So how do we figure out the purpose or function of a behavior? We start with the "A", "B," "C's".

A is for Antecedent --

which means an event or condition that happens before the behavior.

B is for Behavior--

which refers to the target behavior you are watching and recording. It must be defined in a way that is observable (you can see it) and measurable (you can count or measure it).

C is for Consequence--

which refers to what happens following the behavior, or as a result of the behavior.

So, if we want to figure out why a target (challenging) behavior is occurring, we begin by writing down the A, B, C's on a chart like this one:

<u>ANTECEDENT</u>	<u>BEHAVIOR</u>	<u>CONSEQUENCE</u>
You write down what happened before you saw the behavior. What was person doing? Who were they with?	You describe behavior	You describe what happens just after or as result of the behavior?
<hr/>		
<p>**Like the alphabet, the A, B, C's of behavior are just the <u>beginning</u> of finding out the purpose or function of behavior. There will be other kinds of questions asked of you and other kinds of assessment forms to complete before we are through. When you are shown how to complete these forms, it may be helpful to select an individual you work with, and try to understand the ABCS's of their behavior.</p>		

## **ASSESSING BEHAVIOR AS COMMUNICATION**

*Recognize that challenging behavior may be a form of communication, especially for those with limited communication skills.*

Many individuals with challenging behavior try to tell us something is wrong by showing disruptive behavior. Sometimes they cannot say they have a headache, an earache, a backache, an upset stomach, or have to use the bathroom. For women, maybe they are having their period, or "pre-menstrual syndrome". They may be tired, or are just having a bad day. How would you feel if people around you demanded that you do something when you didn't feel up to it, or were in pain?

People may also try to tell us their likes or dislikes through their behavior. When presented with an activity, the activity may be thrown to the side by the individual. He/she may not be able to tell us this is something they find boring or already know how to do. So, we must be careful not to assume that behavior is just for attention or avoidance of work. It is important to remember that the individual may be attempting to express discomfort or a preference for another activity. You may be asked to help determine if challenging behavior is an individual's way of communicating one of the following behaviors -

### **MESSAGES BEHAVIOR MAY COMMUNICATE**

<b><i>REQUESTS FOR:</i></b>	<b><i>NEGATIVE MESSAGES:</i></b>	<b><i>COMMENTS ABOUT:</i></b>
Attention	Protest/Objection	Events/actions
Social Interaction	Refusal	Objects/persons
Play	Desire to stop	Errors/mistakes
Affection	Pain/Discomfort	Agreement/(willing)
Permission		Greeting
Action by others		Humor/Entertainment
Help		
Information/Clarification		
Objects		
Food		

This brings another kind of assessment. A key part of any complete behavior support program is to assure the person has functional communication skills. In other words, the person must have some way of telling us when they need or want something, or if something is wrong. You may be asked to watch the person, and record if they have any reliable way of communicating in the above categories. The above list may be used as a guide from which to teach or expand communication skills. Communication skills can be taught using adaptive devices, pictures, symbols, computers, signs, or words.

## ASSESSING HIGH RISK TIMES, ACTIVITIES, OR CONDITIONS

*Describe common environmental contributors to challenging behavior.*

Some people we work with have a difficult time coping with **noise** and **confusion**. If they are living in a home with staff and several housemates, they can have an especially difficult time. If we discover this is the case, we may need to find a more suitable living environment for them. In the meantime, we may need to show them how to escape the noise and confusion. We may need to teach them a way to communicate their need for peace and quiet. *Finally, we may need to teach them ways to relax in times of stress, so they may better cope with noise and confusion.*

Other common culprits which contribute to challenging behavior are **transition times**, **scheduling**, and **predictability**. You may find a person does just fine until it's time to get on a bus to go to school or work. If the person seems to like school or work, they may be having trouble dealing with transitions - or going from one environment to another. Maybe they don't know what to expect, and the transition periods are confusing. If we determine this is the case, we can find a better way of letting them know what they are scheduled to do next. This helps make their life more predictable. This problem is especially common when the person does not communicate well. One way to help them cope with transition times is to show them pictures of the next activity. Eventually, they may be able to use pictures to make decisions about their own schedule, based on their preferences.

*Recognize that common events or conditions can create times when challenging behavior is likely or not likely to occur.*

There are times when all of us are more likely to be frustrated than others. Early morning is a time when many people have difficulty. After work or school are other times when we are tired and less likely to be patient with others. Noise and other distractions can cause people to be upset, especially when they are trying to rest.

Sometimes people have chronic pain, such as headaches and toothaches. These conditions can make a person irritable and anxious. They may be less patient with others and lose their temper more quickly than if that were not in pain. It is important that we be aware of the medical status of those we work with and make sure we have explored all possible **medical reasons** for challenging behavior.

In working with people, we need to be aware of **what events and times of day are more difficult for them**. You may be asked a number of questions, or asked to complete a form to help decide which of the above common events or conditions may be contributing to challenging behavior. When we are aware of these situations, we can plan our interactions and avoid making too many demands on those we work with. Sensitivity is important in reducing the likelihood that challenging behavior will occur.

## **LEARNING ASSESSMENTS**

Many of these assessments point to skills a person needs to learn, or things a person needs to do instead of the challenging behavior. These skills will enable the person to get their needs met without resorting to challenging behavior. These skills make challenging behavior unnecessary. It is essential to develop teaching strategies which are likely to be successful. To teach successfully, we need information about the preferred learning style and characteristics of the learner.

Learning Assessments help us find out answers to some of the following questions?

What kind of social environment does the learner prefer to work in: **Alone? With one other person? In a small or large group?**

What rewards or reinforcers work best for the person: **Praise while working? Praise when finished? Recognition from peers?**

When and how long does the person work best: **In the morning? After eating? After nap? A few minutes at a time? An hour at a time?**

How does the learner prefer to get information: **Watching someone else? Following directions one step at a time? Reading about it? Manipulating objects?**

Does the learner have difficulty focusing on the task? **What kind of tasks--all tasks? New tasks? Demanding tasks?**

How does the learner communicate with others? **With words? Sign Language? Gestures? Communication device?**

You have already learned to use several effective teaching strategies. You can see how the information the support team gathers from the assessment forms you complete can be used in developing the Individual's plan for learning new skills and behaviors.

## **TESTING INTERVENTION STRATEGIES**

You have just learned about several kinds of assessments you may perform as part of a positive support team. How will these results be used? We need to figure out what the information we have gathered means. The I-Team will discuss information from these assessments and form ideas or "hypotheses" about the function(s) of the challenging behavior.

Once the team knows the purpose a behavior serves, the team can develop strategies to replace the behavior with a better way for the individual to communicate his/her needs and have those needs met. Our goal is to naturally reward desired behavior.

For example, if the behavior allows a person to escape from boring or uncomfortable situations, the team may wish to teach the person a word or sign that means they want to stop what they are doing and do something else. Then the team would teach staff to always respond in the same way to that sign or word. The team would test out whether the new skill will serve the same purpose or WORK for the person, and whether their intervention is on the right track.

If not, the team could re-evaluate whether the activity is truly important for the person. If so, the team will also consider if the activity could be taught in a more interesting, or less frustrating way--more in line with the person's preferred learning style. Thus, much planning goes into developing behavior support plans.

## **DIRECT TREATMENT/INTERVENTION STRATEGIES**

*Describe examples of reinforcers and reinforcement schedules from own life experiences.*

*Describe how reinforcers can be used as intervention strategies to address challenging behavior.*

*Give examples of common direct intervention strategies, based on functional assessment to treat challenging behavior.*

### **Reinforcers**

In the section on "Effective Teaching", you learned about the use of reward in teaching. A reinforcer has a similar meaning. ***A reinforcer is an activity or event which happens after a behavior which makes it more likely to be repeated in the future.***

Picking a strong and lasting reinforcer is an important part of changing a person's behavior. The best reinforcers are ones that naturally occur in the person's life. If you are going to use a reinforcer to develop or strengthen a behavior to replace a challenging behavior, look back at the functional assessment information. The same reinforcer that was maintaining the challenging behavior may be the reinforcer to use to support the new behavior. In other words, the new behavior should serve to obtain the same reinforcer as the challenging behavior did.

Every individual is different, but using reinforcers correctly requires assessment and planning. Knowing what and how much to expect from an individual will determine how to plan to be sure that the reinforcer is collected almost every time. Success of the reinforcement procedure depends on being sure that the individual succeeds in collecting the reinforcer, and **not** on withholding the reinforcer. Choosing a new behavior that is meaningful for the person, and allows them to obtain natural reinforcers more easily than the challenging behavior is also a key ingredient of success.

## Setting Events

Setting events, or conditions occurring sometime before the behavior, may change the value of a reinforcer. For example, a three-course meal in the previous hour might change the effectiveness of snack food as a reinforcer. A headache might make praise by a friend less valuable as a reinforcer (while you had the headache). **Can you think of an example of how this works in your own life? Or in the life of someone you work with?**

## Schedules of Reinforcement

Reinforcement can be delivered to a person on a schedule. This helps ensure the reinforcer is delivered at the right time. Some reinforcement schedules are "**continuous**."

In other words, reinforcers are delivered every time the behavior occurs. Other reinforcement schedules are "**intermittent**". In other words, the behavior is not reinforced every time. Instead, it is reinforced on a planned schedule. Intermittent schedules are useful in maintaining a behavior once it has been taught and established. Thus, the reinforcer continues to be of value.

## Differential Reinforcement Schedules

Reinforcement schedules may also be used to change challenging behavior. One way to do this is to direct the reinforcers away from the challenging behavior. Schedules also help staff to remember when reinforcement should be delivered. Some possibilities are:

- DRO schedule:** means the reinforcer is delivered when the challenging behavior does not occur for a certain period of time. You are directing the reinforcer toward *other behavior* that is not challenging.
- DRA schedule:** means the reinforcer is delivered when a specific behavior -- an *alternative behavior* meant to take the place of the challenging behavior -- is performed. This is especially effective when the alternative behavior is selected based on the functional assessment. The reinforcer is designed to obtain the same reinforcer(s) as the challenging behavior once did.
- DRI schedule:** is much like a DRA schedule, except the alternative behavior *is incompatible* with (can't be done at the same time as) the challenging behavior.
- DRL and DRH schedules:** means reinforcers are delivered when behavior occurs at a certain *low rate* (DRL) or at a certain *high rate* (DRH).

Just because we may use a schedule to plan the delivery of reinforcers doesn't mean that it should be given mechanically, without enthusiasm, or respect. These qualities are all part of a successful relationship.

All of these schedules of reinforcement are positive techniques intended to be part of an overall positive behavioral support plan. Can you think of examples of how these schedules work in your own life, or in the life of someone you work with?

## **Direct Strategies**

Changing antecedents, reinforcement schedules, and effective teaching strategies can all be used to support other direct strategies. Some of these strategies are:

<u>Direct Strategy*</u>	<u>Purpose</u>
Relaxation Training	Reduce stress or anxiety
Anger Control Training	Reduce and control anger
Systematic Desensitization	Reduce and control fears
Habit Breaking	Reduce or break habits that occur at certain times or places
Self Control Techniques	Assist person who is motivated to change a behavior
Discrimination Training	Teach person where and when a behavior is appropriate

\*Meyer & Evans (1989)

Even persons with severe disabilities may learn some of the above strategies to control their own behavior. These techniques allow the person more freedom and dignity, as they learn to control the events that affect their daily lives.

## **MEASUREMENT AND EVALUATION**

*Recognize the reasons for measuring behavior before, during, and after a planned intervention or treatment strategy.*

*Identify and demonstrate data collection methods.*

*Identify examples of realistic and desirable outcomes of a positive behavior support plan.*

**Behavior is measured before, during and after a behavior change procedure.** The measurement procedure is important for three reasons:

1. Measuring the behavior **before** intervention or treatment helps in choosing treatment procedures and can be compared with measures after treatment to see if improvement has occurred. This is called getting a **baseline**.
2. Measuring behavior **during** treatment provides day-to-day feedback, and allows the effects of the procedure to take place so necessary adjustments can be made.
3. Measures **after** treatment can be compared to baseline measures to evaluate if the change procedure was successful.



## EXAMPLES OF DATA COLLECTION METHODS

### Frequency Record

The following are examples of behaviors which may be recorded using a frequency record:

- Fighting
- Stealing
- Door Slamming
- Requesting a break from work
- Being ready for school or work on time

To record these kinds of behaviors, you simply count **how many times a behavior occurs over a certain period of time**. For example, you might record the number of times a person slams a door each day. The frequency record should only be used when you can be sure of consistently counting each instance of the behavior. In other words, the behavior must be obvious enough to ensure that you or another observer will almost always be able to reliably record the behavior. In addition, **the behavior must occur for a distinct period of time**. For example, crying might occur for 30 seconds, or 30 minutes; this behavior would not be as appropriate for a frequency or event record.

### Duration Recording

Sometimes we are more interested in **how long a behavior lasts**, rather than how many times it occurs. This means you record how many seconds, minutes or hours a behavior lasts. Using the crying example, you would record the number of minutes, or hours per day the person spent crying. This would be a more sensitive measure than counting the number of times the person cried.

### Interval Recording

This method involves **recording instances of the behavior during a pre-set observation period**. For example, you could count the number of times a person yells in an hour (for someone that yells frequently.) This is intended to estimate behavior for the day.

### Time Sampling

Time sampling is used to **record those behaviors that have no obvious beginning or ending and those that occur at such a high frequency that it would be difficult to count each instance**. Time sampling is convenient because it does not require continuous observation, so accurate recording can occur while you are performing other duties.

In time sampling, the observer records behavior only at the end of pre-set time intervals. Time samples are often made at equal intervals (i.e., every two hours). Sometimes it is more practical to sample at irregular intervals throughout the day. Some observers have used a kitchen timer or alarm watch to remind themselves of when to observe a behavior. The length of intervals between observations is usually based on how often the behavior occurs. You will have a chance to try some of these recording techniques during training.

## **Desirable Outcomes**

Although a number of these measuring techniques seem to focus on the target behavior, **the more important goal is improving lifestyle outcomes.** Improvement in the challenging behavior is only one of several outcomes to evaluate. Some others are:

- **Acquiring new skills**
- **Reducing need for medical or crisis intervention**
- **Less restrictive placement**
- **Integrated community involvement**
- **Subjective quality of life improvement**
- **Expanded social relationships**
- **Expanded opportunities to make personal choices**
- **Increased autonomy and dignity**

Some of these outcomes may be more difficult to measure, but should not be overlooked when evaluating the behavior support plan. Changing severe challenging behavior is a complex and lengthy process. There is no "quick fix". It is not realistic to think challenging behavior will disappear overnight. There is always the possibility challenging behavior will re-occur. Positive behavioral support is a process, and not a fixed set of intervention procedures. **We must be willing to change ourselves, the settings, the schedule, the curriculum, the reinforcers, or whatever support is needed to achieve positive outcomes and improve the overall quality of a person's life.** We can make a difference with comprehensive long-term support planning.

## RESOURCE MATERIALS

Some of the content of this module has been adapted from the following sources:

Anderson, J.L., Mesaros, R. and Neary, T. (1989) *National In-Service Training Program on Community Referenced Non-Aversive Behavior Management*. Eugene, OR: **Research and Training Center**.

Anderson, J.L. et al. (1993). *Issues in Providing Training to Achieve Comprehensive Behavioral Support*. In Reichle, J. and Wacker, D. P. (Eds.) *Communicative Alternatives to Challenging Behavior: Integrating Functional Assessment and Intervention Strategies*. Baltimore: **Paul H. Brookes**.

Ditman, William (1978). *Student Confrontation Avoidance Techniques (SCAT)*. Waukegan Development Center: Waukegan, IL.

Hitzing, Wade (1990). *Positive Learning: An Alternative to Behavior Management*. Minneapolis, MN.

Macomb-Oakland Regional Center (1990) *Group Home Training in Teaching Technology*. Mt. Clemens, MI: **Joseph M. Snyder, Macomb Oakland Regional Center**.

McGee, John J., et al. (1987). *Gentle Teaching: A Non-Aversive Approach to Helping Persons with Mental Retardation*. New York: Human Sciences Press.

Meyer, L.H. and Evans, I.M. (1989). *Non-Aversive Intervention for Behavior Problems: A Manual for Home and Community*. Baltimore: **Paul H. Brookes**.

Michigan Department of Mental Health (1984). *Group Home Curriculum: Participants' Manual*. Lansing, MI: **DMH**.

