

DEALING WITH CHALLENGING BEHAVIORS

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DEALING WITH CHALLENGING BEHAVIORS



After reading this material, you will be able to:

- Understand why behavioral challenges occur.
- Demonstrate proactive options when challenging behavior occurs.
- Demonstrate effective confrontation avoidance techniques (C.A.T.) when behavioral challenges occur.
- Describe key steps in building a positive behavior 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 extremely 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.

There are many ways you can 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.**

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, what to do to prevent it, and 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 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 material, you will be able to:

- Understand that there are always reasons for an individual's behavior.
 - Realize that safety, security and dignity for the individual and others in the 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.
- Look at a challenging behavior from that person's point of view.
 - Learn ways to help an individual make positive changes in their

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 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 was 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.

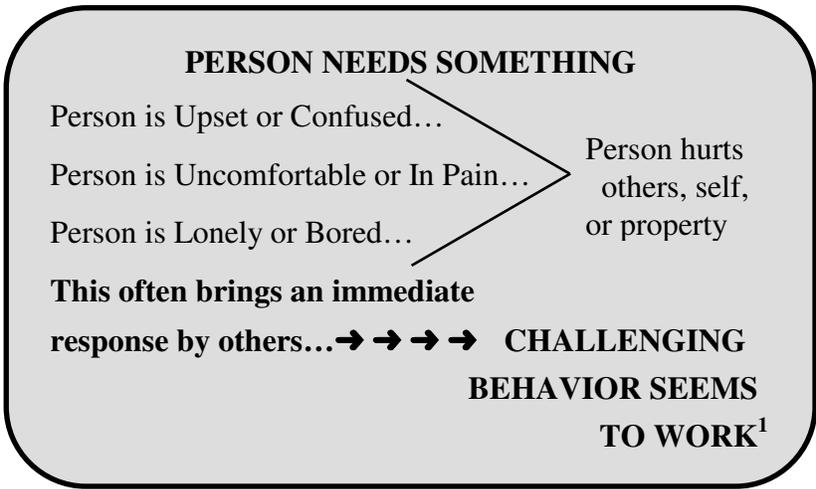
It's not surprising that when people feel frustrated, angry or are in pain, they often behave in disruptive, and often dangerous ways. When people are bored or confused, their behavior is often less predictable. Problems may arise when an individual discovers that.

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.



¹ Wade Hitzing (1990)

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.

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 →	POSSIBLE MEDICAL CONDITION
injury to own face or head →	toothache, ear infection
constant pacing →	back problem or sprain, adverse reaction to medication
inability to sleep →	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 complete an exercise routine. This problem is often resolved by letting the individual decide when to do the exercises, such as after dinner or in the morning. 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 | ✓ Talking excessively |
| ✓ Yelling | ✓ Staying in the bedroom | ✓ Rocking |
| ✓ Crying | ✓ Refusing to participate | ✓ Not wanting to go outside |
| ✓ Not talking or communicating | ✓ Repeating things over and over again | ✓ 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 it 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 given individuals opportunities to make their own plans. This

allows for a much more relaxing environment for both clients and staff.

Events or Circumstances Which Should Follow Challenging Behaviors

Once a behavior has occurred, staff need to know 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 staff's behavior.

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.

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 section, you will be able to:

- Select proactive options is dealing with challenging behaviors;
- Recognize times when learning is not likely to occur, and have an alternate plan of action;
- Identify precursors to challenging behavior; and
- Understand how to respond effectively in handling challenging behavior.

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 of 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.

Identify Precursors to Challenging Behavior ²

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, 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.

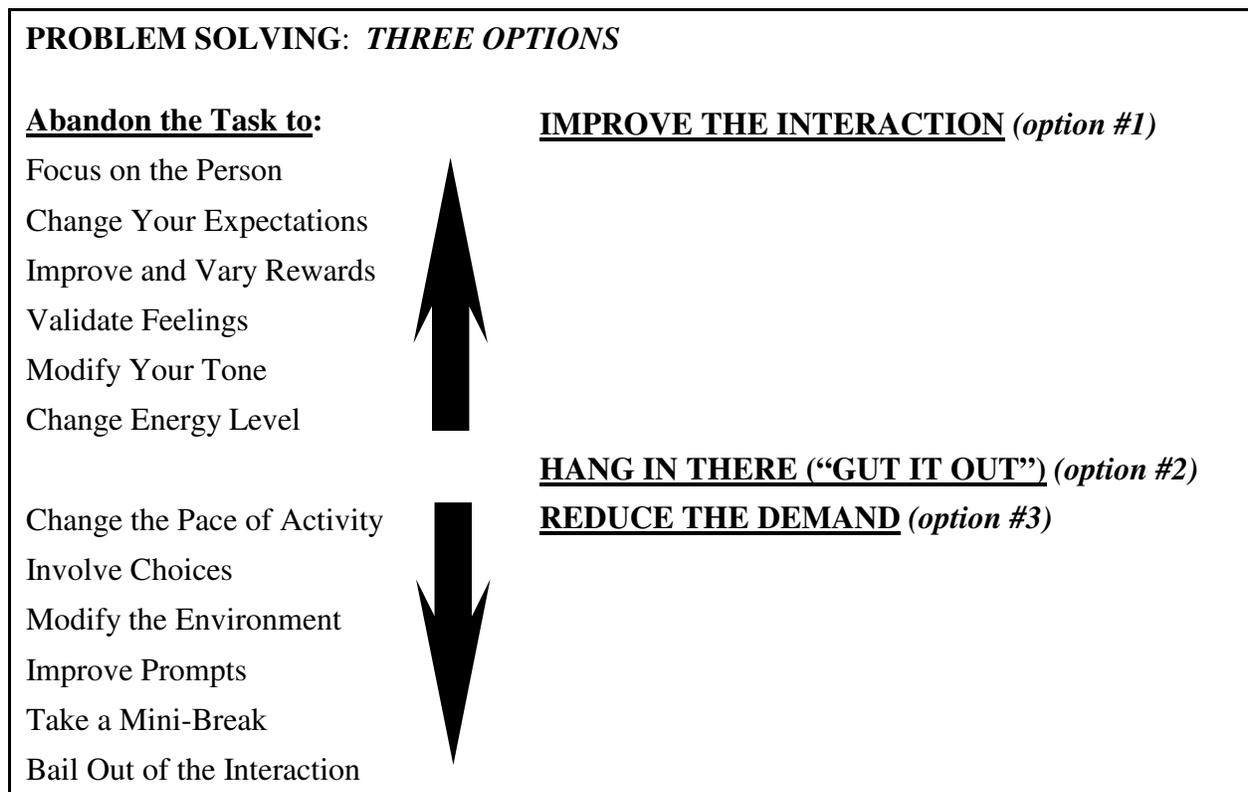
A precursor may take the form of some active communication from the learner that his or her attitude toward the teaching is changed. That communication could be verbal, by gesture, or physical expression. The person’s words may change with a change in feeling. The words could stay the same, while the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

² Adapted with permission from John McGee (1990) in Group Home Training in Teaching Technology, Macomb-Oakland Regional Center.

The person’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 person is thinking about some unpleasant situation that just happened. Lastly, a precursor may be the disappearance of some action or expression in the person. Each of these possibilities is some kind of change in what the person is doing. We can easily miss these changes without being alert to every aspect of our interaction.

Identify Potential Responses to Challenging Behavior

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. The other is to reduce the level of demand on the person. The option between these two is simply to “hang in there,” or sweat through the challenge.



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 person'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 person'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 person. 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 makes 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 person than he or she is prepared to give. Here, we assume more responsibility for rewarding ourselves, as well as the person. For now, we ask for less back, and look for less back from the person.

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 just to toss the task out and just “hang out” with the person. The new “task” becomes learning to be close to that person.

The other category of options reduces demand on the person, 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” 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 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 area for us may not be so for the person. Conversely, distractions to the person 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 person 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 person by making the person 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 person (and the staff) 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 person 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 person 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 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 smile; words of encouragement; and/or 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 more than rely on our experience and that of others. We have to turn those experiences into a formal part of our plan.

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

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 person 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 in the Midst of Challenge

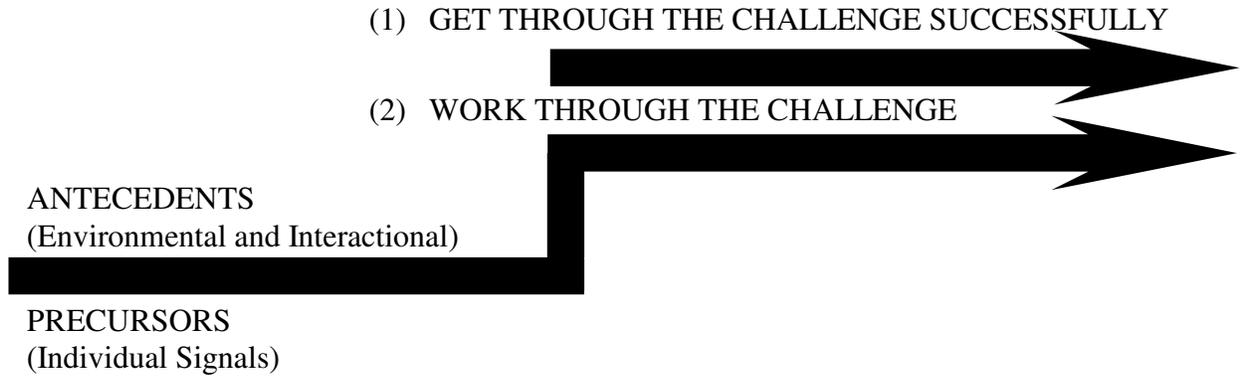
We may get in the middle of a challenge and have no other recourse than to terminate the interaction. This is a judgment call in keeping the focus positive and on the person. A coach in the background can help us to decide whether the situation calls for terminating the task during a challenge.

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.

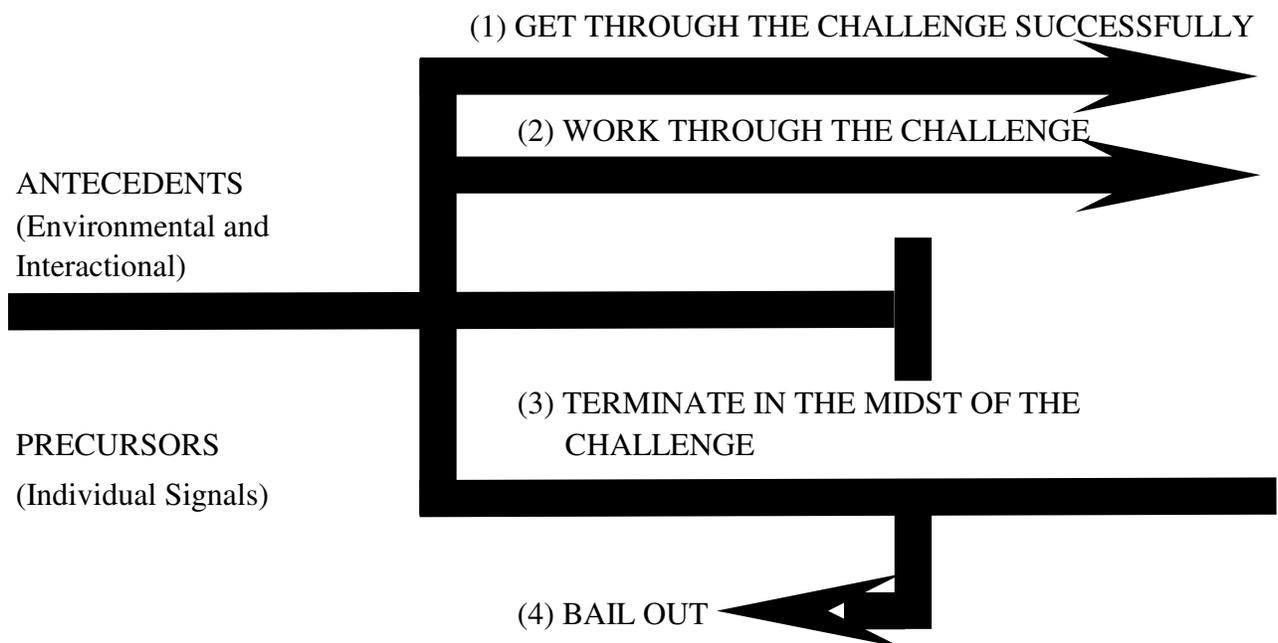
Plan for Success

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



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 person’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.



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. Physical Intervention Techniques are taught in a separate class. 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.

Dealing With the Difficult Challenges

This section deals with those challenges that really bring the activities to a halt. These challenges are so energetic, or emphatic, or insistent that we cannot follow through with activities without some significant changes. 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 person has not learned to like and get along with staff.

Changing prompts is effective when the person does not understand what to do, or is doing the step differently from the program plan (i.e., not "successfully"). Changing the task of simplifying the steps becomes necessary when the person 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 person's attention stays with the staff and the interaction.

If you have had previous success with the person, but are not seeing success now, you may just wait quietly and patiently. This method is for the person 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 person 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 PERSON, 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 person that calls for a unique effort or dedication on the part of the staff. **EXAMPLE**: People who do not respond to conversation, or who harm themselves, others or property.

Confrontation - 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 or 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 staff'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.)³



After reading this section, 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.

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

³ Adapted from William Ditman (1984) in Group Home Curriculum: Participants Manual, Michigan Department of Mental Health

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.

Frustration

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

There are five distinct phases of anger that individuals experience. This is true for all of us, as well as the consumers we work with. The difference is that we do not generally “act-out”, as we have learned ways to deal with our anger appropriately. Key points to be aware of when dealing with anger include:

- ✓ Everyone has a baseline for their behaviors; some people are hyper or talkative all the time, while others are more relaxed or quiet. Any change in behavior can be considered a move away from their baseline.
- ✓ Once adrenalin is triggered in the body, it remains in the blood stream for up to ninety (90) minutes. This explains why some individuals appear to be calming down, and yet they can be triggered back to a violent stage very quickly.

It is important that you understand the FIVE PHASES OF ANGER:

- **Phase One - Triggering Phase** - This is the first behavioral movement away from baseline. There may be many reasons for this to occur, and these early warning signs may go undetected by staff who do not thoroughly understand a particular consumer.
- **Phase Two - Escalation Phase** - This phase takes the consumer directly to an assaultive behavior. They are moving farther away from their baseline and symptoms are more likely to be noticeable. The likelihood that an individual will respond to verbal interventions begins to decrease. You would attempt to de-escalate the individual using the techniques we have previously discussed.
- **Phase Three - Crisis Phase** - The individual in the crisis phase is less capable of controlling their impulses. They may begin to threaten staff or others, swear, self-abuse, or attempt to cause harm to others. During the crisis phase, utmost concern must be for the safety and protection of residents and others in the immediate vicinity. This phase is when physical intervention may be required, to assure the individual’s safety. Physical intervention techniques are taught in another class.

- **Phase Four - Recovery Phase** - After the crisis begins to diminish, the individual begins to move back toward their baseline behavior. They have begun to calm down, and are becoming more rational. Using appropriate intervention during this phase is crucial to assure that there is not a return to the crisis phase.
- **Phase Five - Post-Crisis Depression Phase** - This phase finds the consumer actually regressing below the normal baseline behavior. The consumer may be physically and mentally exhausted. Often they are remorseful, tearful and distraught, and feel bad about their actions. The consumer is often receptive to efforts to relieve guilt, apologize, and return to a normal state of behavior. Allow the individual time to discuss what triggered the behavior and discuss appropriate ways to deal with this in the future.

It is important to remember that as the adrenalin increases in the consumer, it does so in us as well. We will discuss later, several techniques used to assist you in returning to your baseline behavior, too.

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.

Confrontation Avoidance Techniques (C.A.T.)

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 or attending a day program. As the adult in control, you are responsible for facing an agitated individual and calming the person down. Every confrontation is potentially dangerous—to you, other staff members, the client and others in the 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.....and less	Be MORE..... and less
Supportive.....Controlling	Accepting.....Contingent
Tolerant, Empathic.....Judgmental	Co-Participatory.....Verbally Directive
Guiding/Directive, i.e., “Let’s....”	Questioning, i.e., “Do you want?”
A Friend Showing Mutual Respect	“Staff” in Position of Authority
Flexible	Rigid
Empowering	Dominating

A key to being able to work well with consumers is to be aware of our own emotions at all times. There will be times when you may not feel well, have had a bad day, recently gotten in a fight with a significant other, or you may be working with an individual who tends to “push your buttons.” Be aware that the attitude you bring to work with you will effect how you interact with the consumers during your shift.

Your own beliefs and values will effect how you view the consumers and their daily actions. Be aware that you should not impose your beliefs or values on another individual at any time. You may not agree with what a person is doing, but your feeling should not dictate your actions. By being aware of your own feelings, you will be better prepared to help those individual in your care.

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:

- ✓ **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.
- ✓ **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. Review client record to actions taken in the past that calmed the individual down.
- ✓ **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 or program, 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.

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.

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 empathy 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 or you can get the individual involved in an 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. 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. 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.

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 for the individuals you are serving.

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-face 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-face 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 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 | ✓ Tongue | ✓ Neck (2 ways) |
| ✓ Face (14 sets) | ✓ Shoulder | ✓ Stomach |
| ✓ Upper arm | ✓ Chest | |

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 muscle 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-face? 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.

“ABC’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 ABC'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.
**Like the alphabet, the ABC'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 ABC's of their behavior.		

DECOMPRESSING, DEBRIEFING and DOCUMENTING



After reading this material, you will be able to:

- Identify the three activities that must be done after you physically intervene.
- Recognize the purposes of the three post physical intervention

After you physically intervene with a person, there are three activities that you must do. They are: 1) get yourself settled down so you can continue to function effectively with staff and clients (decompression); 2) talk about what happened (debrief); and 3) document the incident and what you did. All three of these are very important and contribute to the persons' learning and progress and to the ability of direct care and support staff to help the person. The three activities are described below. The major ingredients that are a part of each activity are included in the descriptions.

Decompressing

Anyone involved in a physical confrontation experiences various types of emotional and physiological reactions. Some examples are: your heart rate and adrenaline increases, your breathing changes, you may tense certain muscles, and you may very well be scared or angry. You have learned some ways to cope with these reactions during a confrontation.

It is essential that you take some time as soon as possible after a confrontation to “unwind” or decompress. Decompression means the process of relieving pressure or bringing the pressure back to normal. This term is most commonly used in reference to scuba diving. After a deep dive, scuba divers must go into a decompression chamber to gradually bring the high pressure back to normal atmospheric pressure.

Problems may occur for you, other staff and clients if decompression is not done following a physical confrontation. You need to take some “time out” to relieve the pressures created by the confrontation. If this is not done, the pressures may escalate to the point that they interfere with your ability to work effectively and constructively with clients.

Anyone involved in a physical confrontation experiences emotional and physiological reactions. It is critical that you take some “time out” immediately after a confrontation to decompress or relieve the pressures created by the confrontation. This will help you to maintain a positive and helpful relationship with clients.

Before taking time out to decompress, it is necessary to make sure that the person or persons involved in the confrontation have reestablished self-control and the environment has returned to normal. The safety and well-being of the clients is the first priority. If other staff are available, they can be useful in ensuring that the persons are involved in constructive activities and their needs are attended to, and that the person(s) involved in the confrontation are observed closely for signs of continuing agitation or possible injury. Once these factors have been dealt with by you or other staff, then you should ask your supervisor for some time away from your regular duties for a short break. Usually a few minutes will be adequate to help you regain your emotional and physical equilibrium. It is important to realize, however, that circumstances may be such that time for a break may not be possible right after the confrontation. If this is the case, it will still be possible for you to spend a minute taking some deep breaths to help you relax.

Before requesting time to decompress, make sure that the needs of clients are being attended to and the environment has returned to normal. Persons involved in the confrontation need to be observed closely for signs of continuing agitation and/or possible injury.

There are many decompression techniques. Some techniques may work for you, but not for someone else. You need to discover those that are feasible and effective for you. For example, having a beer

at a bar with good music is an effective decompression technique for many, but it isn't feasible on the job! However, there are many things you can do during your brief break. You may take a short walk, get some fresh air, do some stretching or relaxation exercises, talk to someone, do some deep breathing or meditation, sit down a minute, drink a glass of water or juice, eat a snack, etc.

There are many decompression techniques that will be effective and also feasible to do during a brief break. Find one or more that work for you.

Decompression is the first post physical intervention activity to take care of. Following that, you need to move on to debriefing and documenting.

Debriefing

Debriefing is the process of discussing, questioning, and analyzing to obtain important information gathered during some event. It is a critical process that needs to occur following any physical intervention. In addition to obtaining information, the debriefing can also provide further opportunities for staff to unwind and sort out their thoughts and feelings about the confrontation.

During debriefing or discussing the physical intervention incident, important information can often be obtained that will help you and other staff to intervene more appropriately and effectively in the future with the client(s) that were involved in the physical confrontation. For example, you may discover during debriefing that you failed to observe some beginning signs of agitation. You and other staff are then alerted to early signs that you can watch for. It may be possible to avoid future physical confrontations altogether by intervening nonphysically in a timely fashion, before the person's behavior gets out of hand.

Debriefing means discussing and analyzing a physical intervention in order to obtain important information that will help you and other staff in your future work with recipients. Debriefing can also provide additional opportunities for staff to decompress and sort out thoughts and feelings.

Debriefing is done by discussing and analyzing the incident with other staff. Another staff person can help you get a more complete and objective picture of the behavior of both you and the person before, during, and after the confrontation. This will allow you to plan and prepare for future interventions, change your intervention strategies if necessary, or to enlist the help of support staff. If physical confrontations are occurring frequently, the person's plan of service may need to be revised. Whether or not staff participating in the debriefing were witnesses to the physical intervention incident, they can be very useful in helping you and others understand what happened and how to avoid another occurrence.

Other staff, whether they witness the incident or not, can help you get a clearer and more complete picture of the entire confrontation. This will help you and others take the necessary steps to avoid future incidents.

To be most effective, debriefing with staff should be done as soon as possible following the confrontation and decompression. The following questions are important ones to try to answer during debriefing:

- ✓ How did you feel before, during, and after the confrontation?
- ✓ What was the person doing before, during and after the confrontation?
- ✓ What signs of agitation did you or others observe before the confrontation?
- ✓ What nonphysical intervention techniques were used? What happened as a result?
- ✓ Was the physical intervention technique effective? Was the technique the least restrictive one possible given the situation? Was the technique done correctly?
- ✓ Did other staff assist? If not, why? If so, was communication clear between staff? Were actions coordinated?

- ✓ Were other persons removed from the area?
- ✓ If the situation reoccurs, what would you do differently? What would you do the same?
- ✓ are you aware of any patterns in the person's behavior (such as becoming agitated when tired or hungry)?
- ✓ What are the implications for the future?

It is also important to debrief with the person(s) involved. They can be helped to better understand and control their own behavior. The timing of the debriefing is critical. It needs to be done after the person has calmed down and reestablished self-control. But if too much time elapses between the confrontation and the debriefing, both you and the person may forget significant information.

Various intervention techniques, such as feedback and problem-solving, will be useful during the debriefing process with persons. You may need or want to review these techniques before the debriefing session. One of the most critical things to make sure the person understands is that you will continue to help and be supportive of him, but that you cannot tolerate certain behaviors.

Debriefing is also important to do with persons who were involved in the physical confrontation. Debriefing should occur after the person has reestablished self-control, but before too much time goes by.

Documenting

Agitated and aggressive behavior and physical interventions must be documented so this information is a part of the person's record. This is critical for the following reasons:

- To ensure all staff working with the person are aware of the behavior and any physical interventions that were necessary. This will help other staff to make appropriate and timely interventions. The record is a communication tool between staff.
- This information becomes a collection of significant data that indicates the person's progress or lack of progress. The documented information may show that changes in the person's plan of service are necessary or that the person's program is effective and is resulting in positive changes in behavior.
- It is a requirement that all physical injuries that a person sustains during a physical intervention (or at any other time) be documented on an Incident Report. Any unusual client behavior and all physical intervention must also be documented on the Incident Report.

Documentation of agitated and aggressive behavior, as well as physical interventions with persons, is critical. This documented information is an important communication tool between staff and helps to determine client progress or lack of progress. It is a requirement that physical injuries, unusual behavior, and physical interventions be documented on an Incident Report.

What You Should Document

The following identifies what should be documented after a physical intervention. Always keep in mind that all documentation must be descriptive, not evaluative. This means that you need to document what you see (observable actions), not what you think those actions mean.

Always be descriptive and document observable actions.
Do not evaluate those actions.

The following ingredients need to be included in documentation of a physical intervention.

1. What happened before, during, and after the physical intervention. Note specific behaviors displayed by the person and others involved. Did anything trigger the agitated or aggressive behavior? If so, make a note of possible causes.
2. Date, time, duration, specific location and all staff and persons involved.
3. What nonphysical intervention(s) was used. This information is very important because physical intervention is justified only when non-physical interventions fail to work or when it is an emergency and there is no time to try intervening nonphysically. If it was an emergency situation, make sure to indicate this and describe why it was an emergency.
4. What physical intervention was used. Note the name of the specific technique(s) used.
5. What was done following the physical intervention. Indicate the presence or absence of physical injuries, who the incident was reported to, and what was done to help the person calm down.
6. What were the person's thoughts and feelings about the incident. Document any significant information obtained from the person during the staff-client debriefing.
7. Complete an Incident Report.

Written documentation of the above information following a physical intervention is essential. This information is also important to share verbally during shift report staff meetings in order to prepare staff who are coming on duty. Documentation is a form of communication. Communication among staff and between staff and clients is critical to the continued growth and progress of persons and the smooth functioning of the group home and/or program.

Documentation is a form of communication which is essential for the continued progress of clients.

Resource Materials

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

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