

Therapeutic-based positive behaviour strategies briefing

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Professionals and families are often 'challenged' to understand the behaviours they experience while delivering services and supports to children and adults with intellectual disabilities, autism spectrum disorder or other additional needs.

Managing children and young people's needs and not resorting to restrictive practices requires taking several steps back in the process and delivering support in a preventative, low arousal context. By anticipating the support needs of individuals and any potential challenges they might pose, restraint and seclusion can be replaced with person-centred therapeutic interventions focused on improving the well-being of the child or young person, who either is in need of help but refusing it, or is otherwise unable to initiate or accept help by themselves.

Low-arousal approaches include interaction, diffusion and distraction strategies, that focus on the reduction of stress, fear and frustration aimed at preventing aggression and crisis situations. The low arousal approach identifies triggers and uses low intensity strategies and solutions to avoid punitive consequences for distressed individuals.

BASW NI is concerned that training currently provided to teachers and support staff may not focus sufficiently on de-escalation training and low arousal approaches, leading to unnecessary use of restraint and seclusion. The result is that what should be used as a last resort, in crisis situations, is being used overly-frequently, without regulation, recording or reporting to parents/families.

Any intervention should improve both immediate wellbeing and add to the learning and ongoing wellbeing of the child/young person in keeping with their individual assessed needs. In contrast to low-arousal techniques, excessive use of restraint has been shown to further traumatise children and young people who may already have histories of harm. Restrictive practices have also been reported to cause significant physical injuries.

Various programmes are available for managing behaviour of concern—some widely adopted such as Therapeutic Crisis Intervention (TCI), some bespoke in-house programmes and some new programmes such as Non-Violent Resistance Intervention.

Any effective programme must consider:

- **The people involved (child and adult)**

Too often programmes focus on managing the child and forget that the staff member is part of the relationship and thus part of the solution and or the problem. There should be an understanding of the purpose and origins of the behaviours. Many behaviours have their origins in past trauma, attachments, and learning. If we don't understand this, we can end up adding to trauma and

punishing and restricting behaviours that have a purpose for the child and make sense for the child.

We should also be aware that adults bring “baggage” to the relationship that can help or inflame.

- **The environment**

Consideration must be given to the impact the environment (in and outside school) is having on the behaviour and how adapting the environment can change behaviour and avoid directive intervention. For example, removing audiences can enable the child and staff to back down. Environment will also include institutional elements that can help or hinder, such as resources, staff numbers and competence, rules, contracts, and physical space.

- **The relationship**

This includes the boundaries, values and expectations we hold ourselves and others to and how they influence relationships, and also how, what and why we communicate. The assumptions we make about ourselves and others and the labels and stereotypes we apply to ourselves and others shape relationships. In implementing toolkits, skills and methods to manage behaviour, it must be remembered that the relationship will need to be sustained beyond the incident at hand.

TCI has four questions that summarise the above and are recommended as part of any intervention.

1. How am I feeling? (Am I going to help or hinder?)
2. What does the young person feel need or want? (what is driving the behaviour? What is the purpose?)
3. How is the environment impacting?
4. What should I do? How do I respond?

To avoid reactive interventions that emphasise response and control, focus should be placed on the first three questions, with attention centred on the needs of the child and the competence of the staff at the time.

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