



Staffordshire  
Social Care  
Workforce

CMDT  
Care Market Development Team

# Positive Behaviour Support Guide

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## Foreword

*This guide has been developed to introduce the subject and further research and learning is recommended to provide a complete understanding. Requirements are often unique to individual care services, and you should consider how best to implement practices.*

## Introduction

Positive behaviour support is an approach to supporting people who have care needs and may display behaviours that challenge. It aims to understand the reasons behind these behaviours and provide person-centred support that reduces distress, improves quality of life, and minimises the use of restrictive interventions.

Behaviours can include actions or expressions that can cause harm or distress to the person or others. Behaviours are not inherent to the person, but rather a result of their interaction with the environment and potentially unmet needs.

## Understanding behaviours

It is important to understand the underlying reasons for behaviours. Behaviours are often a way of communicating unmet needs, preferences, or feelings that the person cannot express otherwise. They may also be a way of coping with difficult situations, avoiding unpleasant tasks, or seeking attention or stimulation. By understanding the triggers and consequences of behaviours, we can provide positive behaviour support that meets the person's needs, respects their choices, and reduces their distress.

Some reasons for behaviours being expressed include:

- **Communication challenges:** Some people may have difficulties expressing their needs, preferences, feelings, or opinions verbally or non-verbally. They may also have difficulties understanding what others are saying or implying. This can lead to misunderstandings, frustrations, or misinterpretations.
- **Emotional state:** Some people may experience strong emotions, such as anger, fear, sadness, anxiety, or boredom, that affect their behaviour and reactions. They may also have difficulties regulating their emotions or coping with stress. This can make them more prone to lash out, act impulsively, or overreact to perceived threats or provocations.
- **Medication changes:** Some people may take medication that affects their mood, cognition, or behaviour. Changes in medication type, dosage, or schedule may have unintended side effects, such as agitation, confusion, irritability, or mood swings. These may alter the way people interact with others or respond to situations.
- **Physical health:** Some people may have physical health issues that affect their comfort, mobility, or sensory abilities. They may also experience pain, fatigue, or discomfort that affect their tolerance or patience. These may impair their ability to cope with challenges or difficulties or increase their sensitivity to stimuli or disturbances.
- **Environmental factors:** Some people may be affected by the physical, social, or cultural aspects of their environment. For example, they may find the noise level, temperature, lighting, or layout of the space too stimulating, too dull, or too unfamiliar. They may also feel crowded, isolated, or unsupported by the people around them. These may affect their mood, attention, or perception of reality.
- **Personal history:** Some people may have past experiences that shape their beliefs, attitudes, or expectations of themselves and others. They may also have unresolved traumas, conflicts, or losses that affect their trust, security, or self-esteem. These may influence how they relate to others or handle situations.

## Identifying an expression of behaviour

Some people may display certain signs or signals before they engage in a behaviour. These may include verbal cues, such as saying specific phrases, making noises, or repeating words; or non-verbal cues, such as making gestures, facial expressions, or body movements. These cues can indicate that the person is feeling anxious, frustrated, bored, or overwhelmed, and may need some support or intervention to prevent the behaviour from escalating.

By observing and understanding these cues, staff can identify when a person is at risk of displaying a certain behaviour and take appropriate action to help them cope or calm down.

## Promoting positive behaviour support

Where there is an identified need, a positive behaviour support plan should be developed and implemented, which includes proactive strategies to prevent or reduce certain behaviours, and reactive strategies to respond to them in a safe and respectful way.

The plan should detail how staff can offer reassurance, distraction, redirection, or a change of activity or environment.

- Identify and address the possible triggers or causes of the behaviour, such as pain, boredom, frustration, fear, or unmet needs. Try to eliminate or reduce these factors as much as possible.
- Use positive communication skills, such as active listening, empathy, validation, and praise. Avoid arguing, blaming, criticizing, or threatening the person.
- Provide choices and options for the person and respect their preferences and decisions.
- Create a supportive and comfortable environment for the person, with adequate lighting, temperature, ventilation, noise level, and personal space. Ensure they have access to activities, hobbies, and interests that they enjoy and find meaningful.
- Teach and model coping skills and strategies for the person, such as relaxation, breathing, self-talk, or seeking help. Encourage them to use these techniques when they feel stressed, angry, or anxious.

Monitor and record the frequency, intensity, duration, and context of the behaviour. Use this information to evaluate the effectiveness of the behaviour support plan and make any necessary adjustments.

## Responding to a behaviour that has challenged

Even with a positive behaviour support plan in place, there will be instances where behaviours are expressed that might provide challenge. It is of paramount that the situation is de-escalated calmly and effectively to prevent further escalation.

- Stay calm and composed. Do not react with anger, frustration, or fear. Use a calm and respectful tone of voice and body language. Avoid any gestures or expressions that may be perceived as threatening or provocative.
- Acknowledge the person's feelings and needs. Show empathy and try to understand the reason behind their behaviour and what they are trying to communicate. Use active listening skills and restate what they say in your own words.
- Give the person space and time. Do not crowd or touch the person unless necessary. Respect their personal boundaries and allow them to move away if they want to. Do not block their exit or corner them. Give them time to calm down and process their emotions.
- Offer choices and options. Do not force the person to do something they do not want to do. Instead, present them with alternatives and consequences. For example, "You can either stay here and talk to me, or you can go to your room and relax. Which one do you prefer?" or "If you keep shouting, I will have to leave. If you lower your voice, I can stay and help you. What do you want to do?"
- Use positive reinforcement and distraction. Praise the person for any positive behaviour or signs of calming down. Redirect their attention to something else that may interest them or soothe them. For example, "You are doing a great job of breathing slowly. That's very helpful. Do you want to listen to some music or watch a video?" or "I can see that you are feeling better. How about we go for a walk or play a game?"



## Supporting the person after a behaviour that challenges

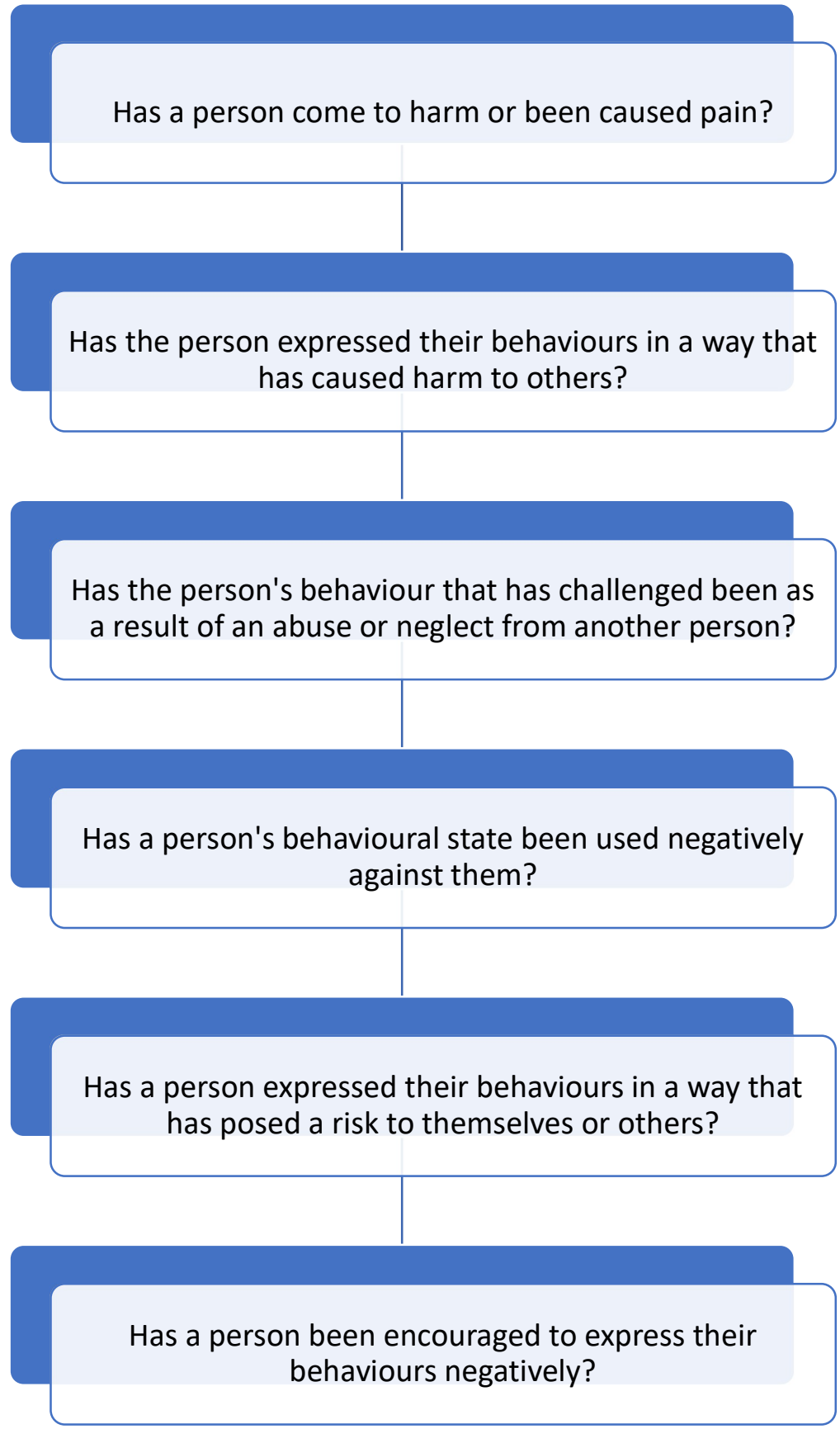
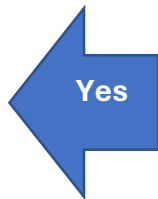
After a person has expressed a behaviour that challenges, they may feel upset or exhausted. It is important to support them in a way that respects their dignity and helps them to recover.

- Give them space and time to calm down, if they prefer. Do not crowd or pressure them but stay nearby and check on them regularly.
- Offer them a drink, a snack, or a comfort item to help them relax and feel safe.
- When they are ready, talk to them about what happened and how they are feeling. Listen to their perspective and avoid blaming, judging, or lecturing them.
- Help them to identify the triggers, signs, and consequences of their behaviour, and discuss alternative ways to cope or communicate in the future.
- Encourage them to take part in a restful or enjoyable activity, such as reading, listening to music, or playing a game, to distract them from negative thoughts and feelings.
- Provide them with an opportunity to get some fresh air or exercise to boost their mood.

Remember to document the incident and the support provided, and report it to the relevant people, such as the manager, the family, or the relevant professional. Review and update the positive behaviour support plan as needed and seek further advice or training if necessary. This is an ideal opportunity to reflect if there were any signs that the behaviour was going to be expressed and if the de-escalation methods were effective.

## Safeguarding thresholds

Log as **incident** and raise a **Safeguarding Referral**



## Summary

Positive behaviour support is an approach to supporting people who display or are at risk of displaying behaviours that challenge. It aims to understand the reasons behind the behaviour and to address the person's needs in a respectful and person-centred way.

Staff should receive ongoing training and support. It also requires a positive culture that values and respects the dignity and rights of the people they support. By applying the principles and practices, staff and carers can provide better care and support for people with behaviours that challenge and help them to live fulfilling and meaningful lives.

For further information,  
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