




POSITIVE BEHAVIOUR SUPPORT IN AUSTRALIA

Dispelling Myths and Recent Advances



Learning Objectives

1

Bust a few myths or misconceptions about Positive Behaviour Support

2

Describe the underpinning principles of contemporary Positive Behaviour Support, and how Positive Behaviour Support can be delivered to help people with disability who display behaviours of concern

3

Explore some current challenges in delivering high quality Positive Behaviour Support in Australia

4

Discuss research-informed strategies for addressing implementation challenges and building the capability of the workforce to deliver Positive Behaviour Support



MYTH

Positive Behaviour Support is but one intervention for reducing behaviours of concern

What actually is Positive Behaviour Support?



PBS is a framework for delivering a range of evidence-based behaviour supports



The main goal of PBS is to build skills and improve quality of life for the person



Reductions in behaviours of concern is a side effect

Underpinning Principles of PBS

- It is values-led, in that the goal of behaviour support strategies is to achieve enhanced community participation, choice, build life skills, and experience respect and social inclusion, rather than simply behaviour change (i.e., reduction) in isolation
- Allen, D., James, W., Evans, J., Hawkins, S., & Jenkins, R. (2005). Positive behavioural support: definition, current status and future directions. *Tizard Learning Disability Review*, 10(2), 4-11.)

Underpinning Principles of PBS

- It is based on an understanding of why, when and how behaviours happen and what purposes they serve (via the use of functional behaviour assessment).
- Carr, E. G., Dunlap, G., Horner, R. H., Koegel, R. L., Turnbull, A. P., Sailor, W., ... & Fox, L. (2002). Positive behavior support: Evolution of an applied science. *Journal of positive behavior interventions*, 4(1), 4-16.

Underpinning Principles of PBS



It focuses on altering triggers for behaviour, in order to reduce the likelihood that the behaviour will occur.



It uses skill teaching as a central intervention, as lack of critical skills is often a key contributing factor in the development of behavioural challenges.

Underpinning Principles of PBS



It achieves reductions in behaviour as a side-effect of teaching new skills, creating better environments for people to live in, discovering what brings people joy in life, and creating contexts in which people can do more things that bring them joy



Doing these things helps move people closer to achieving a better quality of life

Underpinning Principles of PBS

- It has a long-term focus, in that challenging behaviours are often of a long-term nature and successful interventions therefore need to be maintained over prolonged periods.

Definition of PBS

- According to the NDIS Quality and Safeguarding Commission, Positive behaviour support is the term used to describe *the integration of the contemporary ideology of disability service provision with the clinical framework of applied behaviour analysis. Positive behaviour supports are supported by evidence encompassing strategies and methods that aim to increase the person's quality of life and reduce challenging behaviour*
- Singer, G. H., & Wang, M. (2009). *The intellectual roots of positive behavior support and their implications for its development*. In Handbook of positive behavior support (pp. 17-46). Springer, Boston, MA.

Tactics And Strategies Used in PBS

Teaching safer and more understandable forms of communication using either speech or AAC (functional communication).

Providing visual supports and choices

Changing the environment around the person in such a way to prompt or increase the likelihood of an alternative behaviour, or make the occurrence of behaviours of concern less likely (environmental arrangement).

Minimising known triggers

Identifying personal preferences and creating a preferred and enriched environment around the person

Providing items or activities that provide stimulation that are more preferred than, or matches, the stimulation produced by engaging in behaviours of concern (competing stimuli).

Myth

- Positive behaviour support is all about changing the behaviour of the participant/client/direct recipient of services

A team approach



Although PBS does involve supporting the person to learn new skills, a big component of the work that PBS practitioners do is supporting the team around the person!



Let's look at how we might do this...

Environments of Concern

- Defined as environments that:
 - Do not allow the person to have their basic needs met (shelter, food, sleep, warmth)
 - Are devoid of learning opportunities
 - Are devoid of meaningful relationships and opportunities for socialisation
 - Are devoid of opportunities for recreation and leisure
 - Are devoid of opportunities to make choices
 - Impose restrictions
 - All sorts of positive behaviour goes unrecognised and un-reinforced

Address the Environment First

Sometimes, this is only thing you need to do!

This often involves working directly with the people around the client, who are responsible for the environment that the client lives in – *in this case, who is the client?*



MYTH

We can address behaviours of concern without understanding it's function

What is function?


- The reason *why* the person is engaging in the behaviour of concern
- A function-based approach to behaviour assessment and support is based on the following assumptions:
 - Challenging behaviour is learned
 - It serves a purpose for the person
 - It is not an innate part of the person, but the result of an interaction between that person and their environment
 - There are no problem people, just contexts that support challenging behaviour
 - Sometimes, *extraordinary* forms of challenging behaviour can develop and maintain under rather *ordinary* conditions
 - The answer to how to help people with their challenging behaviour lies in understanding the function of the behaviour for the person
- Sometimes, challenging behaviour is actually *a very adaptive response to a very maladaptive environment!*
- Hanley, G. P. (2012). Functional assessment of problem behavior: Dispelling myths, overcoming implementation obstacles, and developing new lore. *Behavior Analysis in Practice*, 5(1), 54-72.

What happens when we try to change behaviour without considering function?

We may blame the person for their behaviour



We engage in 'behaviour modification' at best
(*'powerful but arbitrary'!*)



We resort to medication, hospitalization, restraint, and
seclusion at worst



These are only temporary fixes, and by and large do not
consider and promote the well-being of the person



MYTH

When conducting an FBA, your job is to identify which one of the ‘four functions’ is maintaining the behaviour of concern

One-word
descriptions of
functions of
challenging behavior,
don't give us enough
information to build
an effective
behavior support
plan.

Fact



Your job is to identify the unique and personally-relevant function for each person



Every person has a different a unique learning history



Therefore, every FBA should identify a different function!



There are an endless number of possible functions!



But, be careful not to chase the causes of behaviour inside the person...



MYTH

When addressing behaviours of concern, all you need is a functional behaviour assessment!

Fact

- The FBA is just the first step in the process!
- The purpose of the FBA is to inform the design of a function-based, skill-based positive behaviour support plan!
 - Function-based - The support strategies are directly linked to behavioural function
 - Skill-based - support strategies emphasise the teaching of new skills
- Research consistently tells us that the *very best way* to produce meaningful and long-lasting reductions in problem behaviour is through teaching and richly reinforcing new skills
- Leif, E., & Ahlgren-Berg, A. (2019) *How to find the underlying reasons for challenging behaviour with functional behaviour assessment*. Monash Teachspace.

And...

Coach others in implementation of the behaviour support strategies

Collect and analyse data to make decisions about the effectiveness of the BSP

Make changes to the BSP based on the person's response to intervention

Assess the contextual fit and social validity of the BSP

Take steps to reduce and eliminate restrictive practices

Fade out

Where do we go from here?

- Positive behaviour support is not one thing! It is a highly individualised and person-centred approach to supporting individuals to live their best life
- We don't yet have enough practitioners who are skilled in this area
- Therefore, we need to build the capacity of the current disability workforce to deliver high quality, safe, and effective Positive Behaviour Support!

Current Challenges



We need more behaviour support practitioners



We need more tafe and uni coursework in contemporary PBS



We need to build capacity within organisations to provide supervision to direct care staff/support workers



We need to improve our collection and analysis of data, as part of the process



We need to shift our emphasis from reactive approaches that focus on reducing behaviours of concern to proactive approaches for enhancing quality of life



BUILDING CAPACITY OF THE WORKFORCE

Strategy #1: Adopt a Human Rights Focus

1

Ensure all staff are trained on the principles underpinning the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disability

2

Develop a policy that describes the steps your organisation will take to protect and uphold the human rights of your clients


3

As part of team meetings, discuss how current strategies for mitigating risk, including the use of restrictive practices, might be impinging on your clients human rights. Make these kinds of conversations 'business as usual'

Friedman, C. (2021). Reducing 'Challenging' Behavior by Training Support Staff to Promote Dignity and Respect. *Journal of Developmental and Physical Disabilities*, 33(3), 449-458.

Strategy #2: Use Active Staff Training Methods

Research suggests passive staff training methods (e.g., lectures or webinars alone) are unlikely to be effective



Active staff training can be highly effective!



Adopt a behavioural skills training (BST) model of staff training, which includes instructions, modelling, practice, and frequent feedback (positive and corrective)

Parsons, M. B., Rollyson, J. H., & Reid, D. H. (2012). Evidence-based staff training: A guide for practitioners. *Behavior analysis in practice*, 5(2), 2-11.

Strategy #3: Invest in Developing Your Staff



This is a high turnover industry! The importance of investing in your staff cannot be understated



Trusting and collaborative relationships must be developed between supervisors and supervisees



Adopt a 'participatory supervision' approach



Build supervision structures into the way your organisation operates

Sellers, T. P., LeBlanc, L. A., & Valentino, A. L. (2016). Recommendations for detecting and addressing barriers to successful supervision. *Behavior Analysis in Practice*, 9(4), 309-319.

Make Data Collection and Analysis a Key Focus of Your Work



Data will help you be objective, transparent, and accountable



Data will tell you when things are working, and will help you celebrate all the successes along the way!



Equally as important, data will tell you things are not working and need to be changed

Being a Trauma-Informed Practitioner

- Understand the risk factors (family violence, mental health issues, poverty and unemployment, social isolation, lack of learning opportunities, few social connections)
- Understand protective factors (positive attachment to caregivers, strong sense of belonging in family and community, peer role models, access to social services, access to trauma-informed services)
- Understand what trauma is – not an event per say, but a response to a stressful event or series of events in which the person's ability to cope is significantly reduced
- Understand that each person's response to a potentially stressful event is different
- Understand that some behaviours that challenge are very adaptive responses to trauma
- Always promote safety first (physical safety and positive relationships)
- Help trauma-impacted clients experience choice and control within their lives

Being a Culturally Capable Practitioner

- Culture is defined as “the attitudes, habits, norms, beliefs, behaviours, customs, rituals, styles and artifacts that express a group’s adaptation to its environment; that is, ways that are shared by group members and passed on over time”
- Understand that a person’s preferences and goals are influenced by culture
- Be aware of your own values, and how your own values have been shaped by your culture. Be mindful not to impose your values on others
- Be aware of your own biases, and how these biases may impact your professional work
- Maintain a positive attitude toward cultural differences
- Take steps to increase your understanding of different cultures (family practices, child rearing practices, traditions)
- Take time to listen – put the individual and their family at the centre of the behaviour support process



Further Resources

- Steege, M. W., Pratt, J. L., Wickerd, G., Guare, R., & Watson, T. S. (2019). *Conducting school-based functional behavioral assessments: A practitioner's guide*. Guilford Publications.
- O'Neill, R. E., Albin, R. W., Horner, R. H., Storey, K., & Sprague, J. R. (2014). *Functional assessment and program development*. Nelson Education.
- Greene, R. W. (2016). *Lost & Found: Helping behaviorally challenging students*. Jossey-Bass.
- Ayre, K., & Krishnamoorthy, G. (2020). *Trauma informed behaviour support: a practical guide to developing resilient learners*. USQ Pressbooks, Toowoomba, Australia.
- [The Behaviour Intervention Plan Quality Evaluation Scoring Guide \(BIP QE\) II](#)
- Reid, D. Parsons, M., & Green, C. (2012). *The Supervisor's Guidebook: Evidence-Based Strategies for Promoting Work Quality and Enjoyment Among Human Services Staff*. Habilitative Management Consultants, Inc.
- Daniels, A. C. (2000). *Bringing Out the Best in People. How to Apply the Astonishing Power of Positive Reinforcement*. McGraw-Hill.
- Sanetti, L. M. H., & Collier-Meek, M. A. (2019). *Supporting successful interventions in schools: Tools to plan, evaluate, and sustain effective implementation*. Guilford Publications



QUESTIONS?

