

Effective Behaviour Management in Further Education Classrooms for Students with ALN

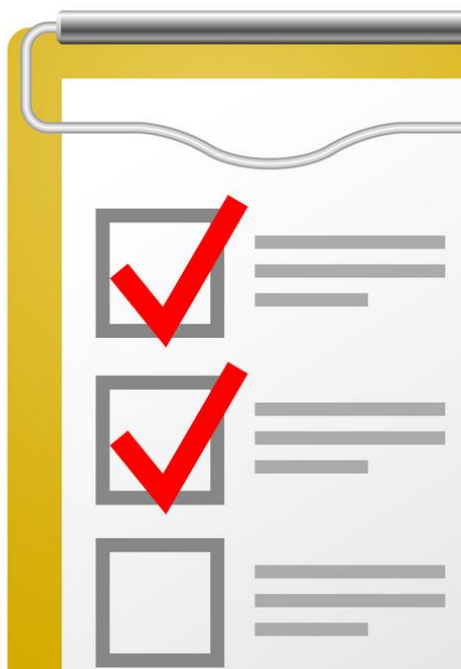
Jem Cogger





Session Objectives

- To understand some causes of challenging behaviour
- Use relevant research and theoretical frameworks to understand challenging behavior
- Adapt research and theory for specific context of setting (FE / ALN)
- Plan and Implement appropriate strategies to manage and reduce challenging behaviour



"A new Estyn report highlights how further education (FE) colleges in Wales are facing increasing behavioural challenges, with issues such as absenteeism, social media misuse, and vaping becoming widespread"

Estyn (2025)

Nearly all the colleges Estyn visited reported an increase in learners with ALN as well as mental health and anxiety-based difficulties since the pandemic.

— Estyn (2024)

"Consistent and positive approaches to managing behaviour are vital in creating a safe and inclusive learning environment where all learners can thrive"

Estyn (2022)

Understanding Behaviour

Behaviour = observable actions/responses to internal/external stimuli

Skinner (1953): *“any action that can be observed and measured”*



Behaviour in educational settings is complex, and there isn't a single explanation for why learners behave the way they do. Understanding behaviour helps us respond effectively, create inclusive environments, and support engagement and progression—particularly for learners with Additional Learning Needs (ALN).

For learners with ALN, emotional, cognitive, social, and communication challenges mean behaviour is often a form of communication (Welsh Government, 2023).

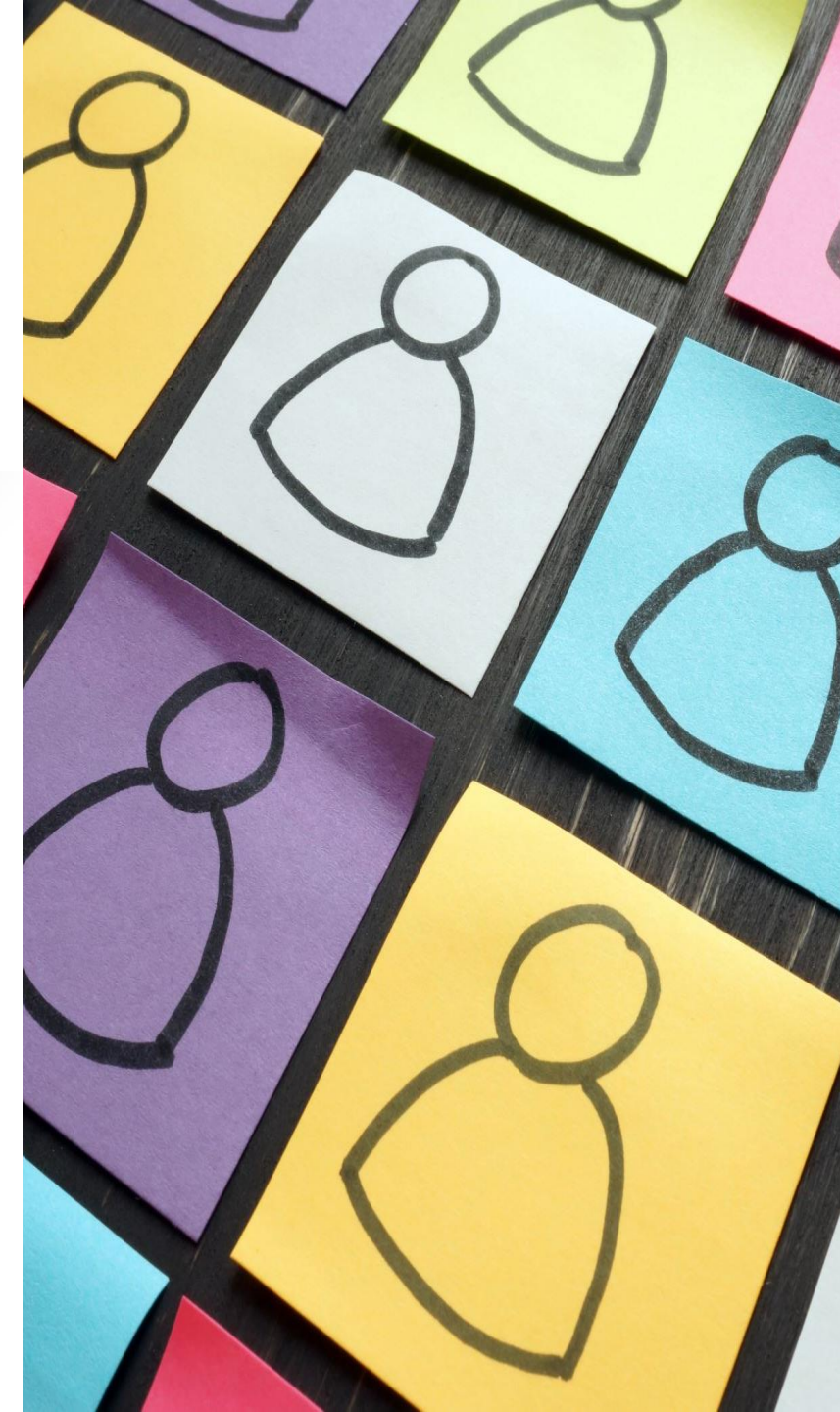
Gray & Woods (2022) state that ‘effective practices are those that are flexible and responsive to the unique circumstances of each learner’

Integrating Theories in Practice

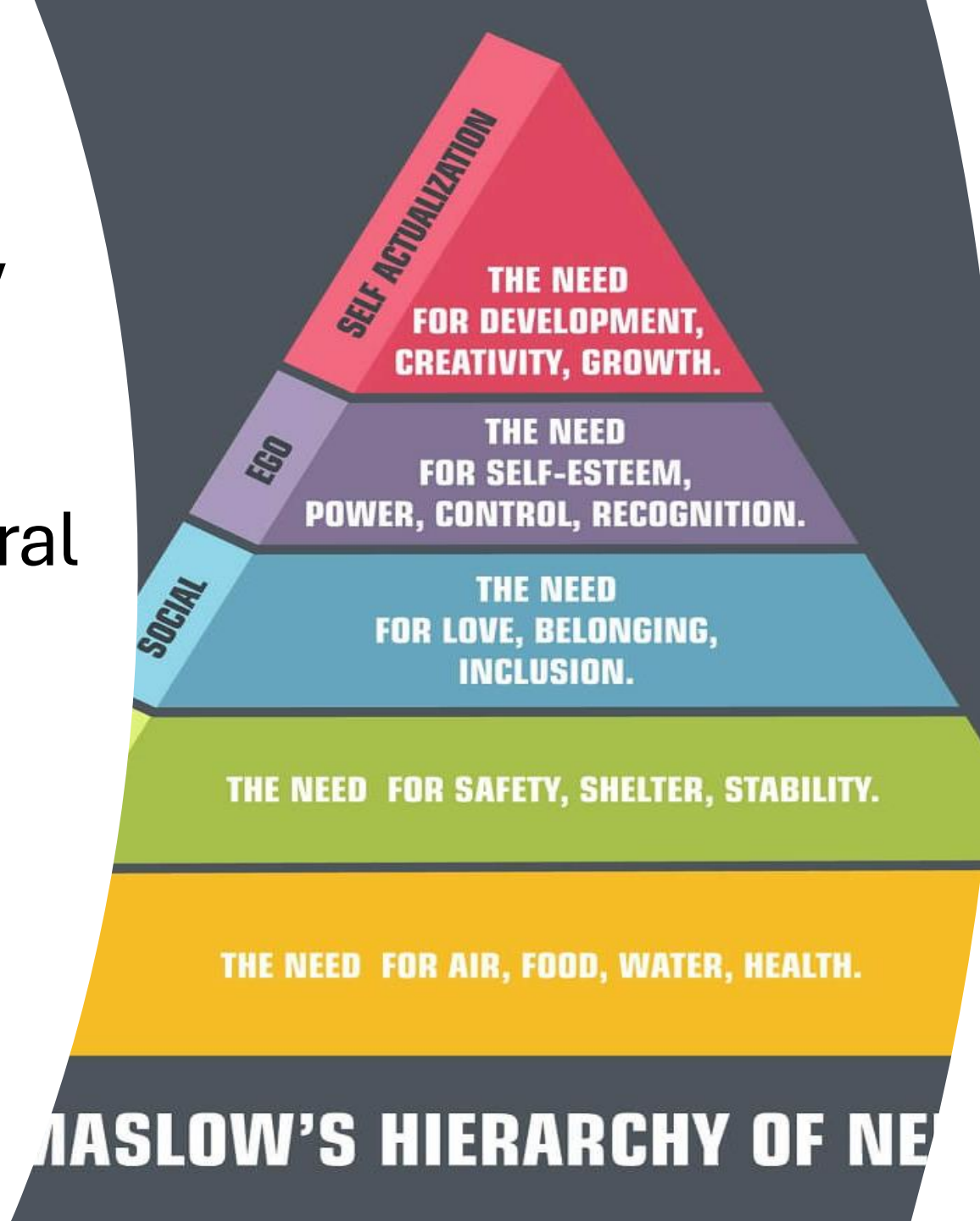
No single theory fully explains behaviour.

For ALN learners in FE:

- **Behaviourist strategies** can provide structure and clear expectations.
- **Cognitive approaches** can help learners think about consequences and may help with self-regulation.
- **Humanistic perspectives** ensure emotional and social needs are met.
- **Social learning** and **systemic approaches** consider the context and modelling of behaviour.
- **Psychodynamic insights** help us ask why the learner or learners are behaving in that way.



Maslow Hierarchy Of Needs in Behavioural Support



Understanding Maslow helps educators address learners' needs, boosting engagement and success (Walley, 2024)

- Unmet basic needs (food, rest, safety, structure) can lead to challenging behaviour.
- Meeting these needs supports engagement, motivation, and learning outcomes.

Practical strategies in FE include:

- Providing breakfast or snacks (NPTC Group of Colleges, 2022)
- Clear instructions, structured routines, IDPs for Autistic learners (Walley, 2024)
- Maslow is a guide, not one-size-fits-all approach: learners may pursue higher-level needs even if basics aren't fully met (Neher, 1991).
- Individualised approaches that are flexible are vital for ALN learners (Mohamed & Nordin, 2025).

IT'S WHAT YOU **DON'T SAY** THAT COUNTS!



ThePhoto by PhotoAuthor is licensed under CCYUSA.

Behaviour can tell us something about what the learner is experiencing and what they need from us. (Dix, 2017)

Behaviour as Communication

- **Challenging behaviour can be a form of communication for learners with ALN (Carr *et al.*, 2013)**
- Behaviour can reflect unmet needs, frustration, or discomfort when unable to communicate verbally.
- Understanding behaviour helps staff respond supportively, not punitively (Dix, 2017)
- Integrates with behaviourist, cognitive, and humanistic approaches for holistic support

Limitations

- Requires time, trust, and consistency, especially in FE environments with multiple teachers (Estyn, 2022)

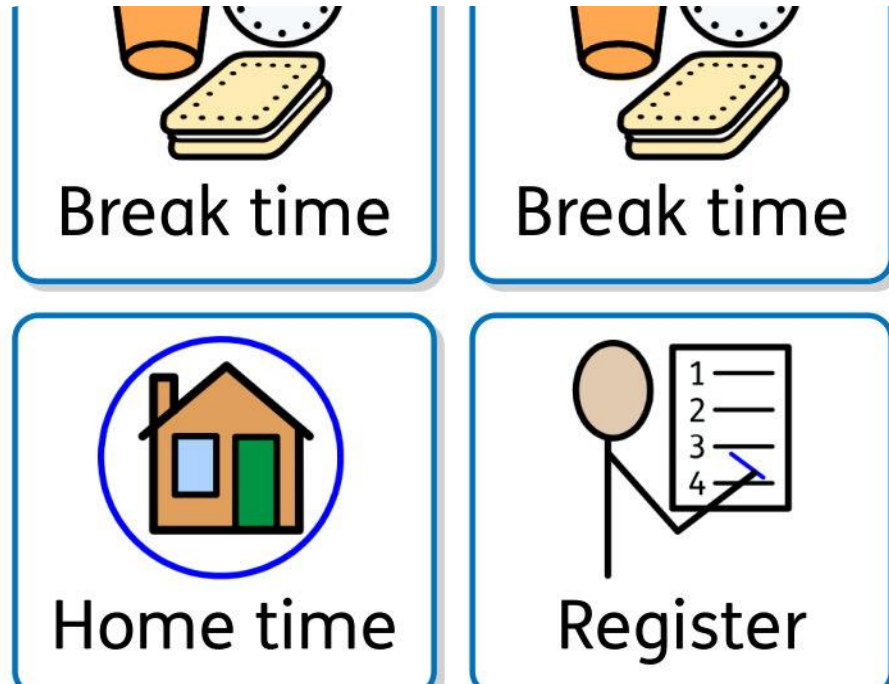
In Practice

- Have empathy and understanding – ask what is it the student is trying to communicate
- Adjust teaching or add strategies to meet individual needs

Effective FE Classroom Behaviour Strategies- handout

Strategy Area	What It Involves	Theoretical Link / Research	Practical Application for ALN Learners
Antecedent / Preventative	Establish routines, co-created rules, differentiated tasks, structured environment	Behaviourist: predictability reduces triggers (Skinner, 1953; Marzano, 2003;)	Clear routines, visual schedules, differentiated tasks
De-escalation	Calm communication, low-arousal tone, visual cues, personal space	Cognitive approach (Carr et al., 2013; Dix, 2017)	Allow space, model calm behaviour, provide signals or cues
Positive Reinforcement	Immediate, meaningful rewards	Behaviourist: operant conditioning (Skinner, 1953; Marzano, 2003)	Praise effort, small rewards, structured recognition, build self-regulation
Modelling / Adult Behaviour	Staff demonstrate calm, respectful interactions	Social Learning Theory (Bandura, 1977; Dix, 2017)	Staff model emotional regulation, communication, and prosocial behaviour
Individualised Interventions	Functional assessments, tailored support plans	Person-centred / Humanistic (Estyn, 2022; Carr et al., 2013)	IDPs, differentiated strategies, personalised targets
Technology / Environment	Classroom layout, interactive tools, task management apps	Behaviourist & humanistic (Marzano, 2003; Maslow, 1943)	Quiet zones, clear pathways, adaptive tech, minimise sensory overload
Boundaries & Expectations	Clear, fair, consistent rules	Relational & humanistic (Dix, 2017; Rogers, 1969), Packet et al 2022)	Co-create rules, explain consequences, balance firmness with care
Relationships & Respect	Trust, positive connections	Humanistic & relational (Rogers, 1969; Dix, 2017)	Build rapport, unconditional positive regard, treat learners with dignity

Antecedent / Preventative



Rules and Routines

- Clear rules and routines provide structure for learners to thrive (Estyn, 2012).
- Begin the year with visible, consistent, and reinforced expectations (Marzano, 2003).
- Visual supports, such as timetables, enhance understanding for learners with ALN (Rutherford et al., 2020).
- Consistent routines reduce behavioural problems and support emotional regulation (Hatherly et al., 2023).
- Predictable environments reinforce positive behaviour (Skinner, 1953).
- Balance needed: routines vs. autonomy and flexibility (Rogers, 1969).
- Prepare learners for unavoidable changes (e.g., cancelled classes, staff absence).

De-escalation

Calm	Calm communication and low-arousal tone reduce tension (Carr et al., 2013, Dix, 2017)
Space	Allow personal space and minimise sensory distractions (Hatherly <i>et al.</i> , 2023)
Model	Model calm behaviour and use gentle cues (Bandura, 1977 - CBT principles)
Support	Support learners to self-manage tasks, avoid over-reliance on staff
Balance	Balance structure with autonomy in sessions

Positive Reinforcement

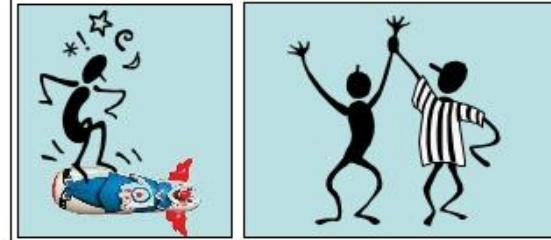
5

- Behaviourist: Operant conditioning (Skinner, 1953)
- Reinforce positive behaviour through praise, recognition, or small rewards
- Strengthens self-regulation and motivation (Parsonson, 2012)
- Useful for ALN learners — predictable and structured feedback
- Avoid over-reliance to support intrinsic motivation (Deci & Ryan 2000)

Positive vs. Negative Reinforcement

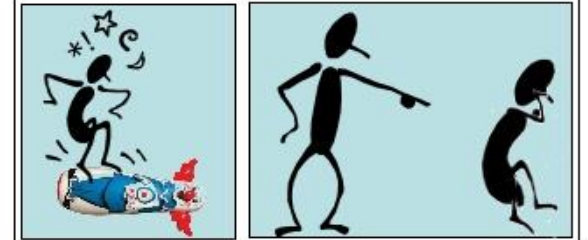
Positive Reinforcement

- Observer is likely to repeat a behavior a model demonstrates.
- Behavior doesn't matter, reinforcement received matters.



Negative Reinforcement

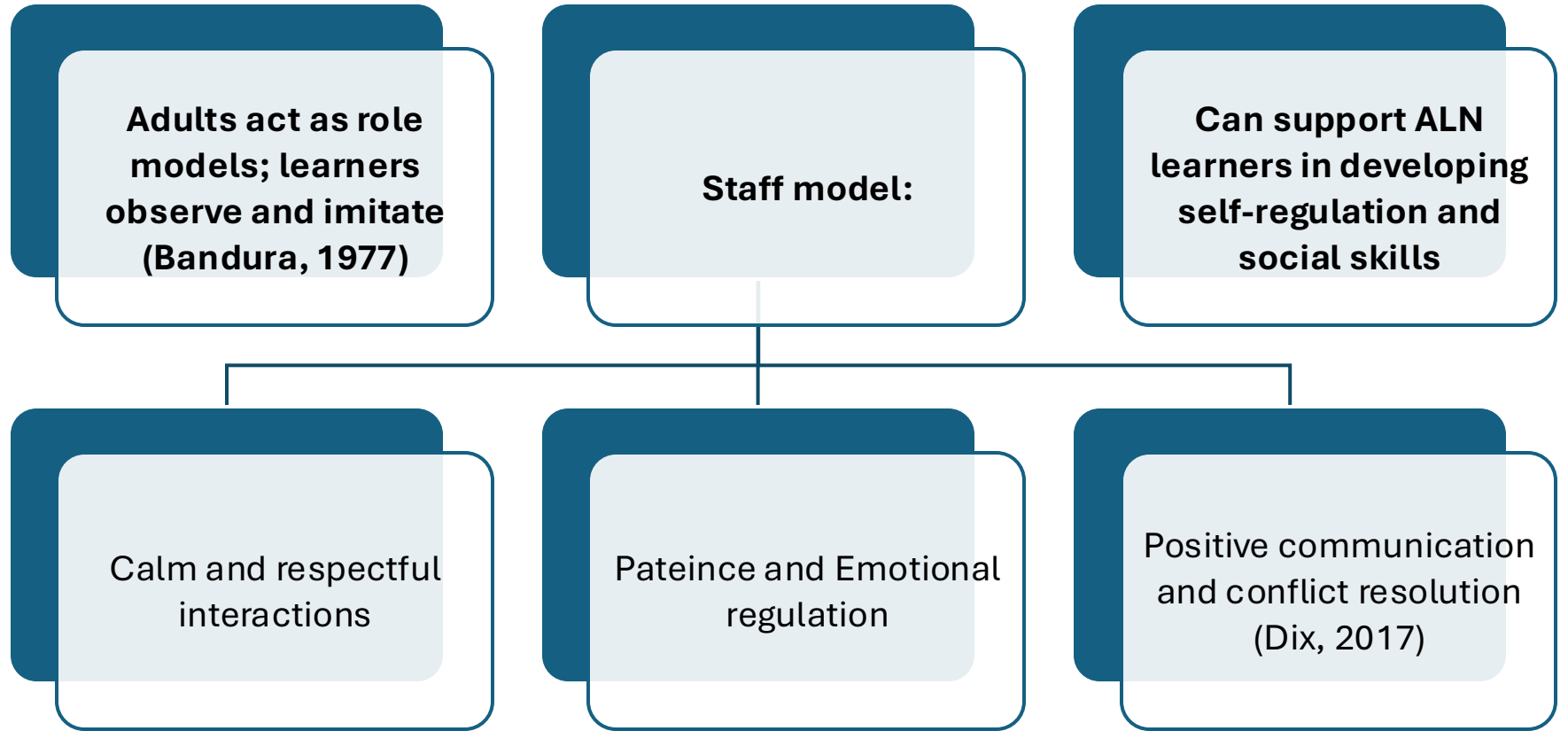
- Observer is less likely to repeat a behavior a model demonstrates.
- Behavior doesn't matter, reinforcement received matters.



Verbal – well done for waiting your turn

Symbolic – achievement points, certificate's,

Modelling Adult Behaviour



Examples:

- Speak calmly when learner shows frustration
- Show patience when explaining tasks and repeat or rephrase if needed.
- Handle conflicts fairly
- Encourage learners to apply calming strategies and offering encouragement and praise effort

When the Adults change, Everything Changes

When the adults change everything changes by Paul Dix is a behavioural management strategy that doesn't involve children having to change their behaviour as it has a focus on the teachers.

"Adult behaviour sets the tone for the classroom/learner's mirror adult's actions and responses"

"If adults change how they respond learners' behaviour will follow"

Key principles

1. Having the correct tone in certain situations- Showing less anger and more compassion and respect.
2. Trust and positive connections- Asking how the students are doing creating a positive connection.
3. Consistency with staff
4. Reflection upon staff

Practical examples

1. When trying to calm down a student stay calm and consistent
2. Same expectations and boundaries to make lessons predictable for ALN learners and easier to de-escalate if needed
3. Staff showing consistency with lessons and planning will help create a positive environment
4. The Staff taking the time as a team to discuss their responses to certain difficult situations and factor in different strategies for next time

This strategy is flexible and encourages staff to understand behaviour as a form of communication. It builds an environment where all students are respected and can succeed.

Students are more likely to engage and self-regulate when staff model consistency, respect and empathy.

Dix, P. (2017) *When the Adults Change, Everything Changes: Seismic Shifts in School Behaviour*. Carmarthen: Independent Thinking Press.

Individualised Interventions / Support

- Baseline assessments to identify learner needs
- Use of IDP to identify support needs
- Individual support plans and strategies
- Person-centred / humanistic approach (Estyn, 2022, Carr *et al.*, 2013)
- IDPs, differentiated strategies, and personalised targets
- Promotes engagement, inclusion, and skill development

Implications

- Can lead to an over-dependence on adult support
- needs ongoing review

In practice:

Adapting tasks using differentiated resources or visual supports, Setting individual literacy, numeracy, or communication targets, sensory breaks or movement breaks to help regulation.



Environment & Technology

- **Layout influences behaviour and engagement (Marzano, 2003)**
- **Safety and comfort are essential before learning (Maslow, 1943)**

Strategies to support learners:

- Quiet zones & clear pathways (Estyn, 2022)
- Remove clutter & sensory overload (Ashburner *et al.*, 2010)
- Allow a space for movement for ADHD learners (Barkley, 2015)
- Use adaptive technology & task management apps to help support individuals with their organisation, attention, and independent learning (Sugai & Simonsen, 2012)
- **Benefits:** reduces anxiety, supports focus, accommodates sensory differences
- **Negatives :** overly structured environments may limit autonomy and exploration (Sugai & Simonsen, 2012; Marzano, 2003)



Boundaries and Expectations

- **Boundaries are about clarity, not control**
- Clear, fair, and consistent expectations support safety and respect (Dix, 2017).
- Co-created rules promote ownership and self-regulation
- Consistency and calm responses strengthen trust and relationships (Dix, 2017).
- Flexibility prevents inequity for ALN learners (Packer *et al.*, 2022).

In practice:

- Visual reminders of rules and routines
- Restorative approaches, not punitive
- Space for movement or quiet reflection when needed

CLASSROOM EXPECTATIONS

- 1 Show Respect.**
Respect your teacher, classmates, belongings, and yourself!
- 2 Do Your Best.**
Always put your best efforts into your work.
- 3 Be Prepared.**
Have all of your classroom materials ready to go.
- 4 Stay Positive.**
Keep a growth mindset, even when things get hard.
- 5 Be Kind.**
Stay kind to your teacher, classmates, and those around you.
- 6 Make Me Proud!**
Try to make your teacher proud at all times.

Relationships and Respect

'Trust and positive connections shape behaviour more than rules or sanctions' (Dix, 2017)

- Unconditional positive regard builds rapport, engagement, and motivation (Rogers 1969)
- Structured routines combined with relational strategies support ALN learners (Marzano et al., 2003)
- **Positives :**
- Increases engagement and self-regulation (Dix, 2017)
- Promotes willingness to follow routines and rules (Rogers, 1969)
- Supports skill development and inclusion (Marzano et al., 2003)

Limitations:

- Some learners may appear compliant but experience internal distress (Packer et al., 2022)
- Diverse ALN/SEN needs require flexibility; no single strategy fits all Estyn, 2022)



Case Studies - handouts

Max is a 16-year-old learner with ADHD participating in an Independent Living Skills practical cooking session. He is very energetic and creative but struggles with attention, impulsivity, and following multi-step instructions. Some behaviours in the kitchen have resulted in near misses and often unsafe for himself and others.

Challenges observed	Strategies implemented	Outcomes
• Interrupting peers during tasks • Difficulty maintaining focus on cooking • Frustration when corrected or redirected • Over-reliance on staff prompts for task completion and safety	• Positive Reinforcement: Staff used a token system to reward focus and task completion, offering small activity choices as incentives. • Structured Independence: Max was given responsibility for simple tasks (e.g., measuring ingredients) with minimal intervention, promoting autonomy. • De-escalation Techniques: Staff used calm tone, proximity control, and reduced sensory input to help Max manage frustration. • Visual Task Cards: Step-by-step recipe cards helped Max stay on track without constant verbal reminders.	• Max completed cooking tasks with reduced adult support. • He began using task cards independently and asked to lead a group activity. • Staff noted improved peer interactions and reduced impulsivity. • Max expressed pride in “doing it myself,” showing increased confidence and motivation.
This case study shows success due to a balance of structure and independence for Max. Staff have reinforced positive behaviour and reduced an over reliance of staffing which has supported Max in the kitchen.		

Learner Profile:

Ellie is a 17-year-old student on an Independent Living Skills (ILS) programme at a Further Education college in Wales. She is Autistic and experiences high levels of anxiety, particularly in noisy or unpredictable environments. Transition between classrooms and changes to routine often cause distress.

Challenges observed	Strategies implemented	Outcomes
• Avoidance of group activities and social interaction • Emotional shutdown during timetable changes • Sensory overload in busy corridors • Limited verbal communication when anxious and stressed.	• Visual Supports: Visual emotion cards to help Ellie identify and understand and label her feelings. A personalised visual timetable and “Now/Next” board helped Ellie anticipate transitions and reduce anxiety. • Quiet Space Access: Ellie’s Individual Development Plan (IDP) included access to a quiet room when overwhelmed. • Modelling & Reinforcement: Staff modelled calm behaviour and praised Ellie for using coping strategies, such as requesting time out.	• Ellie began independently requesting quiet time when needed. • Her participation in group activities increased gradually. • Staff reported fewer incidents of emotional shutdown. • Ellie expressed feeling “more in control” during transitions.
This case study shows the importance of combining structure with emotional support. The staff recognised that Ellie’s behaviour was a form of communication and by recognising this they had empathy and responded with strategies that could help and support Ellie. This also aligns with Paul Dix’s principle that adult behaviour sets the tone for learner behaviour.		

References

- Carr, E.G., Dunlap, G., Horner, R.H., Koegel, R.L., Turnbull, A.P., Sailor, W., Anderson, J., Albin, R.W., Koegel, L.K. and Fox, L. (2013) 'Positive behavior support: Evolution of an applied science', *Journal of Positive Behavior Interventions*, 4(1), pp. 4–16.
- Deci, E.L. and Ryan, R.M. (2000) 'The “what” and “why” of goal pursuits: Human needs and the self-determination of behavior', *Psychological Inquiry*, 11(4), pp. 227–268.
- Department for Education (2018) *Mental health and behaviour in schools: Departmental advice for school staff*. London: DfE.
- Dix, P. (2017) *When the Adults Change, Everything Changes: Seismic Shifts in School Behaviour*. Carmarthen: Independent Thinking Press.
- Estyn (2025) *Learner Behaviour in Further Education Colleges*. Available at: <https://estyn.gov.wales/improvement-resources/learner-behaviour-in-further-education-colleges/> (Accessed: 23 October 2025).
- Estyn (2024) *Additional Learning Needs in Further Education Colleges*. Available at: <https://estyn.gov.wales/improvement-resources/additional-learning-needs-in-further-education-colleges/> (Accessed: 23 October 2025).
- Estyn (2024) *The Additional Learning Needs System: Progress of Schools and Local Authorities in Supporting Pupils with Additional Learning Needs*. Available at: <https://annual-report.estyn.gov.wales/2023/the-new-additional-learning-needs-system-progress-of-schools-and-local-authorities-in-supporting-pupils-with-additional-learning-needs/> (Accessed: 23 October 2025).
- Estyn (2022) *Supporting Learners with ALN in Post-16 Education*. Cardiff: Estyn. Available at: <https://estyn.gov.wales/improvement-resources/supporting-learners-with-aln-in-post-16-education/> (Accessed: 23 October 2025).
- Gray, A. and Woods, K. (2022) 'Person-Centred Practices in Education: A Systematic Review of Research', *Support for Learning*, 37(2), pp. 309–335. Available at: <https://www.wiley.com/en-us> (Accessed: 14 October 2025).
- Hatherly, K., Stienwandt, S., Salisbury, M.R., Roos, L.E. and Fisher, P.A. (2023) 'Routines as a protective factor for emerging mental health and behavioral problems in children with neurodevelopmental delays', *Advances in Neurodevelopmental Disorders*, 7(1), pp. 35–45. doi: 10.1007/s41252-022-00260-y.
- Marzano, R.J. (2003) *Classroom Management That Works: Research-Based Strategies for Every Teacher*. Alexandria, VA: ASCD.

- Maslow, A.H. (1943) 'A theory of human motivation', *Psychological Review*, 50(4), pp. 370–396. Available at: <https://psychclassics.yorku.ca/Maslow/motivation.htm> (Accessed: 14 October 2025).
- McLeod, S. (2025) *Behaviorism in psychology*. Simply Psychology. Available at: <https://www.simplypsychology.org/behaviorism.html> (Accessed: 14 October 2025).
- Mohamed, R. and Nordin, N. (2025) 'Applying Maslow's hierarchy in inclusive education: Insights for learners with ALN', *International Journal of Educational Research*, 120, p.102156. Available at: <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0883033825000456> (Accessed: 14 October 2025).
- Neher, A. (1991) 'Maslow's theory of motivation: A critique', *Journal of Humanistic Psychology*, 31(3), pp. 89–112. Available at: <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/0022167891313010> (Accessed: 14 October 2025).
- NPTC Group of Colleges (2022) *Free breakfasts for every student at NPTC Group of Colleges*. Available at: <https://www.nptcgroup.ac.uk/2022/09/12/free-breakfasts-for-every-student-at-nptc-group-of-colleges/> (Accessed: 14 October 2025).
- Packer, R., Abbinett, E. and Morris, E. (2022) "Be prepared and give it a go!" Transitions into further education for learners with additional learning needs', *British Journal of Special Education*, 49(1), pp. 35–51. doi: 10.1111/1467-8578.12409. (Accessed: 23 October 2025).
- Parsonson, B.S. (2012) 'Evidence-based classroom behaviour management strategies', *Kairaranga*, 13(1), pp. 16–23. Available at: <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ976654.pdf> (Accessed: 22 October 2025).
- Rogers, C.R. (1969) *Freedom to Learn: A View of What Education Might Become*. Columbus: Charles Merrill.
- Rutherford, M., Lahood-Kullberg, B., Baxter, J., Johnston, L. and Cebula, K. (2020) 'Pupils' views on visual timetables and labels in mainstream primary classrooms', *Good Autism Practice (GAP)*, 21(2), pp. 11–22. Available at: <https://eresearch.qmu.ac.uk/handle/20.500.12289/10672> (Accessed: 17 October 2025).

- Skinner, B.F. (1953) *Science and Human Behavior*. New York: Macmillan.
- Smith, B.J. and Fox, L. (2003) *Position statement: Challenging behavior*. Division for Early Childhood of the Council for Exceptional Children. Available at: https://challengingbehavior.org/docs/DEC_PositionStatement_ChallengingBehavior.pdf (Accessed: 14 October 2025).
- Sugai, G. and Simonsen, B. (2012) 'PBIS history, defining features, and misconceptions', *PBIS Newsletter*, 1(1), pp. 1–4.
- Welsh Government (2023) *ALN Code for Wales*. Cardiff: Welsh Government.
- Welsh Government (2023) *Additional learning needs and behaviour support in schools*. Cardiff: Welsh Government.

Recap: Meeting in "Jem Cogger" 01 January | Meeting | Microsoft Teams

AI declaration

I declare I used co pilot on 14.10.25 to give an example for case studies using behaviour strategies for students with ALN

I used co pilot on 14.10.25 to find "Etsyn reports that are relavent to ALN in FE"

I used co pilot 23.10.25 on "how do behaviour theories link to strategies for aln students"

I used co pilot 23.10.25 on "What are the limitations of behaviour strategies – help me with some example"

ALNET Act (Wales) 2018

ALNET (Wales) 2018 promotes **inclusive, evidence-based approaches** for learners with ALN.

- Introduces **Individual Development Plans (IDPs)** – tailored plans outlining the support each learner needs.
- IDPs can include **strategies to manage behaviour**, helping learners engage fully in their learning.
- Encourages **preventive strategies**, supporting self-regulation and independence.
- FE environments are complex – **mixed-age groups, varied levels, multiple classroom transitions** (Estyn, 2022).
- Behaviour strategies must be **flexible, person-centred, and responsive** – not a one-size-fits-all approach (Gray & Woods, 2022).



Theory

Theory	Key Principles	How to Apply	Key Thinkers / References
Behaviourist Theory	Behaviour is learned through interaction with the environment; reinforcement and punishment shape behaviour.	Use of positive reinforcement, reward systems, and structured routines to encourage desired behaviour. Particularly effective for promoting clear expectations in ALN settings.	B.F. Skinner; McLeod (2018); Woolfolk (2016)
Cognitive Theory	Behaviour is influenced by internal thought processes; learners interpret and make sense of their experiences.	Encouraging self-regulation, problem-solving strategies, and reflective practice. Supports students in understanding consequences and making informed choices.	Jean Piaget; Woolfolk (2016); Eggen & Kauchak (2020)
Humanistic Theory	Behaviour is linked to an individual's need for belonging, self-esteem, and self-actualisation. A positive environment supports engagement.	Creating nurturing environments that meet emotional and social needs. Aligns well with inclusive approaches for neurodivergent learners.	Abraham Maslow; Carl Rogers; McLeod (2019)
Social Learning Theory	Behaviour is learned through observation, imitation, and modelling. Social context plays a key role.	Using peer modelling, group work, and teacher modelling to encourage positive behaviours.	Albert Bandura; Eggen & Kauchak (2020)
Systemic / Ecological Theory	Behaviour is influenced by multiple interacting systems (family, school, community, policies).	Multi-agency approaches to behaviour support; recognising the wider context of learners' lives.	Urie Bronfenbrenner; Woolfolk (2016)
Psychodynamic Theory	Behaviour may stem from unconscious emotions, past experiences, and unmet needs.	Understanding underlying emotions behind challenging behaviour, building trust and emotional safety.	Sigmund Freud; McLeod (2017)