

IMRAY P. (2008) TURNING THE TABLES ON CHALLENGING BEHAVIOUR  
LONDON: ROUTLEDGE

## CHAPTER 8

## Writing a behaviour management programme

Although this is not a particularly difficult practice, it is one that is absolutely essential to the success of any strategies devised. If you take as a general rule that if *it's not written down, it's not going to happen*, writing it down effectively becomes doubly important. This chapter is, however, one of the shortest in the whole book for the very simple reason that to be effective, the behaviour management programme needs to be a very short document. It should contain:

- 1 a couple of sentences of background information, including some ideas as to why (you think) the behaviour is occurring;
- 2 a single objective, though definitely only two at the most;
- 3 some suggestions about how you're going to help the child, young person or adult to achieve the target;
- 4 the initials of the person writing the programme;
- 5 the date.

Let's take these issues one by one.

### **1 A couple of sentences of background information, including some ideas as to why (you think) the behaviour is occurring**

Not everyone who deals with the child, young person or adult who displays challenging behaviours is going to know them equally well. A little bit of information for those who might not be in the normal information loop, such as meal supervisors or bus escorts at school or occasional supply cover at the respite home, is always helpful. Clearly you're going to have to be selective about what you say and confidential information cannot be given out in such a document, but *why?* has to be addressed. You may want to try and be specific, especially if the child has ASD, as in 'Liam really enjoys watching Jonathon going into a tantrum' as a reason behind Liam hitting Jonathon over the head with the nearest available object, or fall back on attention seeking and/or task avoidance if you're referring to someone with SLD or PMLD. Either way, it is always best to try for a reason, otherwise the reader might assume that there is no reason at all, and we know (don't we!) that this is definitely not the case.

## 2 A single objective, though definitely only two at the most

A key factor in any behaviour management programme is to make absolutely sure that it's a success. We can get overwhelmed with the multiplicity of behaviours and problems and if we try to solve everything at once we're likely to end up solving nothing. Write a hierarchy of behaviours, detailing the 'worst' behaviour, the one most in need of changing, and concentrate on that single behaviour. Be successful with that one and move on to the next. Of course it may be that all the behaviours can be resolved by a single action plan (as for example with Rahul in Chapter 4 and Tina (though much slower) in Chapter 5), though most often this is not, unfortunately, the case!

The objective needs to be SMART – Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic and Time-bound. Being wishy-washy with the target is not going to help anyone because this usually means it is impossible to achieve. If Liam is hitting Jonathon several times a day (in order to watch him going into a tantrum) this is clearly an established behaviour and it is probably not realistic to think/hope that this will cease immediately. It may, however, be realistic to expect Liam not to hit Jonathon for an hour – by, for example, establishing a clear system of rewarding Liam for not hitting, perhaps backed up by a social story. *To not hit Jonathon* is not specific, not achievable, not realistic and not time-bound. It is measurable, but the measurement is almost inevitably going to indicate failure. By limiting the demands placed on Liam, as in *To not hit Jonathon for 1 hour*, we're trying to ensure that the programme is successful, where success is measured by a reduction in the number of hitting incidents. The greater the success, the more we can move Liam along, so that the next BMP might have as its objective *To not hit Jonathon for 2 hours*.

## 3 Some suggestions about how you're going to help the child, young person or adult to achieve the target

Firstly you'll need to know the nature of the learning difficulty, in order to opt for the appropriate response, since we have already established that any resolution to the problems of the challenging behaviour will vary according to the nature of that learning difficulty. Secondly, it would certainly be useful to check off 'The Magnificent Seven' – Why?, Consistency, Positive, Reward, Control, Time and Success.

### Why?

You will need to have some ideas as to why the behaviour is occurring – you may not be correct, but an educated guess is better than no guess at all, because there is a reason for the behaviour.

### Consistency

You will need to make sure that everyone within the organisation who has regular contact with the child, young person or adult who displays the challenging behaviour(s) is willing and able to follow the same programme. The

more people who follow it, the quicker the new behaviour will become established.

### Positive

Part of this consistency of approach is to ensure that everyone is adopting a positive attitude to the child and the programme you have adopted. The very best way to do this is to involve as many people as possible in the actual devising of the programme. If people have had a chance to discuss the issues they will feel much more involved and have a common ownership of the programme. It will be **their** programme that has to work rather than a programme imposed on them from above.

### Reward

Most programmes, especially for those with SLD and ASD, will involve a reward system. As we have already noted a reward is only a reward if it changes the behaviour, and it therefore has to be motivating to the person whose behaviour you want to change. The very best way of working out what motivates is to devise a **strengths chart** which will detail what the individual is good at. These strengths:

- must be positive;
- can be what the learner enjoys doing as well as what he/she is good at. This may include stereotypical or self-stimulatory behaviours such as 'loves playing with cassette recorders' or 'really enjoys flapping with a favourite piece of string';
- may be associated with spending time with a favourite person or persons, especially if it is an attention-seeking behaviour you're trying to change;
- need not be academic skills – 'has a sense of humour' is a strength;
- should number around ten – you might have to think a bit! – though they may number less for those on the autistic continuum where it might only be one or two;
- will then form the basis for our reward system. You may not be able to use all of them but there will usually be at least a couple that can be used in all situations.

If you **really** can't find any rewards that work it may be that the learner has a profound learning difficulty and therefore can't make the cause and effect connection between the reward and the behaviour. Alternatively – and especially if the learner is diagnosed ASD, or exhibits strong autistic type behaviours, or what works as a reward one day doesn't work the next – it may be that the learner has a tendency towards Pathological Demand Avoidance (PDA). Have a look at Elizabeth Newson's website at [pdacontact.org.uk](http://pdacontact.org.uk).

### Control

If you have established (or even if you believe) that one of the reasons behind the behaviour is that the learner is trying to establish control – however badly – you

will need to allow for that control to be exercised effectively in a non-challenging manner. **Please remember** that we shouldn't be aiming to take the control away from the learner, merely to allow him/her to exercise the control without hitting, biting, scratching, kicking, throwing computers over or whatever the behaviours happen to be.

## Time

There is virtually always some sort of time factor involved in a behavioural objective. This usually involves the objective itself as in for Liam *To not hit Jonathon for 1 hour*, though you may also wish to outline how you're going to explain time to the learner. To this end sand-timers; clocks which colour in the time as the hand goes round; traffic-light timers which give an amber warning for when the time is nearly up (especially useful for counting down on a reward that the learner might not want to leave); and visual timetables are especially important. **Please remember** that time is a very abstract concept and needs to be explained in a very concrete manner to learners with severe learning difficulties. The second part of the *Time* factor is that for those with a severe learning difficulty, the behaviour should start to change fairly quickly – within 4 weeks at most. If there's been no significant change within that time, it's probable that something basic has gone wrong – the rewards aren't working (they're the wrong 'rewards'), people are being inconsistent in the application of the programme or the objective is too difficult for the learner are the usual ones, but there may be other reasons. Don't give up – try a new tack.

## Success

There is no point in putting in place any programme which cannot succeed. You may not be absolutely certain that it will succeed, we seldom are, but you should have a good idea that it should succeed. If it doesn't, don't give up: start again – this can be a valuable learning process for all of us. **Please remember**, however, that this is not just about the learner being successful. We cannot and **must not** put all of the emphasis for success on the learner and then blame the learner when it goes wrong. If a behaviour management programme goes wrong, it is virtually always **our** fault, in that we haven't yet found the key. I firmly believe that there is no such thing as a child, young person or adult with a severe or profound learning difficulty who wants to display challenging behaviours. They do what they do because they haven't found a better way. It is our job to teach them that better way.

## 4 The initials of the person writing the programme

Although the devising of the programme should be a collective process involving as many people as possible and certainly all those who regularly come into contact with the learner, the actual writing of the programme needs to be a managerial responsibility. Somebody needs to draw the ideas together and put them down on paper.

## 5 The date

A simple and obvious detail I know, but I've lost count of how many programmes I've seen that are undated. How do you know which is current? Behaviour management is difficult enough without us adding to the problems!

Finally in this very short chapter, a quote from Dave Hewett (1988a):

*Many staff, understandably, want to be told exactly what to do when 'this' or 'that' happens. This can be achieved up to a point, and the more effective teams talk about and/or write sensible guiding procedures for known recurring situations. However, expecting to be absolutely and precisely guided in all of the behaviours that you as a member of staff will need in a situation is generally a mistake. It is more realistic and effective for staff to carry with them in their heads a set of principles for managing difficult situations. The principles offer a framework of decision making throughout the incident, but it is necessary to make judgements and decisions based on these principles and the existence of any helpful known procedures.*

(p. 71)

In other words, when dealing with behaviours which challenge us, we need to stay calm and we need to use our common sense. If Liam has gone 55 minutes without hitting Jonathon and you can see him *winding up* for an attack it's probably best to slip into Plan B. You might try distracting or guiding him away from Jonathon, taking Jonathon out of the room for a while or maybe even pretending that the hour is actually up after 55 minutes and giving Liam lots of praise and his reward. Consistency is important but rigidity is not.

## Summary

In this chapter, I have tried to give some guidance for actually writing the behaviour management programme itself; and it is **absolutely essential** that it is written down.

The general rules are:

- Try and work out why the behaviour is occurring.
- Do not try and resolve everything at once.
- Organise a priority of behaviours.
- Deal with the single most challenging behaviour first, then move on to the next when success has been achieved.
- Ensure that the objective is SMART.
- Write down some ways in which you might help the learner to achieve the objective.
- Children, young people and adults with severe and profound learning difficulties cannot do it on their own – they have severe and profound learning difficulties!
- If the strategies fail it is almost always our fault.
- Don't give up – try again.

- It doesn't help to be totally rigid in our thinking. We need to be consistent, but we also need to allow for some flexibility. The important feature here is that the learner needs to succeed, and we have to make it as easy as possible for that to happen. Then we can move on to the next (more challenging) target.
- Behaviour management programmes should essentially be about short-term needs and you will therefore have to see some success within a fairly short space of time – probably within a maximum of 4 weeks.
- It is important to have a long-term view and for those with profound learning difficulties there may only be a long-term view. For those with severe learning difficulties, however, (with or without autism) you are unlikely to be able to resolve the long-term problems until you resolve the short-term problems.

## CHAPTER 9

# What do we do when it doesn't work?

Unfortunately, there is no such thing as a fool-proof strategy, and there is no such thing as a book which has all the answers – including (however reluctant I am to write such a statement) this one! I am, however, confident enough to suggest that if the strategies put in place have not worked it is usually something fairly simple and a quick referral back to 'The Magnificent Seven' of **Why?, Consistency, Positive, Reward, Control, Time and Success** may be enough to rectify the problem and should certainly be your first port of call. As mentioned in the last chapter the problems are often fairly simply resolved.

## The rewards aren't working

This means effectively that they're the wrong 'rewards' because they are not sufficiently motivating to the individual concerned. Generally with those on the autistic continuum, you're unlikely to have that problem because once you've found the one or possibly two things they **really** like, they'll continue to be highly motivated by them. There is always the chance that the motivator (the individual's very special interest) will change suddenly, but then it's just a matter of switching to the new one. With SLD it may be that they've become bored with the reward, especially if they're receiving it several times a day! There are only so many times you can listen to 'Is this the way to Amarillo?' even if you're a 12-year-old with severe learning difficulties. In this case, try broadening the choices on offer, or have several cards with three or four options on each. The more you know about the child and the sort of things they like, the easier it will be.

## The objective is too loose

If the objective is open to interpretation and not **really** tight, it may be that the learner has lost concentration before he/she can achieve it, or doesn't actually understand what the objective is. Generally the answer is to make it time bound as in *to stay on task for 20 minutes*.

## The objective is too difficult for the learner

There is often a temptation to say that because a learner can achieve a certain target **most** of the time, he/she should be able to achieve it **all** of the time. That is, our natural desire as educators to stretch our charges can lead to us pushing too

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radically different from each other. It may be reasonable to expect teachers and TAs to have a thorough knowledge of the three (and perhaps four) categories of disability, but it seems wholly unreasonable to expect teachers and TAs to differentiate teaching within the same class across the three (and perhaps four) categories. There are, I'm sure, some staff who can do it, but these will be the exception (and exceptional!) which prove the rule that it is just too difficult to achieve success consistently across such a wide range of need. The increasing trend towards large special schools covering a range of need is one, therefore, that has to be thought about very carefully. I understand that this trend may well be a matter of economies of scale, but the economic argument could easily backfire if classes become unmanageable.

Nonetheless, the case for such multi-category schools is still as strong if each of the categories of learning need were taught separately rather than in the same class. Inclusion time could be planned within areas like drama and dance and music as well as mealtimes, playtimes and assemblies. I don't believe that inclusion is about offering the same education to all, because the same education will not suit everyone, any more than the same size clothes will fit everyone. Inclusion is surely about providing all with an equal opportunity to an education appropriate to their needs. It is surely far more about quality than quantity.

### **The child is appropriately placed from a learning perspective, but the behaviours are insurmountable**

Of course, even if we get it all right, do all the right things, follow the principles steadfastly and are patient and loving and persistent, there is no **absolute** guarantee of success. There are bound to be some learners whose needs are so great that residential care is the only answer. These learners will be those for whom consistency is paramount across every hour of every day and who place the greatest strain upon normal family life. They will be those whose needs stretch the resources of the education, social and health agencies beyond the point of an effective service. It is definitely the case that these instances will be very much the exception, but nonetheless they are bound to occur, however occasionally, and the only answer is probably a residential placement. Certainly these cases will need to have as their priority the best interests of the child, young person or adult, but we cannot ignore the sometimes dangerous degree of strain they can place on parents and siblings.

Lastly in this chapter, there are two areas that I have barely touched upon in the book, that is, the use of drugs to control behaviour and the use of restraint to control behaviour.

### **Drugs**

There is no doubt that drugs which claim to control behaviour have become considerably more sophisticated over the last ten years or so. Some such as Ritalin (and other similar compounds with differing brand names) have almost become commonplace with certain diagnosed conditions like ADHD. There has to be a question mark against the extraordinary rise of diagnosed ADHD and the

## Restraint

I can only personally speak for Team-Teach, since I am an accredited trainer, and am very happy to recommend them to you. They can be contacted through [www.team-teach.co.uk](http://www.team-teach.co.uk). It is, however, vital that we recognise that any recourse to restraint is an emergency and it should certainly not be used as a replacement for a behaviour management policy. There is no doubt that using restraint techniques on a regular basis is an indication that we have failed in our attempts to teach learners better ways of communicating their needs. There may be exceptional circumstances – especially when dealing with those with emotional, social and behavioural difficulties (ESBD) – but for SLD, PMLD and ASD use of restraint techniques must be the occasional exception rather than the norm.

I have tried throughout this book to give both a theoretical and a practical background on which to base your work with the children, young people and adults with SLD, PMLD and ASD who are expressing challenging behaviours; but I do not want this work to be seen as either theoretical or academic in nature. This is a book about practice, and it is very much about practice making perfect. There's a very appropriate story about Gary Player, in his time one of the world's very best golfers. After finishing a particularly low-scoring round, one commentator remarked that he thought Player might have ridden his luck that day. 'It's odd isn't it,' replied Player, 'that the more I practise the luckier I get!' And this is largely at the core of the book, because I've made more mistakes than you could shake a stick at but still passionately believe that the next time I'm going to get it right if I keep working at it. I don't actually have all the answers – no-one does – and I think it's important that readers accept that temporary failure,

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