



## Challenging Behaviors

### Introduction

“Severely challenging behaviors refers to behavior of such an intensity, frequency or duration that the physical safety of the person or others is likely to be placed in serious jeopardy, or behavior which is likely to seriously limit or delay access to, and use of, ordinary community facilities.”

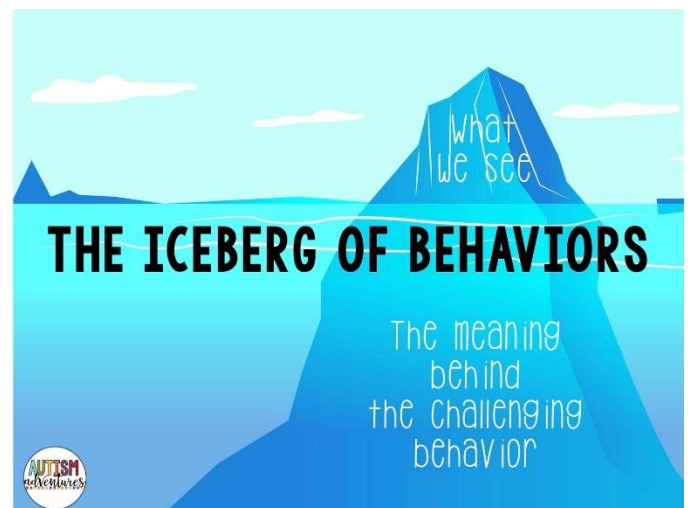
Challenging behavior is a consequence of both environmental and individual characteristics. These characteristics can also be referred to as unmet needs or causes. It is Pikes Peak Respite Services (PPRS) policy to understand, recognize, and assist individuals with challenging behaviors in order to keep the those receiving services and others safe.

In almost all cases, challenging behavior is –

- Not a problem that someone has
- Not meaningless
- Not intended to be troublesome
- Not a permanent feature of the person.
- Not a diagnosis
- Not a label to describe people

### Reputation

Describing behavior as 'challenging' can carry potential dangers as it should not serve as a label for someone. Rather, it should only serve to highlight an underlying unmet need or cause that triggers such behavior. Failing to address these underlying causes could cement this label as part of a person's reputation. Such reputations, especially when reinforced over time through written reports, can have long-lasting and damaging effects.



## Story

The saying “the more you know about the person, the more you love,” is very appropriate for people with negatively held reputations. Learning the life story of the person you support is critical to being able to provide the right support.

## Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder

The limited coping mechanisms and existing difficulties of the people you support may make them particularly vulnerable to an anxiety disorder called Post Traumatic Stress Disorder.

The causes of PTSD are not clearly known, but it often arises when the person is overwhelmed and unable to cope with a traumatic event or repeated traumatic experiences; for example when experiencing abuse.

If the person you support experiences a traumatic event and receives the appropriate support, they may not develop this disorder.

## Know the Disability

Knowledge of the person’s disabilities will give you insight into their behavior and certain approaches you might apply to address challenging behavior. Providing support tailored to a person’s specific disabilities and other needs is central to your role.

## Importance of Control

Challenging behavior can be closely related to a lack of choice and control. The challenging behavior may be the only way the person can control their life.

## Right Support

Think about your own role: Do you and the person you support like each other? Are you a good match? Is your relationship as positive now as when you first started working with them? If the answer to these questions is ‘no’ you should consider why and possibly speak to your supervisor about this issue.

## Supporting Challenging Behavior

### Phase One - Recognize the Warning Signs

- If you know the person you support well and have studied the documentation, including their behavior plan, you will be familiar with the early signs of difficulty.
- This could include any combination of the following –
  - Look
  - Gesture
  - Stance
  - Sound
  - Tone of Voice
  - Words Used
  - Purposeful Separation from Others

### Phase Two – Thinking Before Responding

- What could the cause or unmet need be?
- What is being communicated? Can you help without reacting to the behavior.
- Does the person need to be comforted by someone they trust?
- If they are isolating themselves, consider if it is safe for them to have time on their own.

- Could the behavior escalate the safety of the person or others? Is an intervention needed, or does the person want time to work out frustrations? In some circumstances, and intervention can worsen the behavior.
- Remove or reduce things that build anxiety, like a loud TV or radio.
- If behavior is directed at or presented around others, can you attempt to separate yourself and the other people?
- If the person is depressed or upset and separates themselves from others, be especially attentive. Ensure your supervisor and other team members know of their low mood. Do not focus on sadness straightaway. Help the person move forward by redirecting or sharing a task.

### Phase Three – Redirect

- Redirection aims to intervene before the behavior escalates, and to help the person become better associated with positive interactions.
- With a calm manner that does not show an immediate reaction to the behavior, redirect the person away from any triggers. Without mentioning the behavior, you could suggest and short walk, a quiet chat, or an activity or task the person has enjoyed before.
- Give two positive choices to help the person control the redirection. For example, “Would you like to go for a walk or have a chat downstairs?” Have alternative choices in mind in case these are not successful.
- Do not match the body language or tone of voice of the person who is stressed. Talk quietly and they will need to be quiet to hear you. The person will often lower their voice to match yours.
- Make verbal and physical prompts simple and to the point.
- Ensure the suggested task matches the person's ability. If it's too challenging, it might lead to more frustration.
- If the person is shouting and screaming, it may be quite intimidating, but it is also a way to release energy and express feelings. Redirecting should be accompanied by efforts to help express emotions in a more suitable way to prevent anxiety from escalating further.

### Phase Four – Managing Continued Behavior

- The behavior may continue or worsen if the person is especially upset or if the early warning signs were not present or missed.
- The behaviors could include any combination of shouting, swearing, hitting, kicking, spitting, pushing, throwing things, or soiling themselves.
- Pay full attention to the person, but do not react to the behavior. By ignoring the behavior, you reduce its power. Say nothing about physical violence. If the person throws something, you should ignore this also. Do not attend to the item or mess. The person may feel they have upset you further because you concerned with the mess.
- If the person wets or soils themselves, you should help them to clean themselves, if they need assistance. But you should do so in silence. After cleaning, redirect them towards a positive conversation or task.
- If the person runs away, consider the risks to self or others. If the person is not safe on their own, catch up with them, but do not block their progress or hold them back.
- In more severe cases, direct verbal and gentle physical prompts may be necessary to distract them. This approach aims to guide them away from the escalating behavior.
- Do not:

- Give the person a time out or punish them.
- Tell the person what they did or said was wrong.
- Explain that the behavior is against the rules.
- Give ultimatums; for example, “Do that again and bad things will happen.”
- Gesture or show an expression of upset or anger.
- Think About the Physical Environment
  - Give the person plenty of space.
  - Do not turn your back. They may feel you do not want to listen. You will not be able to see what they are doing, and you will be an easy target.
  - Do not directly face or stare at them in a confrontational matter. Stand or sit alongside them.
  - Avoid blocking a doorway that they may want to exit through, as this can appear confrontational.
  - If, for example, you are in the kitchen where they may be knives, plates, and cups, you could walk away from the person gesture them to follow you. If they do not move, you could move these items away.
  - If the behavior is directed toward another person, you should separate the two people. Ensure the other person gets the attention needed and is praised for not reacting to the person’s behavior.
- Think About Your Behavior
  - Do not touch or restrict the person’s movements.
  - Do not stand over them.
  - Do not reprimand or show visible upset about their behavior.
  - Be conscious of body language; avoid crossing arms or appearing angry. Speak calmly and slowly, ensuring a relaxed tone and mannerism.
  - Make sure your speech is low, calm, and slow, and that your movements are also slow and relaxed.

#### Phase Five – Reward

- Reassure the person and react positively when they calm down or cease the challenging behavior.
- As soon as the person converses with you appropriately, attends to the task offered, or is demonstrating positive behavior, you should reward them with verbal praise and encouragement.
- Be mindful that even after the challenging behavior stops, the person might still feel upset, tired, or ashamed. Avoid expecting an apology, but if offered, accept it without dwelling on the incident.
- Recognize the individual's need for space or solitude after such incidents. Periodically check in with them and gently guide them back to their routine to minimize disruption to their day.
- Understand that it can take individuals some time to completely move on or recover from an incident.

#### Phase Six – Report, Reflect, and Continue.

- After a challenging experience you may also feel tired and emotional. Take a break. Talk and reflect with your colleagues in private so you do not bring additional attention to the behavior.

- Reflect and report the incident to your supervisor if you need additional support. Reflect on what you would do next time to respond more positively to the person what can be done to avoid future challenging behaviors.
- Depending on the ability of the person to understand and stay calm when talking about challenging behavior, they may benefit from reflecting on the incident. Advice and reflection can help avoid or manage any future incidents.
- Continue to build your relationship with the person.

## The Five Things You Can Do

### 1. Get to Know the Person

Supporting someone with challenging behaviors starts with a commitment to truly understand them. Regrettably, those developing interventions often lack meaningful knowledge of the individual. They view the person as a problem to solve rather than a unique individual. Approaching someone as a problem to fix is rarely effective and always disrespectful. Targeting behavior without understanding the person behind it is ineffective and lacks respect.

The first step in supporting a person with difficult behaviors almost seems too obvious to state, *get to know the person*.

#### *Spend Time with the Person*

Make a point of spending time with person in places that they enjoy, during times of the day that they chooses. Choose a comfortable setting where both of you feel safe and relaxed, such as a quiet room, a pleasant restaurant, or a walking trail in a nearby park.

#### *Ask for Permission*

When the moment feels appropriate (trust your intuition), share your concerns with the person and seek permission to assist them; it's essential and respectful. Even if the person doesn't have formal means of communication, still ask. Sometimes, individuals comprehend but struggle to express their understanding.

### 2. All Behavior is Meaningful

Difficult behaviors are “messages,” that can tell us important things about a person's quality of life.

#### *Questions to Ask*

Every behavior conveys various needs. A single behavior can signify multiple things. The crucial understanding is that challenging behaviors have underlying reasons; there's always meaning behind them, even if it seems self-destructive.

Below are some questions that you can ask to investigate what may be missing in the life of the person you support.

- What does the person need to be happy?
- What does the person count on in a pinch?
- How often does the person see loved ones and friends?
- What are the person's favorite activities?
- Where does the person like to go?
- What makes the person unhappy?
- Who are the people that the person does not like?



- How often does the person see these people?
- What are the persons least favorite activities?

### *Two More Questions*

Finally, when puzzled, inquire, ask, “Are there times when the person exhibits this behavior frequently?” and “Are there times when the person exhibits this behavior infrequently or not at all?” Answering these two questions can tell you a great deal about the meaning of the person’s behavior. With time, you should be able to see a discernible pattern.

For example, you might find that the person engages in the difficult behavior in the morning, but rarely in the afternoon. Ask, “What happens in the morning that might cause the person to behave this way?” or, conversely, “What is happening in the afternoon that causes the person not to behave this way?” (Hint: It often has to do with the things a person is being asked to do and/or who is asking the person to do it.)

### 3. Help People to Develop a Support Plan

People who exhibit difficult behaviors often have a behavior plan at some point in their lives. Sometimes, this plan is developed by strangers or people the person does not know very well.

Imagine trying to cease a behavior someone you barely know insists you should stop. It's challenging enough to halt behaviors we consciously choose to change, like smoking or overeating.

### *Getting a Life*

Support teams benefit from asking, "Is our vision for this person aligned with how we envision ourselves and others? Do we aim to 'fix' deficits or support them in achieving a fulfilling life?"

### *Seven More Questions*

Rather than focusing on "fixing" individuals, consider these questions when building a support plan. Notice the shift from typical inquiries centered on reducing problem behaviors to those emphasizing supportive strategies for a better quality of life.

1. How can we encourage the person to maintain relationships and make new ones?
2. How can we help the person to feel well in their body and achieve health and wellbeing?
3. How can we bolster the person to find joy in ordinary, everyday community places?
4. How can we aid the person to have more control and choices in life?
5. How can we support the person to make a contribution to others?
6. How can we assist the person in acquiring skills beneficial for this environment or their future?  
This could involve teaching coping mechanisms or new communication methods to better express their needs and facilitate understanding by others.
7. How can we better nurture the person’s supporters?

### 4. Develop Your Plan

Addressing a person's behavior without understanding their life is as oversimplified as creating a support plan without considering the needs of the person's caregivers or supporters. Both perspectives are essential for a comprehensive and effective support approach.

### *Your Plan*

Take time with your colleagues to develop support plans for each other. For example –

- What can you do to increase each other’s level of safety and comfort when someone is behaving dangerously?



- What can you do to have more fun at work?
- How can you have more control over your schedule and input into decisions?
- How can managers better support you?

## 5. Don't Assume Anything

Recent advancements underscore the error in predicting a person's potential solely based on diagnostic labels or past achievements. Many individuals once deemed unsuitable for society have transitioned from institutions to living within communities. One hundred and twenty thousand people who were assessed unemployable because of the severity of their disabilities now work and pay taxes, thanks to supported employment services.

### *What about Labels?*

Always remember that people are people first. We need not forget the person's problem behaviors, but we must understand that people have gifts and capacities that eclipse our labels.

Always address the person directly and explain things clearly, regardless of their labels. Even if they can't fully understand, your tone matters. Never talk about them as if they're not present; everyone deserves to be included and acknowledged in conversations.

**PUT PEOPLE FIRST.**

## Becoming a Better Listener

An attitude of openness is required to be a good listener. Here are some more skills that can help you become a better listener.

### *Listen with your heart.*

The philosopher and humanitarian Jean Vanier said: "Too often we only listen with our heads. When you listen with your head, you only analyze. When you listen with your heart, the story of the people you support becomes your story. It is okay to be affected and let the person's story touch you. This way of listening welcomes compassion and togetherness."

### *Know the person's story.*

Historically, our services faced high staff turnover, causing the individuals supported to encounter frequent changes. As a result, few staff members stay long enough to truly understand them. They might be weary of repeating their story.

Be patient and take time to develop an intimate understanding of the person's history. If there is not already a comprehensive document on the person's life story, consider speaking to the person and your manager about creating one. With the person's consent, record their story and also speak to friends, family members, and more experienced staff to gain additional information.

### *Respond to and acknowledge what they tell you.*

Many people you support will have experienced professionals who do not respond when they make requests and speak up for themselves. They are also often familiar with false promises. Some examples of this are given later in this chapter.

It is important to demonstrate that you can be trusted and that you are listening. If you can respect the person by acknowledging and responding to what the person is saying, they will be more likely to open up to you.

#### Paraphrase.

Paraphrasing occurs when you repeat back or re-explain what you believe you have heard. This ensures that you have understood what was said and have not made assumptions.

#### Focus on the person.

Due to the staff's demanding schedules and stretched ratios, the people you support may rarely experience personal attention. Give people the respect of your full attention.

#### Avoid interrupting and giving your own opinion.

Avoid interrupting or interjecting your thoughts and opinions during conversations. Doing so might signal disinterest in their thoughts. It can limit your understanding of their perspective and potentially diminish their self-esteem.

#### Valued Roles

A contributing factor to the lack of relationships and friendships is a lack of valued social roles. The people you support are much more likely to experience the 'good things in life,' if they acquire valued social roles.

The Good Things in Life	The Social Roles	The Potential Benefits
Family	Partner – Husband – Sister	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Belonging</li><li>• Stability</li><li>• Security</li><li>• Natural Support</li><li>• Love</li></ul>
Partner	Girlfriend – Boyfriend – Wife – Husband – Spouse	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Physical and Emotional Intimacy</li><li>• Stability</li><li>• Security</li><li>• Happiness</li><li>• Support</li><li>• Coping Skills</li><li>• Natural Support</li><li>• Love</li><li>• Comfort</li></ul>
Friends	Confidant – Helper – Supporter – Counselor	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Companionship</li><li>• Social Life</li><li>• Belonging</li><li>• Purpose</li><li>• Happiness</li><li>• Natural Support</li><li>• Emotional Support</li></ul>



Home	Tenant – Homeowner – Neighbor	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Respect</li> <li>• Security</li> <li>• Belonging</li> <li>• Place</li> <li>• Responsibility</li> <li>• Independence</li> <li>• Privacy</li> </ul>
Work	Baker – Salesman – Clerk – Administrator	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Money</li> <li>• Benefits</li> <li>• Friends</li> <li>• Responsibility</li> <li>• Structure</li> </ul>
Community	Member – Contributor – Citizen	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Respect</li> <li>• Friends</li> <li>• Social Life</li> <li>• Security</li> <li>• Natural Support</li> </ul>
Faith	Member – Helper – Worshipper	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Belonging</li> <li>• Friendship</li> <li>• Support Network</li> <li>• Comfort</li> <li>• Reassurance</li> <li>• Natural Support</li> </ul>

## The Importance of Control

### People Need Control

Offering choices instead of resorting to punishment is powerful. When someone's behavior challenges you, guide them to express their needs differently. Rather than ultimatums, provide options for resolution. For instance, "I see you're upset. What would be helpful? Would you prefer a walk or a ride? It's important to give yourself a chance to calm down." This empowers them to make a decision in managing their emotions.

### Three Choices

Encourage the person to make decisions throughout the day. If decision-making is challenging, offer support. Ensure there are at least three favorable options available for them to choose from. As Norman Kunc has said, if you give –

- One option, you get tyranny.
- Two options, you get a dilemma.
- Three or more options, then people have a real choice.

### A Fair Relationship

Offering choices doesn't equate to allowing free rein. Establishing boundaries is crucial in any relationship. The key lies in who sets these limits and why. If limits are imposed without involving the individual and are part of a life where they feel powerless, even the best advice might seem like another demand to comply. Advice might be disregarded if the person feels they lack control over their life. Empowerment and involvement in decision-making are pivotal for advice to be respected and embraced.

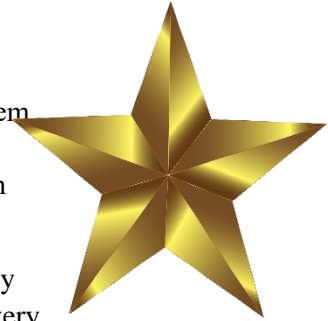
A sustained commitment to the person and fairness in the relationship is crucial. If they've lacked control for an extended period, consider accommodating more frequently initially. The aim is to show them that reciprocity is essential, teaching that giving and receiving work both ways in a healthy relationship.

### Don't Withhold Rewards

Fun is a powerful antidote to problem behaviors.

Individuals with significant disabilities frequently lack the everyday rewards that others experience. This absence, rather than a lack of skills, often sets them apart from the broader community. Many endure reward systems for good behavior, such as promises like "Be good today, and you'll earn a gold star on your chart."

Worse still is that the very few things that people enjoy are sometimes used by professionals to reinforce compliance. For example, "If you get a gold star every day you can have pizza on Friday." Talk about spoiling a good thing!



### Add to the List

Count the number of things the person enjoys and the number of places she likes to go. Compare this to the number of things other people enjoy and the number of places other people like to go. Ask yourself, "Is the person having fun? Is she experiencing enough joy? Is this an interesting life with things to look forward to?"

Assist in expanding their list of enjoyable activities. Spend time in common community places. Consider prioritizing the measurement of joy and fun rather than other metrics. Making fun a goal can enhance their overall experience and satisfaction in life.

### Crisis Prevention Intervention

#### Be Empathetic

Try not to judge or discount the feelings of others. Whether or not you think their feelings are justified, those feelings are real to the other person. Pay attention to them.

#### Clarify Messages

Listen for the person's real message. What are the feelings behind the facts? Ask reflective questions and use both silence and restatements.

#### Respect Personal Space

Maintain a distance of 1.5 to 3 feet from someone displaying disruptive behavior. Invading personal space can heighten anxiety and potentially escalate their actions.

#### Be Aware of Your Position

Standing eye-to-eye and toe-to-toe might convey a confrontational message. Positioning yourself one leg-length away and at an angle off to the side is less likely to escalate the situation with the individual you're supporting.

#### Ignore Challenging Questions

When a person in your charge challenges your authority or a facility policy, redirect the individual's attention to the issue at hand. Answering challenging questions often results in a power struggle.

### Permit Verbal Venting When Possible

Allow the individual to release as much energy as possible by venting verbally. If you cannot allow this, state directives and reasonable limits during lulls in the venting process.

### Set and Enforce Reasonable Limits

If the person becomes belligerent, defensive, or disruptive, state limits and directives clearly and concisely. When setting limits, offer choices and consequences to the acting-out individual.

### Keep your Nonverbal Cues Nonthreatening

The more an individual loses control, the less that individual listens to your actual words. More attention is paid to your nonverbal communication. Be aware of your gestures, facial expressions, movements, and tone of voice.

### Avoid Overreacting

Remain calm, rational, and professional. Your response will directly affect the person's behavior.

### Use Physical Techniques Only as a Last Resort

Use the least restrictive intervention method possible. Reserve physical techniques for situations where individuals are a threat to themselves or others. Trained staff should exclusively employ physical interventions, as they can pose risks. Only consider physical restraint in life-threatening scenarios, prioritizing alternatives whenever possible.

### Avoid Over Repeating Your Requests

Remember, to give the individual time to process your request, regulate and make the right choice, constant repeating can add more frustration.

### Pay Attention to Behavioral Warning Signs

Behavioral signals can provide awareness regarding someone's interventions. Pay attention to cues that may indicate distress or discontent.

- Significant changes in someone's normal behaviors or routines.
- Sudden changes in expressive, physical activity, or posture.
- Dramatic increase or change in voice, volume, or tone.
- Expressions that communicate extreme anger or distress.
- Communications of despair and hopelessness.
- Body posture that is intimidating or threatening.
- Verbal or physical threats.

### Pikes Peak Respite Services Basic Self Defense

#### How to position yourself with an escalating individual

- Keep in mind the vulnerable parts of your body, which are mostly on your front side, and stand sideways when facing a client escalating towards aggression.
- If you have long hair and it isn't up already- tuck it into the neck of your shirt.
- Be aware of body mechanics- most joints only move two ways.
- Ask yourself: Where is my body positioned?

#### If Someone Bites

The process is similar to someone pulling your hair. If you are being bitten, go towards them with the body part being bitten. What causes the most damage is the pulling away with clenched teeth, try to keep

any pulling away with teeth clenched. Reaction is also key, try not to react, a large reaction might be what the individual is looking for.

Often times behaviors can be avoided by - being engaged in activities, narrating what is happening (e.g., where you are going, what the next meal may be, etc.), not engaging in power struggles, and letting there be as many choices as possible.

## Provider Responsibilities

It is your responsibility to –

- • Maintain knowledge of all related documentation.
- • Understand baseline behavior to identify changes.
- • Facilitate health assessments for unexplained behavior changes.
- • Recognize and report abusive practices.
- • Adhere to PPRS restraint procedures.
- • Focus on 'help' instead of 'fixing.'
- • Understand and interpret the person's behavior.
- • Learn effective communication methods.
- • Use person-centered communication tools.
- • Avoid confusing language; keep it simple.
- • Acknowledge everyone's ability to communicate.
- • Listen attentively and respond empathetically.
- • Know the person's history, disabilities, and needs.
- • Prioritize the person's needs over the system's.
- • Assist in empowerment, direction, relationships, and enjoyment.
- • Recognize the impact of your role.
- • Offer full attention during all interactions.
- • Foster companionship and invest time in relationships.
- • Connect the person with others in the community.
- • Learn person-centered planning approaches.
- • Encourage contributions to the community.
- • Provide choices instead of ultimatums.
- • Foster fun as a solution to problem behaviors.
- • Broaden horizons by sharing personal connections.
- • Develop a rapport with the primary care doctor.
- • Focus on holistic wellness beyond illness absence.