Tips for dealing with Behaviour Challenges

For Professionals & Families

First Edition

Created by:

Mackenzie Health
Center for Behaviour Health Sciences

Centre de traitement
APTUS Treatment Centre

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Purpose of this document

This document is to help mediators, caregivers and families:

- understand different types of behaviour, such as positive vs negative or wanted vs unwanted;

- identify the reason for the behaviour (attention, tangible, escape, or sensory); and

- provide concrete ways of reinforcing positive and wanted behaviours

What is Applied Behaviour Analysis – "ABA"?

Applied Behaviour Analysis, or "ABA", is a science that focuses on understanding behaviour. **Behaviour is anything that we can see or hear**. Behaviour can be as simple as a wink or as complicated as a sequence of steps, such as brushing teeth.

Examples of Behaviour	Possible Behaviour Interpretations (which are not necessarily accurate)
Crying, pacing, biting nails	"She's anxious"
Eating food	"He's hungry"
Yelling, clenching fist	"He's angry"
Smiling, laughing	"She's happy"
Sitting on the couch	"He's lazy"

Behaviour is not necessarily a negative action. For example, talking is a behaviour. ABA focuses on how a person's environment and their behaviour are related.

Behaviour analysts create programs that reduce difficult behaviours and increase skills. Data collection is used to measure changes in behaviour and determine if the programs are successful. These analysts focus on teaching new skills to replace challenging behaviours in order to improve quality of life for all individuals.

Everyone's behaviour has meaning. It serves a functional purpose. This means that we engage in behaviour to assist in gaining something we want, or to escape from something we do not want.

There are four functions of all behaviour : **attention**, **tangible**, **escape,** and/or **sensory**. These are explained in detail in the Functions of Behaviour Chart on page 4.

Setting the Individual up for Success

Before assuming anything, consider the following options for the unwanted behaviour:

Strategies	Description	Tips
Rule out the Medical	Medical conditions such as migraines, toothaches, stomach pain, medication side-effects, puberty, constipation, allergies, sleep deprivation, and/or infections can contribute to an increase in challenging behaviour	• Take the individual to a physician, dentist, and/or psychiatrist regularly to rule out any medical conditions
Consider Environmental Change	Transitioning to a new school or home, seasonal changes, a death in the family, caregiver or support staff change, or a new living environment are all examples of environmental changes that can cause challenging behaviour	• Reduce demands • Keep a structured routine • Provide verbal praise for appropriate behaviours • Seek out additional support from a behavioural agency, a case manager, a counsellor, and/or social worker if needed

Strategies	Description	Tips
Increase Effective Communication	Conditions such as autism, deafness, blindness, dysphasia (inability to speak), PTSD, or other conditions may lead to an individual having a difficult time or being completely unable to communicate their wants and needs which can cause challenging behaviour to occur. Imagine you wanted a drink of water or a snack that someone else was holding but had not learned an appropriate way to communicate that	• Offer choices between two options • Use actual items or visuals to explain choices, if possible • Use simple and direct language • Seek assistance from a Speech and Language Pathologist if you require additional support
Avoid and Reduce Triggers	Triggers are anything that can cause the behaviour to occur. For example: demands, being denied access to preferred items/activities, being told "no", or being told to wait, wanting attention when the person is otherwise busy, or wanting to work with a preferred support staff, etc.	• Set up the environment so that common triggers for the individual are kept to a minimum • Practice coping and preventative strategies when triggers are unavoidable • Examples include: 　o practice taking breaks 　o use replacement activities 　o use reinforcement for task completion 　o provide warnings that a transition is coming 　o use a visual schedule 　o use a timer to count down and signal to the person how long he or she has to wait for something or when something is going to end

Functions of Behaviour Chart

As mentioned above, everyone's behaviour has meaning. It serves a functional purpose for that person. The four functions of all behaviours are listed below, along with appropriate responses for each.

Note: not all behaviours listed are negative or unwanted – it all depends on the situation.

Function	What the individual may be trying to communicate	The behaviour they may be using to communicate
Attention	**LOOK AT ME!**	**Vandalism**
	I'M HAPPY!	Smiling
	I'M BORED...	Slumping
	I'M LONELY AND SAD.	Quietly watching everyone from a distance
	HELP ME!	Self-harming in a way that will be seen
Professional or Family Response		

- Be mindful that this behaviour may occur when someone is in panic mode and feels threatened or reminded of trauma.
- Consider a referral for mental health services.
- Avoid providing attention immediately after the individual engages in challenging behaviour, as the individual is then learning that the way to get your attention is to act out. You will see the challenging behavior continue to increase.
  - o Avoid eye contact, telling the person to stop, talking about the challenging behaviour.
- Give positive attention (attention, praise, eye contact, nodding, etc.) when the individual is behaving appropriately.
- Encourage the person to use vocal or written words or pictures or actions to express what they actually want in lieu of communicating needs via behaviours.

Function	What the individual may be trying to communicate	The behaviour they may be using to communicate
Tangible	**I WANT...**	**Grabbing**
	TAKE ME TO...	Dragging
	GIVE ME BACK MY...	Yanking something from someone else
	I'M HUNGRY/THIRSTY OR HAVE A MEDICAL NEED.	Seeming despondent

Professional or Family Response

- Avoid giving the person access to preferred objects, food, and/or activities immediately after they engage in challenging behaviour. The person would learn that acting out is the way to get what they want. You will see the challenging behavior continue to increase.
- Tell the individual when they can have access to their desired items/activities (e.g., create a schedule).
- Encourage the person to use words to express what they actually want in lieu of communicating needs via behaviours.

Function	What the individual may be trying to communicate	The behaviour they may be using to communicate
Escape	NO!	Shaking head
	STOP!	Screaming
	THIS IS HARD!	Giving up on participating
	I DON'T WANT !&#%	**Throwing or destroying items**
	LEAVE ME ALONE!	Withdrawing
	I NEED A BREAK...	Picking a fight

Professional or Family Response

- Be mindful that this behaviour may occur when someone is in panic mode and feels threatened or reminded of trauma.
- If you asked the individual to do something before they engaged in this type of escape behaviour, avoid giving them a break or removing the demand immediately after the behaviour begins. Otherwise, the individual would be learning to act out when he or she doesn't want to do something he or she has been asked to do. You will see the challenging behavior continue to increase.
- Explain their rights (so they can better advocate for themselves)and honour their rights.
- Offer a choice in applicable tasks, if available.
- Consider a referral for mental health services.
- Use other communication tools.
- Teach the person:
    - To ask for help, a different/easier task, or a break.
    - To use relaxation techniques.

Function	What the individual may be trying to communicate	The behaviour they may be using to communicate
Sensory	I'M IN PAIN.	Shallow breathing, being quiet
	I'M AFRAID, SAD or LONELY.	Picking at or eating scabs or skin
	THIS FEELS GOOD.	Smiling, rocking
	THIS HELPS ME COPE.	Repetitive behaviours (e.g., chain smoking, binging)
	THIS HURTS LESS.	**Self harming during times of extreme stress**

Professional or Family Response

- Be mindful that this behaviour may occur when someone has sensory processing disorder (SPD). Those with SPD may not perceive or respond to sensory information in the same way as the general population. Their brains may not be able to organize the messages well, resulting in some sensory inputs making a person overwhelmed of uncomfortable. However, some sensory messages may be well received. SPD can affect anyone. Studies indicate that 5% to 16% of children exhibit symptoms of SPD. (Ahn, Miller et. al., 2004; Ben-Sasoon, Carter et. al., 2009). This disorder is often experienced by people who have developmental disabilities.
- Be aware of the individual's health concerns and/or consult a medical professional.
- Include time for the individual to engage in preferred activities in the daily schedule.
- Consider a referral for mental health services.
- Consult an Occupational Therapist for activities or items that may meet the individual's sensory needs/wants.
- Use these activities or items as rewards to incentivize good behaviour. Avoid giving the individual access to these activities after challenging behavior. This will help avoid the individual learning to act out to get access to these activities.
- Teach the individual:
    o To request (e.g., "I want_____") using words or pictures
    o To request for a break
    o To take medication (if needed)
    o To tell you if he or she is in pain or any other form of distress, using words or a picture, etc.)

Antecedent-Behaviour-Consequence (ABC) Model

Behaviour analysts use an Antecedent-Behaviour-Consequence (ABC) model to understand what happened before and after a behaviour occurred. This will help you to determine why the behaviour occurred and what is causing the behaviour to continue occurring.

Antecedent-Behaviour-Consequence Model

SETTING EVENT	**"Slow trigger"** Something within the last 24 hours that may set the stage for the behaviour to occur
	Examples

- Sickness
- Hunger
- Pain
- Change of support staff
- Change in routine
- Isolation (no attention from others that day)
- **Sleep deprivation**

- No activity to keep busy with
- **Wearing an itchy piece of clothing** (an example of a slow trigger for someone who may have sensory processing disorder)

| ANTECEDENT | **"Trigger"**
What happened right before the behaviour started? |

EXPLANATION

Example 1 : A child sees candy in a store and picks it up and asks their parent to buy it. The parent tells them no or tells them to put it down

Example 2 : There is a shortage of support workers in a long-term care home, so planned outdoor activities for residents with dementia are cancelled for the afternoon

| COMPORTEMENT | **Visual or auditory cues :**
What we SEE. What we HEAR.
What did the behaviour look like? |

Example 1 :
Child begins to cry and scream

Example 2 : The residents get confused or frustrated and may lash out in aggressive behaviour or yell because they are bored and/or their schedule changed unexpectedly

| CONSEQUENCE | **The outcome :**
Your Response. Result. Environment change
What happened after? |

Example 1: Response: The parent buys the candy to make the child stop screaming

Example 2 : Response : Support workers get frustrated and put on a movie, or brings the residents to their rooms to "calm down"

Example 1 : Outcome: The child learns that if parent says no and they cry and screams, they will get the candy

Example 2 : Outcome: The resident learns that unwanted behaviour gets a movie, or may start to associate their rooms with a punishment

Example 1 et 2 – **Result** : In the end, the negative behaviour will increase.
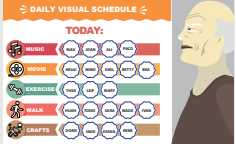See the next section for Environmental Change to see how things could change

Environmental Change: How to Enrich the Environment to Enhance Quality of Life & Behaviour

Once you understand why the behaviour is occurring, you can enhance the individual's environment to minimize triggers. Sometimes an individual may act out if they do not have meaningful activities to keep them engaged. It is important to help the individual choose activities that will improve their quality of life.

Things to consider for an enriched environment:

• How much free time does an individual have? Is this going to change in the near future?

• Does the individual have sensitivities? (e.g., noises, smells, temperature, space, etc.)

• What are the opportunities for social interaction, whether in person or virtually?

• What are the routines in place already?

• Are there opportunities for the individual to be independent?

• Does the environment provide opportunity for learning and positive development?

Strategies for Enriching the Environment

Strategies for Enriching the Environment	Examples
Provide transition warnings and detailed explanations of upcoming activities	• Only 5 more minutes left. • Once you're done, we'll go outside for a walk around the park.
Use First/Then language	• First you have to do _____ and then you can do _____.
Offer choices	• Do you want to go to the library, go eat or watch a movie?
Provide the individual with activities throughout the day	• This morning you'll do some yoga, then after lunch you can read a book and this evening you can go to a restaurant.
Be aware of the individual's sensitivities to the environment (e.g., textures, clothing, bright lights, smells, sounds, etc.)	• Since you don't like crowds and loud noises, you can watch the movie in your room instead of in the theatre.
Use visuals or written schedules	• See our video on Visual Schedules.
Use simple language	• Great job! • Which do you want? • Is this ok?
Simplify tasks	• You can do it! Only one more book to put away.
Offer attention for good behaviour regularly	• Good job! • Way to go. • Thank you for telling me. It helps me understand.

Some Examples of How to Enrich the Environment

When an individual is in a noisy room:

• Provide the person the choice to move to a quiet area
• Offer as many breaks as needed
• Offer noise-cancelling headphones and/or earplugs
• Play calming or relaxing music

When giving the individual an instruction or placing a demand:

• Use first/then language when you want the individual to do something he or she does not want to do.

• The order should be: first the non-preferred task, then the preferred task. We can facilitate motivation for the individual to complete a task if they know that their preferred task will be available after. Once the individual has completed the non-preferred task (demand), give the reward (or preferred activity) right away.

    o For example, if a youth wants to play video games but you want him to finish his homework, you can say "First, finish your homework, then you can play on the computer."
    Remember to keep your promise and give the reward right away.

• If there are multiple tasks that an individual has to complete, give a choice of which task to do first.

• Break the task down into smaller steps if needed.

• Use a motivating item or preferred activity as a reward for completing the task.

• Remind the individual that they can ask for a break if needed.

When asking the individual to wait:

• Use first/then language to ask the individual to wait for a preferred item or activity. Example: "First we have to finish buying groceries, then I can take you to the dollar store."

• Waiting might be a hard concept for some people to understand, so you can keep the person occupied by giving a task or preferred activity (e.g., crafts, watching T.V., etc.) to fill time while they wait. Example: "First, make your bed. Then we can get going to the activities you chose."

• Use a physical timer to show the person how long they have to wait for. Example: "First set a timer on the stove for 12 minutes. Then we can eat the cookies!"

The 10 Rules of Reinforcement

Reinforcement occurs when a behaviour is rewarded or reacted to in a way that makes the behaviour more likely to happen again in the future.

1 The difference between reinforcement and bribery is that reinforcement comes after a task is completed; a bribe is offered and provided before the task. Bribes benefit yourself, while reinforcement benefits the person.

2 Reinforcement should be delivered immediately after the good behaviour. The major danger of delay is that the wrong behaviour may be accidentally reinforced, or the individual may forget what they did that you liked.

3 Reinforcers should be meaningful to the individual. What is reinforcing to one person may not be reinforcing to another. **Make sure that the individual is reinforced in a way that they prefer!**

4 Meaningful reinforcers can change. An individual may find something reinforcing at one time but may not later. It may help to periodically ask the individual what they like to ensure your reinforcer is still valid.

5 A variety of reinforcers should be used. If the same reinforcer is always used, it will lose its value and may no longer be meaningful to the individual. Using various types of reinforcers, based on the situation, will help keep them meaningful.

6 Some people are reinforced by social reinforcers such as praise and attention (Example: "Great leadership today, Desmond. You set a good example by getting your tasks done.") Others are reinforced by tangible items such as access to preferred activity items (video games, basketball, arts and crafts, etc.) or consumable items (food, treats, etc.).

7 It is important to pair tangible reinforcers with social reinforcers (example: when Erin has shown good behaviour, provide her with her favourite snack and positive praise at the same time).

8 Always focus on the good behaviour and be sure that the individual knows that you have noticed and recognize their efforts.

9 Reinforcement is not always providing a reward, sometimes reinforcement can mean removing something that the individual does not like, for example turning down loud music when an individual asks.

10 Remember: to comment only on behaviour, not on the individual.

Example: "I really like how you waited patiently" instead of "You were good today."

Alternative Ways of Saying "No"

Using the word "no" can sometimes act as a trigger for challenging behaviour. Here are some strategies for effectively communicating that an individual's request may not be met in the moment.

Strategies	Examples
Give information	Max has dementia and wants to wear his red shirt but it is in the washer. **Support Worker**: "I know you want to wear your red shirt, but it is in the washer. You can choose a blue or green shirt today. Your red shirt will be clean for tomorrow. • Giving an explanation may help the individual understand "why".
Accept and Acknowledge Feelings	An inmate has stopped participating in all activities. **Corrections Officer**: "I know you don't want to be here, and you may be feeling particularly frustrated right now. But sometimes doing nothing will just make us feel worse. I remember you used to take advantage of some of the learning opportunities and work skills programs. Let's say you take a week to think of what activities or learning you might be interested in. Or maybe there's someone you want to communicate with. I'll follow up with you in a week." • A schedule or visual timer is helpful when asking someone to transition from antisocial behaviour (example with the inmate) and/or to a less preferred activity.

Strategies	Examples
Describe the Problem	A classroom is rowdy and students are not listening to a substitute teacher who is trying to teach a lesson. **Substitute Teacher:** "The sooner you finish reading page two and answering the 3 questions, the sooner you can start your break. Your break will not start until you are done. If you need help…"
When Possible, Substitute a "Yes" for a "No"	**Child with autism:** "Play?" **Caregiver:** "Yes, first lunch, then playground." • Simplify the language to match the individual's level of comprehension.

"Pairing" Yourself with Positivity and Reserving Criticism for Detrimental Behaviour

We live in a busy time. Parents and/or professionals are often juggling many demands or challenges, which may include one or many of the following:

- high-demand stressful jobs
- having more than one job to meet the family's needs
- risk of unemployment
- parenting and parenting alone
- mental health challenges faced by one or more family members
- limited time
- a child who has increasing high risk behaviour (e.g., drug use, risk of teen pregnancy, etc.)
- a child who has increasing needs for learning support or in managing basic life skills

It's natural for parents to focus their limited time on protecting or correcting their child, in order to keep them on a path to success or safety. In the same way, a support professional would likely focus their time on preventing any high-risk behaviour when supporting or supervising vulnerable people.

However, there's a risk that the child or person supported/supervised may interpret this differently if the majority of the interactions areseen as "negative" or critical, for example,achild or senior with dementia constantly being made to feel that what they're doing is wrong. They may conclude:

- that they are bad
- that the parent/professional does not like them anymore
- that all the positive actions don't matter
- or that the only way to get attention from the parent or professional is to do something wrong, etc.

In Behaviour Services, there is a concept of "pairing" which can be very powerful for busy parents and professionals.

We will discuss pairing here in the context of parenting.

Pairing is an approach used to develop rapport with someone by acknowledging their good behaviour.

Parents need to take time to notice and verbally acknowledge things their kids are doing right, e.g., taking dishes to the sink, moving over for their siblingto sit down, feeding the family pet, making a new friend, getting good grades, etc. and be able to genuinely provide reinforcement through verbal praise, high fives, pat on the back and sometimes small tangible items.

This pairing helps turn the parent into the reinforcer, instead of the aversive or criticizer. It will then be more likely that kids will continue to do the good things and want to listen and be around the parent(s).

By the same token, parents should be selective about how they respond to imperfect behaviour.

For example, a parent may like a perfectly clean home. The parent reprimands their child, on average, 6 times per day regarding messes. The messes range from a loose sock on the floor to the toothpaste lying out on the counter. These issues pose no imminent risk to the child. The constant criticism likely poses a risk to the child's self esteem when that is their only daily feedback from the parent. This is an example of where a parent could teach themselves to stop immediately reacting and reprimanding their child's mistakes and try and focus their feedback on what the child is doing right.

Some of this may be about acknowledging progress instead of just perfection. A child's behaviour may not be perfect, but it may be getting closer to the end goal and this should be recognized. For example, Jose may have always been leaving his clothes on the bed or the floor. Now, he is either putting them in the hamper or hanging on a door handle. This isn't PERFECT, but it is better than before and his mother, Maria, recognizes that.

Parents will need to decide when to let some behaviour go unreprimanded (in order to focus their feedback on what the child is doing right) vs. what negative behaviours to respond to.

For example, a parent may decide that they will not step in and constructively criticize their child unless their behaviour poses a threat to the child's safety or success – or the safety of others (e.g., suicidal behaviour, drug use, criminal behaviour, etc.).

The child may likely know in part that what they're doing is not wanted behaviour, but may not know how to back out. The parent can offer a wealth of advice and strategy a child or teen may not be able to come to on their own. It is important to consult or research resources if the issue is beyond the scope of the parent. This will demonstrate that the parent is a valuable ally.

Managing Both Positive and Negative Behaviour. We recommend a 4 to 1 ratio of positive vs. constructive comments so that children don't think that every time they're spoken to, it will be negative. They will begin to realize that most of the time it will be positive. When warranted, there will be constructive criticism. This can build trust and strong reinforcement for positive behaviour and problem solving.

Pairing Scenarios
Example 1
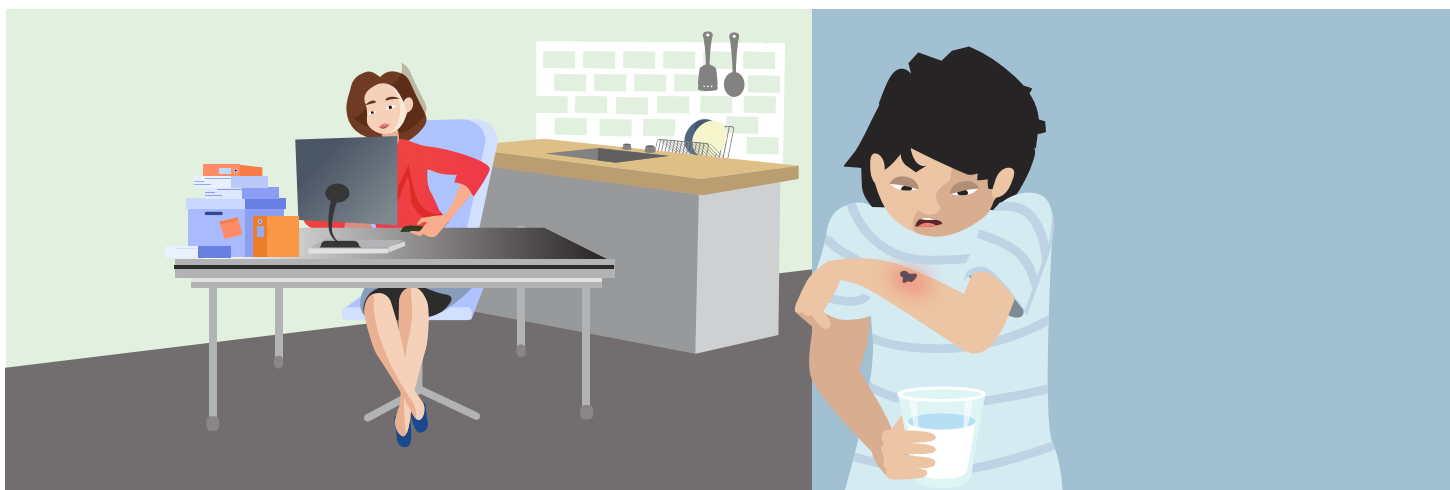
Jose (age 5) is an only child who recently started wetting his bed again, picking his skin to make scabs, has been quick to lose his temperwith other children, and seems to be having a lot of accidents (dropping glasses of milk, breaking things, etc.). His mother, Maria, is moving up fast in her career and has not been home as much lately. She takes work home in order to see Jose more, but often that means that she only looks up when she hears something break.

Issues to overlook or let go:

Maria may decide to react only calmly if Jose drops or breaks something, for example, saying, "It's okay. We can all drop things."

Issues to focus on and/or provide constructive criticism:
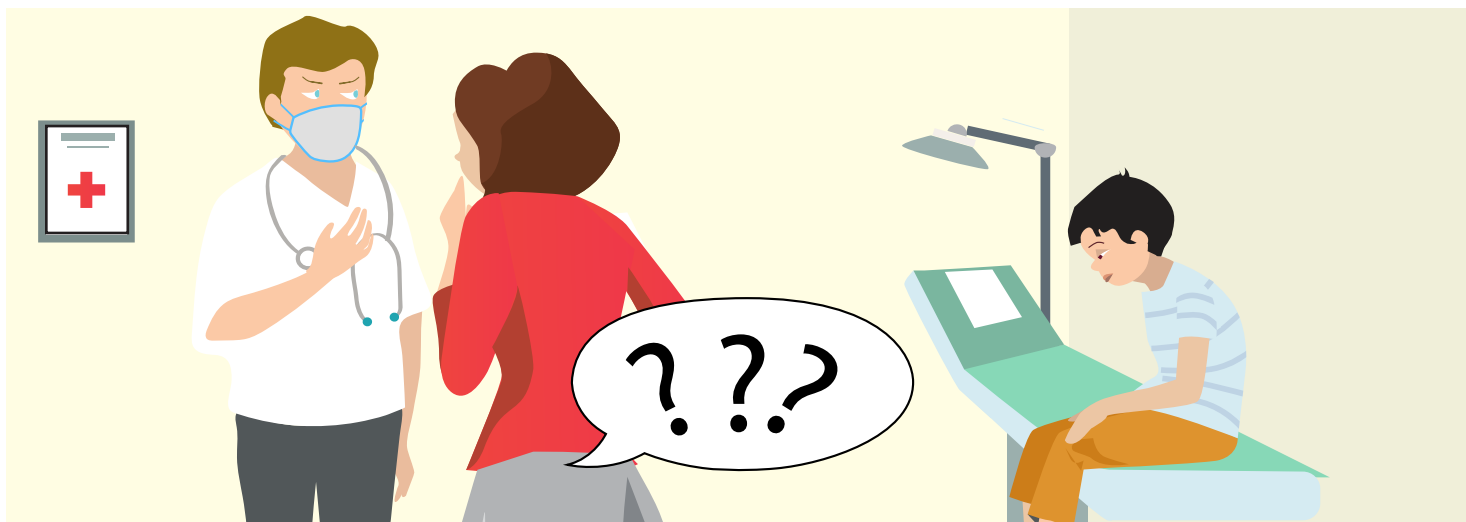
Maria consults their family doctor about Jose's dropping things and picking at his skin. The doctor can rule out if there may be a possible medical issue causing Jose to be more likely to fall. He can also see if there may be a skin concern that's making Jose want to keep picking at his skin. With those concerns ruled out, Maria may consult a therapist to get some input regarding Jose's temper with other students and his desire to pick his skin. She may wait to consult a therapist, and try to use pairing to help focus more attention on what Jose is doing well. As their rapport increases, Jose's picking or temper issues may subside.

Positive behaviour that might have been missed but will now be acknowledged:

Maria makes a rule for herself to have 2 solid hours of undisturbed family time after work, waiting to pull out her computer until Jose's watching his show after dinner. With this increased focus on family time, Maria discovers that Jose is bringing home books from the school library that they can try reading together.

Constructive criticism statements Maria might use: "Jose, I see you're still picking at your scabs. A scab is how your body tries to heal itself and build back the skin on your arm. If you keep picking at it, it won't heal and you may get an infection and then we'll need to go see the doctor. Let's put some ointment on it and a bandaid so your skin won't bother you and let's add a new bandaid every day until we see that it's healed. Okay?"

Example 2
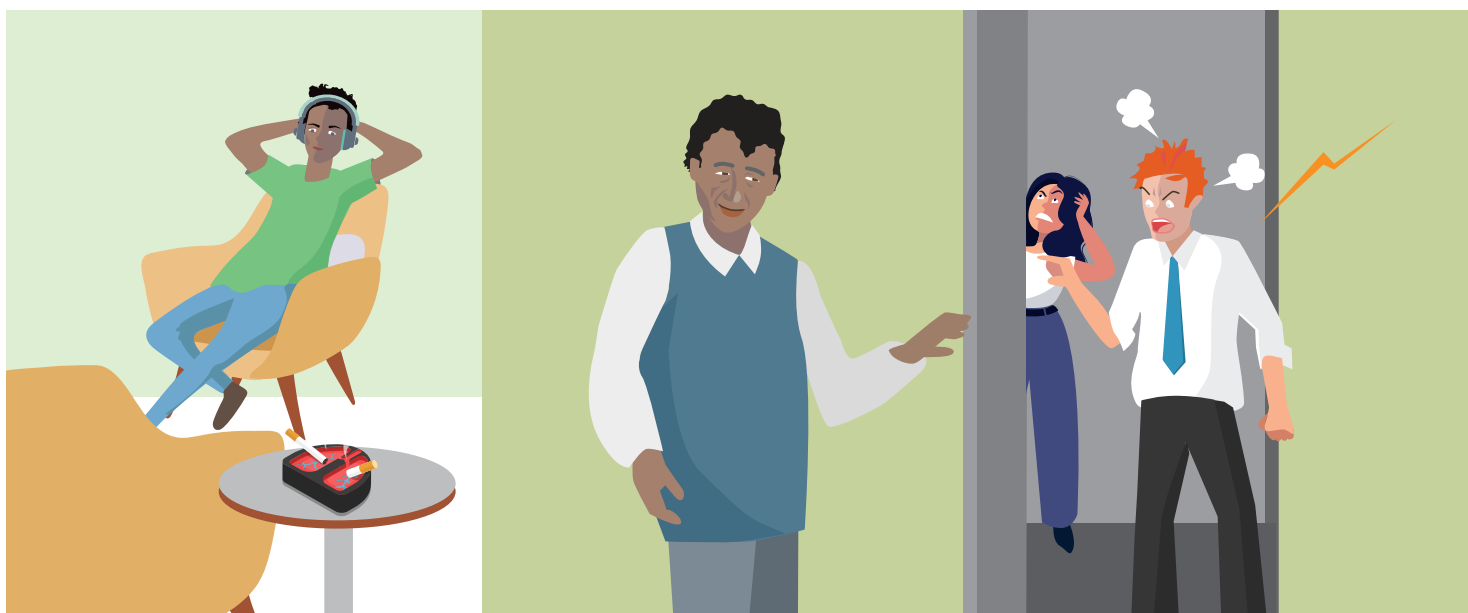
Louis (age 16) is the son of a veteran, Gerry. Some of the neighbours came by to complain after Louis vandalized the new community playground. Louis used to do well at his old school but is recently bringing home all C's, since they moved to a new community. Louis smells of smoke sometimes, but his dad smokes so it may not be from Louis smoking. Gerry and Louis can go days without talking. Gerry has been struggling with PTSD since coming home from deployment. He feels very unsure of his feelings or ideas since returning home. He has been giving Louis a lot of free reign until the neighbours' complaint.

Issues to overlook or let go: Gerry may decide to not question or accuse his son re: possible smoking at this time.

Issues to focus on and/or provide constructive criticism:

Gerry focuses on how to best approach his son about the vandalism. He's worried that Louis may continue this type of behaviour and risk being arrested.

Positive behaviour that might have been missed but will now be acknowledged:

Gerry tries to focus his mind on what has been positive. He realizes that Louis has really been pulling his weight at home – cooking for himself and sometimes leaving dinner for Gerry. Though Louis has not made any new friends yet in their neighbourhood, Louis has been playing basketball by himself on the school grounds. That's a great first step to potentially attracting some friends or joining in a game.

Constructive criticism statements Gerry might use:

"Louis, I wanted to talk to you about a visit I had today from some of the neighbours. According to them, you spray-painted a playground that just got installed. They agreed to let me pay to have the paint removed. This is very generous of them because graffiti is a chargeable offense. I know I haven't been available to you. But I researched it and most people who do graffiti are young men like you who often with an interest in art or are trying to make a statement. So let's talk about it. I want to see you pursue your interests or speak up, but I don't want you to risk getting charged. I want to see you do well."

The "Great 8": Take-Away Points

1 It is important to rule out medical conditions, consider environmental changes, increase effective communication, and reduce triggers (page 4).
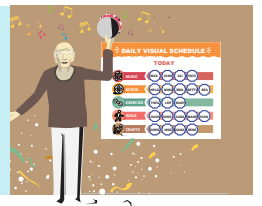
2 Identify the function(s) of the challenging behaviour and change or adjust your response to reduce challenging behaviours (page 6).
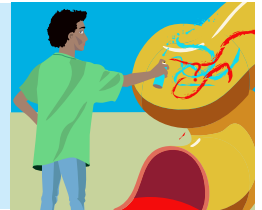
3 Use the ABC model to better understand what happened before an unwanted behaviour occurred (page 10).

4 Consider ways that you can change the individual's environment for the better (page 13).

5 Provide praise and reinforcement to the individual when he or she is behaving how you would like. Remember the 10 rules of reinforcement (page 15).

6 Find alternate ways of saying "no" to minimize the likelihood of a negative or unwanted reaction or behaviour (page 16).

7 Try to "pair" yourself with positivity to increase good behaviour by noticing what your child is doing right more often than you notice what the child is doing wrong (Page 18).

8 Ideally, all staff and/or family will be consistent in responding to someone's challenging behaviour.