

Staff Guide: Understanding and Supporting Challenging Behaviour

Overview

This guide summarises key research on why challenging behaviour occurs and how staff can respond effectively. Aggression is influenced by a combination of individual, social, and environmental factors, and should be understood rather than simply managed.

Key Principles

- Behaviour is communication
- Environment influences behaviour
- Behaviour is learned
- Emotions play a key role
- Consistency is essential

What the Research Tells Us

1. Frustration Can Trigger Behaviour

When students are unable to achieve a goal or feel overwhelmed, behaviour may escalate. Reduce frustration by adapting tasks and providing support.

2. Behaviour is Learned

Students learn behaviour through observation and consequences. Reinforce positive behaviour consistently and model appropriate responses.

3. Relationships Matter

Strong, consistent relationships reduce challenging behaviour. Build trust and maintain clear expectations.

4. Emotions Drive Behaviour

Students may act out when they cannot regulate emotions. Teach coping strategies and support emotional literacy.

Practical Strategies

- Use clear routines and structure
- Provide visual supports
- Break tasks into manageable steps

- Reinforce positive behaviour
- Stay calm and consistent
- Focus on prevention, not just reaction

Reflection Questions for Staff

- What is the function of this behaviour?
- What might the student be trying to communicate?
- Are there triggers in the environment?
- How can I adapt my approach?

Reference

Sturmey, P. (2022). Psychological and sociological theories of violence and aggression. In *Violence and aggression: Advances in preventing and treating violence and aggression*. Springer.