

Behaviour Basics

Definition:

Behaviour is every action by a person that can be seen or heard. Behaviour must be defined in a way that is both observable and measurable so that everyone working with the child has a good understanding of what the behaviour looks like and sounds like (Alberto & Troutman, 2003).

Rationale:

- Children with Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD) may have difficulty in the area of communication. They may lack the appropriate skills to express themselves and have difficulties understanding language, which could result in challenging behaviour.
- It is important to objectively define the challenging behaviour in order to gain an understanding of why it might be happening.

Note: When we hear the word behaviour, we may often think of it in terms of challenging behaviour. However, it also refers to those appropriate/desired skills that your child demonstrates. For example, taking turns playing a game, washing the dishes, taking a break when they're feeling frustrated, etc.

Defining Behaviour:

When defining behaviour you need to ensure that it is: *observable, measurable, and described in concrete terms.*

Observable:

- Natalie yells "shut up" at her parents when asked to clean her room
- Asha asks to go outside to ride her bike
- Mohammed bites his hand when he meets new people

Non-Observable:

- Natalie is rude
- Asha wants to play
- Mohammed hurts himself

Measuring Behaviour

Measuring behaviour on a regular basis can provide a great deal of information. There are a variety of quick and easy methods to measure behaviour. Choose your method based on the type of behaviour; what you would like to change about it, and how frequently it occurs. Use these measurements to track progress and make changes to your plan as necessary.

Measuring behaviour can provide valuable information:

- How often it is happening? (e.g., 100 times/hour, daily, weekly)
- When and with whom it is happening? (e.g., when she is alone, with her brother)
- Do I need a plan?
- Is it getting better or worse?
- Is my plan working?

(Alberto & Troutman, 2003)

Before implementing any strategy, remember to:

- **Assess:** What is the child currently able to do?
- **Goal:** What is the specific goal for the child to work towards?
- **Strategies:** How will you reach the goal?
- **Monitor:** How will you know if the teaching strategies are working?

Note: Some challenging behaviours occur for complex reasons and involvement from trained professionals might be necessary.

References:

Alberto, P. A., & Troutman, A. C. (2003). *Applied behavior analysis procedures for teachers* (4th ed.). Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.