

# Positive Approaches to Challenging Behaviors, Non-aversive Techniques & Crisis Interventions



## Overview to Positive Behavior Support

It is important to understand that behavior is a form of communication. This is true for all of us. We all have our own unique ways of communicating how we feel. Some people are “verbal” and tell us what they are thinking and feeling. Some people are non-verbal and will use certain behaviors or “body language” to communicate what they are thinking or feeling. As DSP’s providing direct support to people we need to be aware of both verbal and non-verbal expressions of communication and behavior.

In order to recognize each person’s form of communication and behavior we need to establish positive relationships. How do we do this? The answer is simple....spend time together. A relationship develops over time. The better you get to know the people you are providing services to, the easier it will be to give them positive support when they need it. In order to be successful in establishing positive relationships you will need to assist in providing a positive environment for the home you work in. This means being part of a “team” with both your co-workers and the people who live in the home.

### **Behavior can be “imitated”.**

How you interact with your co-workers can have an impact on a positive environment. It is important to keep this in mind as you learn more about your work environment and interacting with others. Everyday life can have an impact on a person’s behavior. Small changes in daily routines can impact behavior. It is important to remember that when people have choices in their lives and these choices are honored and respected, the happier they are and less likely they will be to exhibit challenging behavior. Creating a positive environment that respects and values individual preferences and choices will not only make the individuals you work with happier, it will make your job of supporting them easier.

## The Goal of Teaching

The goal of teaching is to support individuals with disabilities and/or mental illnesses to live independently and with as much enjoyment as possible. When a DSP has good “teaching skills” they will automatically promote a positive environment for their co-workers and the individuals they provide services to. Every individual is capable of growth and change throughout his or her entire life. We are all lifelong learners and the more we learn, the more opportunities we have for self-expression and self-determination.

It should not surprise us to find out that the more control we have over our own life the more likely we are to be happy and content. Clearly, the most effective strategy for people with challenging behaviors is to help them replace those challenging behaviors with new skills. This is why your role as a “Teacher” when working with people who have challenging behavior is so important. When a DSP can teach skills

that encourage more independence and control over their life the individual is less likely to get frustrated and upset.

In your role as a DSP, you are in the perfect situation to assist individuals in learning new skills because you are directly involved in so many aspects of their lives – from self-care through participation in consumer and vocational skills. You can support individuals in learning how to have more meaningful and effective relationships, how to manage their resources, and even how to advocate for themselves.

Many of the individuals you work with need to learn many things. How do we know what skills to teach? Here are some general guiding questions to ask:

1. **Is the skill functional?** If the individual does not learn the skill I am attempting to teach, will someone else have to perform that skill for them? For example, if Sarah could not select her own clothing would someone else have to make the selection? If Jim could not make himself a snack would someone else need to make it for him? Individuals need to learn skills that have immediate functional value to them.
2. **Is the skill relevant?** Is the skill I am attempting to teach one that this individual will use often in his or her life? Is it more important for Jill to learn how to wash windows or how to greet someone appropriately? It is important to teach skills that are used frequently.
3. **Is the skill age-appropriate?** Is the skill I am attempting to teach one that other people of the same age can use? Should Mark be learning how to cut pictures out of magazines or would it be more appropriate for him to learn how to call a friend on the phone? Sometimes individuals choose to do activities that you might not consider age-appropriate. For example, because 25-year-old Michael chooses to listen to children's music during his free time, should you tell him that it is not allowed and not let him listen to such music? If someone wants to do things that are not age-appropriate during their free time then that is their choice. However, we can make sure that Michael has the opportunity to listen to music that is more age-appropriate and that he is able to interact with other people his age and learn what they like to listen to. If Michael simply enjoys the children's music, we might be able to find music of a similar style that is more age-appropriate.
4. **Does the skill support independence?** Is the skill I am attempting to teach one that can help this individual get what he wants or get him out of something he does not want? ***Challenging behavior*** often serves as a way for an individual to get a message across about choices. It is important to teach individuals how to communicate what they want and don't want. We all like to express our "desires" on how we want to do things. Monica is scheduled to take a shower before going to bed each night. Some evenings, Monica would prefer to watch certain TV shows and take her shower in the morning instead. On these evenings when she is watching her TV show and is asked to take a shower she becomes angry and starts to yell and slap at her housemates. If Monica and the DSP's that work with her could learn to plan her evening schedule better and provide her with some options, she would have fewer problems with her evening routine.
5. **Is the skill going to be naturally reinforced?** Is the skill I am attempting to teach going to result in naturally occurring outcomes for the individual? Many times we teach people to do things that do not result in any outcome that

reinforces the skill. They learn to do what we request of them. This is especially true for individuals who once lived in an institution. This is a “learned” institutional behavior. For example, if we are teaching Mary money skills by using “play” money, will this help her learn how to use real money independently? If we are teaching Karen her ABC’s but she does not know how to spell, write, or read will this be rewarding to her? Naturally occurring outcomes result from engaging in meaningful activities. If someone is learning how to make a phone call, the natural outcome is that he speaks to someone he’s called. The natural outcome for learning how to make pizza is that he can eat the pizza when it’s done or even share it with friends. The natural outcome for learning how to count money might be using a vending machine and being able to buy a soda or candy.

Rewards are the things we do to reinforce, to make it more likely that an individual will want to do the task again. Handshakes, an arm around the shoulder, high fives, smiles, and laughs are all rewarding. Rewards are genuine and have the most impact when they are delivered with enthusiasm. They should come naturally and be available all the time. The more a DSP can reward “good behavior” the less the person will want to get your attention by doing a challenging behavior. We stress reward and reinforcement because they are basic needs for all people.

If you cannot interact positively, you will have a hard time helping others. Rewards help develop relationships, increase appropriate interactions, refine existing skills, and help teach new skills. People need rewarding environments, not just rewards for “being good”. The more you interact with individuals and are with them, the more relaxed people will become. The better relationship you have with someone the better you are going to be able to teach and they will be more willing to learn!

### **What about activities just for fun? Does everything have to be functional?**

What an individual chooses to do during their free time is different from skills that he or she is learning to become more independent. We all have the right to choose what we want to do in our “free time”. We usually choose things that make us happy, even if it isn’t considered functional. Your role as a Direct Support Professional is to support people, **not to control** what they do. If you are concerned about what a person is doing because it causes negative behaviors to happen either with the person or others around them, you might want to encourage other interests and make efforts to expand the individual’s range of choices with “free time” activities.

### **Teaching During Daily Routines**

One of the best ways to support an individual’s ability to learn new skills is to provide the teaching support they need during the times he or she would naturally use those skills. The more a person has the opportunity to practice a skill, the more likely he or she will gain independence in using it. If the skill is important in the life of that individual, it is more likely the skill will be learned and maintained. As a DSP you should be looking for opportunities to teach throughout the day and in all environments. When a person is attempting to do something on his own but is

having problems....this is your teaching opportunity! When a person is asking for help to do something....this is your teaching opportunity! When you are completing a task you know the person could have done themselves.....this is your teaching opportunity!

These are not “scheduled teaching” times; these are “being there for people when they need you” times! Many opportunities for learning are available throughout the day. Assisting an individual to have an enjoyable life means active participation in that life. We do many things each day that fit this guideline. We get ready for school or work, prepare something to eat, choose our clothing, turn on the radio, clean up the house, and travel to and from our destination, call friends, plan activities, and many other daily routines.

The more we can do these routines independently or feel like we are being included to do them to the best of our abilities, the more control we have over our lives. As a DSP it is important to recognize as many learning opportunities as possible in each person’s daily schedule. The more you can “teach” skills during their own individual daily routines, the more independence and control people will have over their own lives. It is important to find balance between teaching and just letting people enjoy some “free time”. If our whole day was just one big teaching routine, life might be more of a chore and less enjoyable.

### **Guidelines for Effective Teaching**

1. Plan:
  - Know each person’s daily schedule so you can plan those teaching opportunities.
  - Know each person’s Person Centered Plan and what goals they are suppose to be working on.
  - Think about how and where to work with the person on the task.
  - Have the materials available to do the task.
  - Present the task at a level that will best help the person learn.
  - Break the task down into smaller steps if necessary. This is called “Task Analysis”. Presenting smaller steps sets up more opportunities for success. Every time someone completes one of those small steps, they build more self confidence and self esteem.
2. Build in Variety and Choice:
  - Have a variety of tasks in many areas (household, personal care, social).
  - Present “choices” whenever possible (pick one of three shirts to wear, load dishwasher by putting in glasses, plates, or silverware first).
3. Prevent mistakes before they happen:
  - Have the task set up and ready to go ahead of time.
  - Prepare a good learning environment for the person.
  - Lower the chance that things or people will interrupt or compete for your other learner’s attention.
  - Practice your “Teaching Role”.

4. Make the teaching experience successful:
  - Start with something you know the person can do.
  - Encourage participation; don't wait too long for the person to get it right.
  - Any response is participation. Be sure to REWARD it!
  - None of us are "perfect". Do not expect perfection!
  
5. Provide Prompts when necessary:
  - Prompts are done by the teacher as "assisting" techniques to help teach the person to perform the task correctly.
  - There are different "levels" of prompts that can be used depending on the person's current abilities.
  - **D=Demonstration:** This means that the teacher demonstrates how to do the task while the person watches them. This is especially important for people who have "independent" skills and are learning the task for the first time. The teacher may have to break down the task and demonstrate one step at a time while the person actually does the task with the teacher. Most people learn best by "seeing it done"! Good teachers should know how to do the task well and be able to demonstrate the task to others.
  - **I = Independence:** This means the teacher helps the person get started with the task but they are able to complete the task without assistance. One verbal request for the person to perform the task still counts as an independent response. Always be sure to allow enough time for the person to respond independently.
  - **V=Verbal:** This means the teacher will give a verbal request to do the task followed by more verbal assistance as needed to help the person complete the task. Always be sure to allow enough time for the person to respond to your verbal prompting before giving more assistance.
  - **P=Physical:** This means the teacher will give physical assistance to help the person perform the task. This may include using a physical nudge or tap, or physically (hand over hand) helping the person start doing the task. At most it may mean physically (hand over hand) guiding the person throughout the task until it is completed. Always be sure to use the least amount of physical prompting necessary to help the person complete the task.
  - **G=Gestural:** This means the teacher will physically use their hands, fingers, etc. to point to what the teacher wants the learner to do. Only one gesture or several gestures (actions) may be required to lead the person through the task until completed. There should be minimal verbal instruction used with gestures.
  - **R=Refusal:** This means that no matter what prompting or encouragement the teacher is giving to the person today they are not willing to do the task. Everyone has a "bad day". If refusals start happening regularly the teacher should review the "Proactive Options" discussed later in this unit. If proactive options do not help the teacher it may be a sign that the person's Person Centered Plan should be reviewed before more problems arise.
  
6. Reward before, during, and after the teaching session.
  - Praise or compliment the person before the teaching session begins

- Reward for any and all attempts to do the task even if you have to assist the person or do the task with them.
  - Always reward the person after the teaching session is over.
7. Keep the flow going.
- Once the task is ready to go...keep it flowing...help the person if you need to.
  - Make adjustments as needed to keep things going smoothly.
8. Be aware of what is going on during the teaching session.
- If the person is having a hard time you may need to assist with more prompts (verbal and or physical) or increase or change your rewards.
  - You may need to break the task down into smaller steps
  - Look for progress (even in small amounts) and reward it
  - Adapt your rewards to the person you are teaching, as the person learns the task and needs less support, start giving rewards less often.
  - As the person improves, start adding more difficult tasks or new steps.
  - The more “upset” a person becomes, the more you must remain calm.
  - Remember: Focus on the PERSON more than the task.
  - Talk about progress with your co-workers. Everyone should be consistent with following the teaching plans. Be a “Role Model” for new D.S. P.’s that are trying to learn how to best work with individuals.
  - **Don’t keep doing things that are not working!** Discuss the problem with your home manager.

**Most of the time when a person does not seem to be making progress towards “learning the task” it is related to the following:**

1. The task is too hard for the person in its present form.
2. There is not enough time made available for “practice”.
3. There are not enough rewards or variety of rewards being given to the person.

### **What exactly is Behavior?**

Behaviors are a form of communication people use to tell us their wants, needs, and feelings. All of us have behavior. Behaviors don’t happen without reason.

- All behavior is intended to communicate something.
- By “listening” to what the behavior is saying, we may be able to discover the reason why the behavior is happening.
- There are always reasons for behavior, even if we do not know those reasons right now.

### **What Makes a Behavior Challenging?**



Behavior can be considered challenging when it affects an individual’s life in a negative way or the behavior has a big impact on how others relate to them. Behavior is usually considered challenging if it:

- Causes harm to the individual or others.
- Causes property damage.
- Prevents the person from learning new skills.
- Causes the person to be “labeled” as a behavior problem.
- Prevents the person from participating in social and recreational activities.

Once it has been determined that a behavior is challenging, one of your roles is to observe and try to come up with ideas on what is making the challenging behavior work so well for the individual. They must be getting some kind of satisfaction for the challenging behavior. The Direct Support Professional staff should be working together with the person-centered planning team to determine why the behavior is happening and think of ways to teach more socially appropriate alternatives, or **replacement behaviors**. Remember...the challenging behaviors are not happening just to make you mad or to make you work harder! If that is how the behavior is affecting you then maybe you are part of the cause for the challenging behavior.

What individuals are doing at the time, where they are in their environment, and who they are with or around have a lot to do with how they choose to behave. When you pay close attention to these factors you should be able to predict when, where, and with whom the challenging behaviors are most and least likely to happen. People who display challenging behaviors usually do them because it has worked for them in the past.

For example, some of the individuals you work with lived in an institution for many years. That type of environment actually “caused” people to display challenging behaviors. They rarely got any type of good attention or rewards so they figured out ways to get attention in a negative way because “any attention” was better than none at all! So...this is how they “learned” to act because they were not taught any other appropriate ways to interact. Their challenging behavior was actually reinforced. When this type of treatment goes on for many years it can have a lasting impact on a person’s life.

Remember, behavior is communication. Sometimes it is easier to figure out what an individual *doesn’t* want when they are using a challenging behavior. Sometimes these are the behaviors that make it hard for the individual to be with other people. The individual might spit out food they didn’t enjoy or push away the staff person who wants to help. Imagine if you didn’t have words to use. How would you let someone know that something was making you unhappy?

An individual’s behavior usually communicates three things:

- What the individual wants.
- What the individual doesn’t want.
- When the individual wants attention.

How would an individual’s behavior tell you that they want something?

- The individual might point to an apple on the table, which lets you know they want the apple.
- The individual might come to you and shake your hand, which lets you know they want to greet you.
- The individual might look or act confused when attempting to brush their teeth. They may be trying to let you know they need some help.

- When you offer an individual a choice of foods for dinner, they might point to what they want or look in the direction of the food they prefer.

Often, individuals just want someone to pay attention to them. Some people have learned that making loud noises gets the attention of the staff, or when there is a lot of activity going on, they need to wave their arms to get the staff to focus on them. Or an individual may grab or pull on your arm to get your attention.

The more you spend time “getting to know” an individual the more you will learn about their behavior. Knowing a person’s daily routines, communication style, appearance, moods, and regular physical health will be helpful information to have when something is not going right for the person. You will be able to tell what may be causing the person to be in a bad mood today based on what their usual good behavior is. If you don’t know what is normal for an individual, you won’t know when something has changed. It is important to always do the following when you work with someone who has challenging behaviors:

- Observe the person regularly (good times and bad times) and watch and learn how they behave.
- Listen carefully to words, sounds, noises, or cries (happy, sad, and angry, for example) the person makes.
- Ask questions to try to find out what is going on with the person or what they may want or need.

Most of the time people who display challenging behaviors usually give us some kind of “warning” that the challenging behavior is going to happen. This is especially true for the people we know well and who tend to have a pattern to their behavior. A person may show some minor signs that they are about to have a challenging behavior. If the minor sign has something to do with the person’s environment this would be called an “antecedent”. An **Antecedent** is any occurrence or event that takes place before the challenging behavior happens.

They may or may not be easy to see happen. An example might be if someone we work with is afraid of Thunderstorms and it is getting dark and starting to thunder...the actual Thunder may be an antecedent to the challenging behavior of them starting to hit themselves or strike out at those around them. The key here would be to start giving the person support when we hear the thunder so they may be less likely to start doing the challenging behavior. Antecedents are different for everyone but most people who have a pattern of doing challenging behaviors usually have some type of antecedents to look for and warn us in advance that a challenging behavior may happen soon.

A **Precursor** is also a sign that can happen before a challenging behavior. This time the minor sign comes from the person themselves and it means that there will be a change in the person’s mood. They may or may not be easy to see happen. An example might be if someone is swearing...the swearing may be a precursor to a challenging behavior such as throwing an object at someone. Again, the key here is when we hear the swearing we start to go over to the person and help them calm down before they decide to do the challenging behavior. Precursors are different for everyone. Some people may have antecedents **and** precursors before actually doing the challenging behavior.

How we respond to the antecedents, precursors, or the actual challenging behaviors will have a direct impact on how the person will respond back to us. It is not always “what” we say to someone, but “how” we say it that determines what kind of message we are giving to the person and how they will respond back to us. The tone of voice we use when we say something to someone represents 38% of communication. The body language we use represents 55% of communication. The actual words we use only represent 7% of communication. So the tone of voice we use along with the way we express ourselves through body movements has a big impact on the message we are trying to deliver. If we want the person to get the “right” message we need to make sure our tone of voice and body language match what we are trying to say.

We all make mistakes in our communication at times. I’m sure we can all think of times when someone caught us at the wrong moment and we may have said something without using a nice tone of voice or good body language. As a DSP it is very important that you stay aware of your communication style at all times. Remember you are a “Role Model” and your behavior can be imitated.

This is important to remember when relating with the people who live in the home and also when relating with your co-workers. Think about how someone may have said something to you that made you not want to do what they requested. If someone says “You need to clean this mess up right now!” and does not consider that you may be busy doing something else, or that it is someone else’s job, or that you need help, you may respond by not being very nice and definitely not wanting to clean up the mess. This may affect your mood and how you feel about this person. If someone says “I can see a mess here that needs to be cleaned up. Can you do this now or are you busy doing something else? Would you like some help?” You might be much more willing to clean up the mess if you were asked in a nice way to do it. You might even stop what you are currently doing to clean up the mess because you like the way this person treats you and you like to do what they ask of you.

*How* you make a request of someone or respond to someone’s request has a dramatic impact on whether or not the individual will comply. If you ask someone in a way that is respectful and courteous, they are more likely to do what you want them to do. *“Think before you speak”!* This is one of the simple things you can practice with your own behavior that will have a very positive impact on your relationships with the people who live in the home and your co-workers. Our goal is to have “Win-Win” responses. When you ask someone to complete a task or respond to an individual’s request, it is helpful to consider:

- Is this an activity that the individual likes to do?
- Is this an activity that the individual knows how to do or needs help with?
- Is the individual already busy doing something else?
- Does the individual have a **choice** about when or how to do the activity?
- Are you asking in a way that “YOU” would like to be asked?

### **Key Points About Promoting Positive Behavior:**

- What individuals are doing, where, and with who affects their behavior.

- Behaviors are strategies individuals use to get their needs met. Part of your job is to figure out which social/communicative behaviors currently work best for an individual.
- Environment can influence someone's behavior. Make sure environments in which individuals live affect them in a positive way.
- All behavior is communication. By "listening" and "observing" the person's behavior, you can discover the reason for the behavior.
- How you make a request or respond to an individual can decrease the chances of a challenging behavior occurring.

### **Proactive Options:**

After reviewing this material you will be able to select pro-active options in dealing with challenging behaviors, including:

- Recognizing times when teaching is not likely to occur, and having an alternate plan of action.
- Be able to identify Antecedents and Precursors to challenging behavior.
- Understand how to respond effectively in handling challenging behavior.

Often times when we are working on a task with someone we may keep pushing for the task to get finished without taking notice of an individual's minor behavior changes or change in mood. Our focus may be more on the task than the person. We may feel pressure to want to get the task done. If a challenging behavior is starting to happen it is a clear signal that we have to change something in our teaching plan. Failure to change our plan may result in a different lesson learned than we intended.

Focusing on the task as the most important outcome may start to have an effect on your relationship with the individual. The person (the learner), may become more frustrated with the task and you (the teacher), since completion of the task is so important to you. Failure to recognize the needs of or mood changes in the learner can cause the challenging behavior to increase to a point where closure in a friendly, trusting atmosphere is impossible. Our failure to adapt or be willing to make changes for the individual may be perceived as wanting too much "control" over the individual trying to learn.

Using proactive options is not about establishing control over someone. The person trying to learn should be included in the planning process from beginning to end. Without some guidelines to assist us in making "on-the-spot" changes, we might end up responding to a challenging behavior with our emotions. When we respond based on our emotions we may respond with poor body language and inappropriate voice tone. We may become more "bossy" and try to take too much control over the person. To avoid this type of reaction we must have a plan of action ready to implement.

If we know the individual well then we should be aware of the type of challenges we typically face with this person. We can plan our actions ahead of time before the teaching session begins. We learn from past experiences and use our experiences to improve and plan better future teaching sessions. Knowing when to use "proactive options" during our teaching sessions will help us identify potential responses to challenging behavior. We will begin to review the 13 proactive options to assist the teacher when challenging behaviors start to occur. The first 7 options will enhance the

quality of interaction between the teacher and learner. The other remaining options will help the teacher to reduce the level of demand on the learner.

### **Proactive Options that relate to the quality of interaction:**

- **Change your energy level:** You may need to increase or decrease your level of enthusiasm when giving rewards or prompting an individual. Some individuals may like their teacher to be “excited” and “perky”. Others may prefer that you lower your energy level...remain calmer in your approach. This will depend on your relationship with the person and what type of task you are doing with them. “How” you interact with individuals should be based on what works best for the individual.
- **Modify your tone:** This option is similar to the first. You may have to raise or lower your tone of voice to a level the learner recognizes as friendly, encouraging and supportive. Too high of a tone of voice may be too harsh to the learner or seem demanding. Too low of a tone of voice may give the message that you don’t care that much if the person does the task or not.
- **Validate the learner’s feelings:** In order to use this option correctly you need to be able to identify the learner’s feelings that are causing the challenging behavior. The better you know the individual on a personal level, the greater chance that you will be able to recognize those feelings when they occur. Validating the learner’s feelings always has a “But” attached to it. That means you will recognize the feelings and their importance to the learner, “but” we carry on. You need to acknowledge their feelings and include them in the shared interaction you are having with the learner while doing the task. For example, “I know you miss being with your friends at work today. I miss some of my friends too. BUT, you and I can have a good time doing this together today!”
- **Improve and vary rewards:** Remember...how you are interacting with the individual can be a rewarding experience. You need to always be thinking about how you can give positive comments and gestures to the individual, before, during, and after completing a task. The learner may be getting tired of just hearing “Good Job”! You will need to be creative in the ways you reward the individual’s correct responses.
- **Change your expectations:** Sometimes you may be expecting more interaction and participation than the learner is prepared to give today. Be prepared to “back off” and lower your expectations of the learner. Maybe today you will have to “help” the learner more than usual. If the opposite is true, where you may expect less and the learner is willing to give more, then you will adjust your teaching methods to meet the learner’s needs and let them be more independent.
- **Abandon the task to focus on the person:** The individual should always be the focus! There may come a point during the teaching session where it is better for the teacher to forget about the task and just “hang out” with the learner. That becomes the “new” focus or task to keep the person’s

challenging behavior from escalating. If continued encouragement to do the task just makes the person more frustrated and agitated then this may be a good option to choose. You can try to teach the task again another time or another day.

### **Proactive Options that reduce the demand on the learner.**

(These options may enhance the quality of the interaction between the teacher and the learner with less time and effort being spent on the task to be done.):

- **Change the pace of the activity:** If you are moving too quickly through the steps of the task or with your prompting, you may cause the individual to become agitated. The more we take our time to do the activity, the longer we get to spend “interacting” with the learner. Going too slow, on the other hand, may not provide the person with enough “activity”. You need to find a good balance to keep the flow going during your teaching session.
- **Involve choices:** You need to get creative in the way you provide choices during your teaching session. Prepare your task ahead of time. Think of ways you can give the learner as many choices in the activity as possible. Where shall we sit?\_Would you like to put the plates on the table first or the silverware? Would you like to put the plates in the dishwasher first or the cups? Think of creative ways to involve the learner in making choices about the task. The more the learner feels that they have input the more they will want to participate and complete the task. The more choices a person has the happier they usually are. This is true for all of us!
- **Modify the environment:** Is there anything in the environment that is distracting to the learner or making it difficult for them to stay focused on you and the task? There are many factors that could cause problems such as lighting, temperature, noises, other people, certain objects, feeling too crowded, etc. Think about your area before you start the task and during your teaching time and make adjustments so the individual has a good learning environment.
- **Improve the prompts:** When challenging behavior begins think about adding more prompts to the session. “Help” the person complete portions of the task that are giving them problems. Some day’s people need more help than other days so do not be afraid to give extra prompting and assistance when needed.
- **Take a mini-break:** This option is similar to the option of “abandoning the task to focus on the person”. The difference here is the Teacher has decided to just break from the task for a short time. The learner is not able to stay focused on the task no matter what other options have been tried. The key here is to take the break before the challenging behavior increases. Give the person a chance to break away and relax for a bit or do something else for awhile. With this option the teacher will direct the person back to the task after a short break.
- **Bail out:** If the learner’s challenging behavior has not decreased after trying the other options, this one remains an option for the teacher. The teacher can end the task in a nice way before the individual becomes more upset.

Nothing is gained if you continue to try to teach an individual who is totally uncooperative. The teacher and learner will both become more frustrated. This does not mean that the teacher ends their interaction with the person completely, but you will “back off” and give the learner some space. Today is not the day to try to teach the person this task. When this option is used the teacher should look at what happened in this teaching session and try to learn from it. That way the teacher will know how to better present the task to the person next time. Remember the goal is your relationship with the person; the stronger and more trusting that becomes the better chance the person will want to try to do the task with you again.

- Hang in there: The last option is the opposite of “bailing out” and “abandoning the task to focus on the person.” The option of simply “hanging in there” means to help the person through this difficult time they are having. The better you know the person the better you will be able to make the decision on how long to hang in there with the individual. If the person starts to focus again and shows some signs of participation the teacher can start to give more rewards and encouragement to keep the person on the right track.

If problems continue during teaching times, remember the following “problem-solving” skills that may be helpful:

- Increase Rewards (number, type, intensity).
- Change Prompts (use prompts that encourage participation).
- Look at the “Task” or “Environment” (simplify the task, change the task, remove distractions, and review times the task is being done).
- Wait out the difficulty (be patient, communicate effectively, provide support).
- Stay focused on the “Person” and the positive things they are doing. Try to ignore the challenging behavior (unless there is a “safety” concern).
- Don’t blame the person trying to learn the task or yourself for what has gone wrong. (We learn from experience, including mistakes! Take time to evaluate the situation before your next teaching session.)
- Don’t give up!!!!!! (Try and try again! Keep a positive attitude.)

## **Confrontation Avoidance Techniques (C.A.T.)**

Confrontation Avoidance Techniques are some common sense techniques used to calm down an agitated person. Avoiding confrontation is your responsibility as a Direct Support Professional. If the people you are providing services to could avoid such confrontations, they would not be living in a specialized residential setting. As the “trained” DSP, you are responsible for knowing how to calm a person down when they become upset or agitated about something. The better relationship you have with the person the better chance these techniques will work for you. Think of a time in the past where you were upset or agitated. If you needed someone to calm you down which would you choose? A complete stranger or someone you know well and feel comfortable with?

Let’s begin to review the C.A.T. techniques.

## **ALWAYS:**

- Reward “good” behavior as much as possible. When you see it...reward it!!!
- Show care and concern daily; not just when a person becomes upset.
- Actively listen. Stop what you are doing and pay close attention to the person.
- Be fair, sometimes firm, and be consistent. It is important for all DSP’s to work together as a team to provide consistent treatment. This is the “key” to successfully teaching people appropriate social skills.
- Get to know each person you provide services to. Learn their earliest signs of agitation so you can intervene at the beginning of the problem.
- Look out for and avoid events or situations that may upset the person. Remember it is your responsibility to avoid confrontations. People who display challenging behavior on a regular basis may be living in this home to learn some appropriate ways to deal with their emotions. This will be an important part of your job.
- Stay in control of yourself. Be aware of your voice tone and body language. If you show signs of anxiety, this may increase the person’s agitation.

## **WHAT TO DO WHEN AGITATION IS JUST BEGINNING: (These techniques do not have to be done in the order they are listed....you will use whatever works “best” for that individual based on their challenging behavior and communication style)**

- Approach immediately and talk to the person. Find out what is going on. Let them know you are there for them to listen, help, and support them with their problem.
- Remain calm and friendly. Keep that “positive attitude”. Stay in control of your actions.
- Invite the person to sit with you, or stand with the person if they refuse to sit. Stay at eye level. If the person decides to sit down this tells you they are beginning to calm down.
- Speak in a low, calm voice, slowly and clearly. Be aware of your voice tone. When people become upset they do not think, listen, or focus clearly. You remaining calm and speaking clearly will help the person respond and begin to calm down.
- Ask what the problem is. If the person has good communication skills let them tell you what is upsetting them. Be supportive and try to help them with the problem if you can.
- Do NOT: demand, command, argue, disagree, or make any threats.
- Remember these are “beginning” signs of agitation. Getting “emotional” or “bossy” could make the situation worse.
- Don’t bribe or promise what you can’t deliver. If you think you need to promise someone something to get them to calm down you will need to follow through with that promise.
- Be patient. Time is on your side. Be available to take the time required to help the person calm down. It will take MORE of your time if you don’t!!!

**WHAT TO DO WHEN AGITATION IS INCREASING: (Just like the previous set of techniques, these do not have to be done in any certain order. Do what works best based on your relationship with the person you are trying to calm down.)**

- Speak in a calm, relaxed voice at low volume. Be a “role model” for remaining calm under pressure.
- Show no emotion. Be polite and respectful. Don’t be overly “friendly” or show signs of becoming upset with the person. Try to stay “neutral”.
- Continue to talk to the person, listen to them, and wait (be patient) for them to respond and start calming down.
- Acknowledge how the person feels. Try to understand where they are coming from. Put the person first.
- Never turn your back or walk away. If you must leave the area be very watchful and careful. Walk backwards away from the person if you need to. Try to not leave the person when they are agitated. Call for help from another DSP.
- Do not disagree, argue, command, demand, or make threats. Again...this will only make the situation worse, especially if agitation is increasing. Stay in control of your own emotions and behavior.
- Continue to “be patient” and do not give up working with these techniques, unless you are scared, and know the person will continue to escalate to the point of attacking someone, time is on your side.
- Keep your body posture relaxed. Try not to show it if you are feeling tension. Remember your body language represents 55% of your communication.
- Stand slightly to the side of the person, at an angle, face to face, maintaining eye contact. This is especially important if you feel or know the person has the potential to attack you physically. You are in a better position to move away from the person quickly by standing to the side of the person.
- Stand at an arm’s length, plus a few inches away from the person. This goes along with the previous technique. As you stand to the side try to put yourself at a safe distance from the person. If they try to reach out, hit, or grab you will have time to move away.
- Never corner the person and do not allow yourself to be cornered. Most people need space to move around if they are extremely upset or agitated (This is true for all of us). When someone is this agitated you need to make sure you always have an avenue of escape and don’t get yourself blocked into a corner or up against a surface. Making the person do or say something they don’t want to do may still make them feel cornered (psychologically). Cornering any person who is agitated, angry, or scared is highly dangerous.

**C.A.T. WORKED! AGITATION IS STARTING TO DECREASE:**

- Continue to observe the person or remain with the person until they are completely calmed down.
- Involve the person in an activity (their choice!) before you have to leave the scene. Giving the person something to do that they enjoy will help take their mind off what was upsetting them. It may be okay to allow the person to sit quietly if that helps them calm down and you are sure the agitation is ending. You could also offer the person to do something “with” you if that is an option.

- Do not blame, punish, or scold the person for the challenging behavior they just did. You did a great job using the C.A.T.'s to calm the person down. That was the goal. It is okay and normal for ALL of us to become agitated at certain times. Forgive the person and try to encourage appropriate behavior so you can reward them again. Stay positive in your actions!
- It may be appropriate to talk to the person about their challenging behavior. This will depend on your relationship with the person and how well they understand what you are telling them. If they do understand what occurred, it may be a learning opportunity for the person. You can explain to them how their agitation affected you and others. Make sure you are calm and feeling supportive before talking to the person.
- Document what happened. Remember if it isn't written down....it didn't happen!! DSP's need to document in "detail" specifically what they did to help the person calm down. The more you share this information with others the more your co-workers will be able to be consistent in their interactions with the individual. This is especially important for people who cause challenging behavior. Don't forget to include the "good news" too! There should be guidelines in place where you work for documenting these types of incidents.

Confrontation Avoidance Techniques are considered standard procedure unless the person's individual plan of service has a behavior treatment plan in it. If a person has an ongoing treatment plan to assist with their challenging behavior you need to do **exactly** what the plan tells you to do. DSP's should receive specific training for that person's plan. If at any point during a confrontation you do not feel you can handle the situation you need to call for help from another co-worker. Sometimes you may need to admit that you may not be the best DSP to help this person. The DSP that has the "best" relationship with the person usually has the most success with helping the person calm down.

### **POSITIVE BEHAVIOR SUPPORT PLANS**

People who have regularly occurring behavior challenges may require positive behavior support plans.

The supports coordinator/or case manager will coordinate the development of a positive support plan with input from the DSP staff and the person-centered planning team.

#### **KEY STEPS IN DEVELOPMENT OF THE PLAN:**

1. **Develop a Support Team:** The support team should include key people in the person's life. Some of these people may include: Direct Support Professionals, Family Members, Guardians, Mental Health Professionals, School and/or Work personnel, Friends, and anyone else that knows the person well. The team will meet to share information about everything they know about the person. The meetings should be positive and everyone needs to agree to the plan. The team should discuss the person's strengths and abilities, and be able to help put together a plan that will promote a positive future for the person based on those strengths and abilities. The team needs to be willing to meet and review the plan as needed to fine tune the plan or make specific changes. As a direct support

professional you play an important role as a team member. You are a key person in providing information to the team. Never be afraid to “speak up” and let other team members know how you feel about what is going on in the person’s life.

2. **The Severe Behavior (s) needs to be clearly defined:** A severe behavior is a behavior that causes harm to the individual themselves, others in their environment, or causes severe property damage. Specific information on where, how often, and when the behavior occurs needs to be established so it can be monitored regularly.

3. **Everyone involved in the planning process needs to be able to provide extra support to the individual while gathering information about the behavior:**

More focus should be given during “good times”. Find new ways of praising the person and giving positive feedback for “good behavior”. Think of ways to provide more “choices” for the individual. People with challenging behavior have little control over whom they live with, what they will have for dinner, when they will get to go out with a friend etc. Most of the time restrictions are put in place for people that may prevent the person from having some choices in their life. Everyone involved in the plan needs to be creative in how to offer more choices in the individual’s life and still keep everyone safe. Find out what the person likes and dislikes. Observe the person during good and bad times. During times when the person seems to be agitated try not to ask too much of the person. Try to get them involved in another activity they enjoy or change their environment to better meet their current needs. These simple changes in the person’s life and how you relate to them will be helpful with developing a positive support plan.

4. **Begin the process of a comprehensive assessment:**

As a DSP you will be asked to describe how the person spends their time. Other team members will be asked to do this too. Everyone should take note of the overall quality of life for the person. Do they have community involvement? To what extent? Do they have friends outside of their home life? Do they have hobbies or activities they enjoy?

Do they like to be around people? Do they like to have some “alone time”? Do they like a quiet environment or noisy one? Do they like their daily schedule? Do they have input on their daily/weekly schedule? Do they like to go to work/school? What are they good at doing? What things are most important for them to learn? Do they actively participate in their person centered plan? Are the goals in their individual plan encouraging them to learn new things they enjoy? Do they have choices in their life? Do they appear to like where they live? Are there certain DSP’s they “connect” with? Do they have positive role models in their life? Do they like their housemates? Do they have health problems? Do they have an adequate diet? Are they taking medications? Are there side effects of the medications that could have an impact on how they behave? These are just some of the examples of questions that should be looked at to get a clear picture of the person’s life. *It is important to remember*

*that quality of life issues are among the most important factors that influence behavior. If someone's life quality isn't what it could be, it can affect behavior.*

- 5. Conduct a Functional Assessment:** Once all the necessary information is gathered and discussed it is time to conduct a functional assessment of the challenging behavior the person is doing. All behavior that happens regularly serves some purpose for the person. Every person is a unique individual. The best way to help someone change their behavior is to first understand the reasons behind the behavior. Some good questions to consider might be: What does this behavior do for the person? Does the behavior help them get away from something they don't like or don't want to do? Does the behavior help them avoid a situation where they are likely to fail or feel threatened by demands being placed on them? What "need" is the behavior trying to communicate? Why does the person feel the need to resort to such extremes to get someone's attention or to protect themselves from something they see as threatening?

So how do we figure out the purpose or function of a behavior? We start with the "A", "B", "C's". A is for **Antecedent** (and/or precursor) which occurs before the behavior. B is for **Behavior** which refers to the specific challenging behavior that can be clearly seen when it occurs. C is for **Consequence** which refers to what happens after the challenging behavior or as a result of the behavior. As a DSP you will be asked to record the person's challenging behavior based on the A, B, C's you have observed happening. There will be a specific data sheet set up for the person for you to record on whenever you see the behavior happening. The support team you are working with will assist you in learning how to best record the data on the challenging behavior.

- 6. Continue to gather information to evaluate what is going on:**

The information about the person's challenging behavior needs to be evaluated regularly. The steps that have been taken to help the person should have a positive impact on the behavior and the overall quality of the person's life. As information is reviewed it should focus on overall improvements in the person's life, and not whether the challenging behavior ever occurs.

- 7. Design a Support Plan (based on the data collected) which should indicate what the team thinks the purpose or function of the behavior is:** The plan needs to address the changes needed to reduce the amount of times the challenging behavior happens. The plan should note the conditions present before or during the behavior, and what happens after the behavior occurs. What specific skills can be taught to the person to make the challenging behavior unnecessary? What changes need to be made in the environment or other areas of the person's life? When making a positive support plan it is important to involve teaching skills that allow the person to have success and encourage independence. This will help teach new, socially acceptable behaviors and skills to replace the challenging behaviors. The plan also needs to include what to do when the person has a bad day and the challenging behavior increases. Hopefully this will not happen but those situations need to be addressed to promote a safe environment for everyone. Once the support plan is developed the DSP's that work with the individual should be "trained" on the plan. The

DSP's will be responsible for implementation of the plan when the challenging behavior occurs. The positive support plan is considered "treatment" and is part of the individual's person centered plan of service. **All DSP's are required to follow the plan and be consistent with how they implement the plan.**

- 8. Regular Reviews of the Plan should occur:** A positive support plan is not written in stone. There should be regular opportunities to review what is working and to change the plan to make it more effective. The DSP needs to be sure to chart progress or lack of progress on the data sheets regularly. The review of the data along with daily progress notes should give the team the information they need to report progress or make the appropriate changes to the plan. As with other goals in the person's plan of service we should not keep doing things that are not working! As a DSP your ongoing input on the plan is important. Don't be afraid to voice your concerns if the plan is not helping the person to improve.

**Basic guidelines for improving and modifying support plans to ensure success:**

- Teaching opportunities should happen regularly.
  - Rewards/Reinforcement should be based on the individual's likes and choices. If the behavior is not improving, it could be that the reinforcement isn't meaningful to the person, or the goal is set too high for the person to earn reinforcement.
  - If the plan is working....celebrate the success no matter how small the improvement may be.
  - The team should meet regularly and have good communication. Everyone needs support during this process. The team needs to encourage everyone to have input on the plan and be able to discuss what is working and not working.
  - Most of the time the whole plan will not need to be changed. It might only need to be modified in some areas or new strategies may need to be added. As a DSP, you should be attending the team meetings to share your experiences with implementing the plan.
  - Provide more Training and/or Technical Assistance: As a DSP it is not enough to just "read" a support plan. You should have the opportunity to ask questions, watch someone demonstrate; receive frequent reminders and frequent feedback on how you are doing. A DSP needs to have "Role Models" to assist them in carrying out the plan effectively. This is especially true for a "new" Direct Support Professional.
- 9. The Successes from the Plan do not stop after the challenging behavior decreases:** Changing a person's challenging behavior is never a quick or simple process. Challenging Behavior will begin to increase again if long-term support is not provided. There should be "Guidelines" put in place to guide DSP's in providing the necessary supports to the individual. Just because the challenging behavior has ended or decreased does not mean your support ends. The person will need continued support to stay on the right track.

## Crisis Intervention

You now have a much better idea of how to provide an environment that supports choice, control, quality of life, and healthy relationships for the individuals who live in a residential setting. You know that offering choices is one of the most important things a DSP can do to encourage independence.

Effective teaching strategies and developing trusting positive relationships with the individuals you work with will help you to respond to challenging behavior in a caring and supportive manner. Since you have taken the time to get to know the individual you are able to help the individual to learn new coping skills for dealing with fear, frustration, and anger.

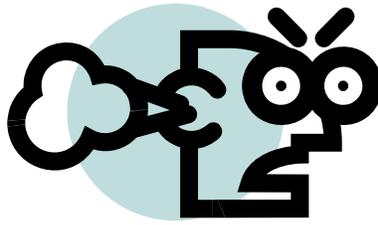
You have learned that behavior is a form of communication. A DSP must “hear” the behavior and use that information to assist the individual to cope with an uncomfortable situation or environment. Even when DSP staff do everything that is outlined in this unit and know people well there is still a possibility that you MAY NOT be effective in de-escalating a challenging behavior or avoiding a crisis situation. Remember the Individuals that you assist are not always capable of avoiding confrontations with others. The DSP must accept this responsibility- aggressions and conflicts are often related to what DSP staff do and don't do.

So, what is a crisis situation? A crisis or emergency situation is defined as seriously aggressive, self-injurious or other behaviors that place the individual or others at risk of harm. A more detailed definition is included later in this unit. This is not a typical behavior for the individual. This is the first time the individual has responded in this way or there has not been time to develop a positive behavior support/treatment plan.

Remember if the individuals' you support have a history of challenging behavior this is not a new behavior for them. There should be a positive behavior support/ treatment plan in place. If there is a plan in place you must follow the plan.

A positive behavior support (PBS) plan may sometimes include a “restrictive” component. Plans that include restrictions must be reviewed and approved by the Behavior treatment committee to assure that the individual's rights are not violated in any way by the techniques in the PBS plan.

If you are providing support for an individual with a PBS plan that includes restrictive techniques you must receive training on the plan and techniques before carrying out the plan. The training must be provided by a qualified instructor and documentation of the training must include the following information: date, length of training, type of training, specific techniques covered, and whether the DSP is able to perform the techniques. DSP staff should receive training on the plan any time the plan is revised or modified. Frequent review and practice of the techniques is recommended to assure that the DSP is able to perform the techniques in the PBS plan when/if it becomes necessary.



If the PBS plan is working and the individual is learning new coping skills the more restrictive parts of the plan will not be used often and eventually will not be needed in the plan. If the more restrictive techniques are used often this usually means that the positive support included in the plan should be reviewed and changed. DSP staff should make the effort to be involved and participate in this process to share their experiences and observations about an individual and to learn what works for others.

You know that sometimes the reason an individual may display a behavior is obvious and at other times it may be much harder to determine the reason for the behavior. It may appear as if there is no trigger or precursor. It is very important that DSP staff work together as a team and communicate what they have observed during their interactions in the residential setting and what has been successful. This information should be shared with the case manager and other team members.

Remember to involve the individual as much as possible in the plan development. A good PBS plan allows opportunities for the individual to learn to make “real” choices that are meaningful and this will help the person gain control and independence!

Be sure to review the **Positive Behavior Support (PBS)** handout which is used with permission from Developmental Enhancement, PLC.

### **What is a crisis or emergency situation?**

A crisis or emergency situation is defined as: A situation in which an individual has a serious mental illness or a developmental disability and one of the following apply:

- The individual can reasonably be expected within the near future to physically injure himself, herself, or another individual, either intentionally or unintentionally.
- The individual is unable to provide himself or herself food, clothing, or shelter, or attend to basic physical activities such as eating, using the toilet, bathing, grooming, dressing, or walking, and this inability may lead in the near future to harm to the individual or to another individual.

**Remember this is not a typical behavior for the individual!**



**What to do in an emergency/crisis situation:**

In a crisis/emergency the DSP has multiple responsibilities and must act quickly to de-escalate the situation, assist the individual to calm down, and ensure the safety of the individual and others who may be present. The DSP who has the best relationship with the individual will have a better chance of finding out what is wrong and helping the person calm down. Emphasis should be placed on using verbal and non-verbal communication including body language as the DSP approaches the individual. Attempt to find out what is wrong, listen carefully and non-judgmentally. This is the perfect time to use the Confrontation Avoidance Techniques (C.A.T.) and the Proactive Options which were covered earlier in this unit.

Your approach and ability to listen respectfully will send a message of support, care, and concern. Individuals may become upset, anxious, or agitated for a variety of reasons. It could be a symptom of a mental illness; it could be as a result of a traumatic event that the individual experienced or a reaction to a medication. Investigating the cause or trigger for the agitation will occur after the DSP has successfully helped the person to calm down.

The following guidelines will help you understand the “**DO’S and DON’TS**” for working with an individual who has become upset and could become violent or aggressive.



## THE DO'S OF Defusing Agitated and Anxious People

<b>Guideline DO:</b>	<b>Explanation</b>
1. Be aware of warning signs.	Pacing, change in muscle tone, gestures, voice tone, posture, breathing and eye contact are warning signs.
2. Intervene early.	Early intervention <b>usually</b> stops escalation. But ask: "what would happen if we did nothing?" If the situation would <b>likely</b> calm down leave it alone.
3. Find out about the person.	Use any and every source. Is the person calmer with a male or female? Is he angry or fearful?
4. Get the person to talk.	Use open-ended questions on neutral topics. As much as possible, focus on reality and his or her positive behaviors.
5. Check external causes.	Is the problem really another person? Does the person have a valid complaint or fear? Does he or she have a physical problem?
6. Check internal causes.	Look for hallucinations, delusions, disconnected thought or speech, misperceptions of others' actions or motives, unusual or unwarranted fears.
7. Use calming techniques.	Acknowledge feelings and their intensity. Help clarify the source. Use a low voice. Reassure of safety.
8. Control <b>your</b> anger and anxiety.	Admit concern about danger and determination to do whatever is needed. Reassure that you want to help but that his or her behavior makes it difficult. Prepare to be extra tolerant before you intervene.
9. Provide alternatives.	Change the environment, provide other outlets. Distract only if danger is imminent.
10. Have a plan.	Include everyone. Be creative & flexible. If it's not working change it.
11. Know when & how to retreat.	Move gradually into open space. If violent you can leave: with or without an explanation. <b>DO IT!</b> Being alone often settles people down.
12. Take action.	Thank people who control themselves. Call for help if needed. Let others decide with you if the person is or is not responsible for their behavior.
13. Follow up.	Defuse yourself. Do something physical to use up your adrenaline. Debrief each other to prepare for the next time.
14. Use other professions.	Trained professionals can give input and advice or talk to the person while you assess and maintain control of the situation.

## THE DON'TS OF Defusing Agitated and Anxious People

<b>Guideline DON'T:</b>	<b>Explanation</b>
1. Put your hands unexpectedly on a disturbed/upset person.	Person may not want to be held or touched. Physical comfort is great for some and awful for others.
2. Challenge, dare, argue, threaten people or change the subject.	These make people feel powerless. Powerless people have only violence to regain power and self esteem.
3. Sound like an overindulgent angry or supportive parent.	Patronizing remarks in a power conflict discredit the person and escalate anger.
4. Use derogatory terms or talk about someone as if he/she isn't there.	Address people as they prefer. To do otherwise is a put down. The ultimate put down is to ignore one's existence.
5. Make promises you can't keep or attempt to bribe.	People read lies & bluffs. They may know the limit of your authority. You may work with them again.
6. Leave without mutual agreement until the issue has been resolved unless personal safety makes it necessary.	If the person is potentially violent you'll set someone else up and make it worse for yourself the next time. If the person is calm and talking he/she may feel abandoned and escalate again.
7. Restrain the person	Evacuate other people first. Talk the person down when ever possible. It may seem to take more time but the results will be better in the long run.
8. Let pride force you into a fight.	People who need to control situations lose sight of the goal: defusing the danger. It's hard when enduring insults/abuse from people you're trying to help. Help the person control him/herself rather than controlling the situation.
9. Block a person's attempt to escape unless you need to.	Blocking traps people. It leaves them no options except to attack. Running may be his/her way of not hurting you & may relieve anxiety.
10. Sacrifice yourself for things.	Items can be replaced. You can't.
11. Move the person unless you have to.	Move yourself and others out of his or her way to avoid unnecessary confrontations.
12. Stay in a small or congested space.	Small spaces confine people bursting with feelings. If violence occurs the chance of injury is far greater. Get the person to walk or meet in a large room with two exits.

Most of the time you will be successful in helping someone calm down by using the techniques that have been covered in this unit. Occasionally, despite your best efforts the individual may continue to display severe challenging behavior. DSP staff must work together as a team to protect others who are in the area and may be in danger of being injured. For example one DSP will continue to try to talk with the individual to determine what is wrong while the second DSP works with the others in the residential setting to get to a safe area in the home. DSP staff should call emergency numbers and follow the emergency procedure that has been established for the home. DSP staff should receive training on the procedure which should include who to call, when to call, and the emergency phone numbers.

Many agencies and mental health authorities have after hour's emergency access to services and supports. For example at Community Mental Health for Central Michigan (CMHCM) the emergency and after hours access numbers are: 24-Hour Crisis Line Number: 989.772.5938 OR 1.800.317.0708 OR 911 OR go to any hospital or other setting that offers emergency care. The DSP will have to make a decision on who to call based on their observation of the situation and the risk of injury to the individual and others.

### **When to call 911:**

DSP staffs should call the police or 911 for assistance when an individual has become so violent and/or aggressive that there is a serious risk of physical injury to self or others and the DSP staffs are unable to get other individuals to a safe place in the home.

DSP staff should call law enforcement/police when there is a weapon and the individual is threatening to harm themselves or others. DSP staffs are not trained to remove a weapon from someone. There is a great risk of harm when trying to remove a weapon from someone who is agitated and upset. The police have received special training and should be able to respond in a way that prevents injury to all people involved/present. DSP staff should continue to talk to the individual until 911 arrives. Remember it is important to work together as a team. Others in the residential setting may be alarmed, fearful, or upset by what is happening. DSP staff should provide support and reassurance to keep everyone as calm as possible.

### **What to do after the crisis:**

Take time as soon as possible after the crisis to "unwind" or decompress. When you have been in an intense situation, adrenaline flows. Decompression means relieving pressure or to get things back to normal. You need to take some time to relieve the pressures created by the confrontation. If this is not done, the pressures or negative feelings may get worse until they interfere with your ability to work effectively with that person and / or others who live and work in the licensed residential setting. Before taking time to decompress make sure the confrontation is over. Has the person regained self-control? Has the environment returned to normal? The safety and well-being of the people living in the home is your first priority.

Debriefing occurs when the DSP staffs discuss what happened during an incident. Because everyone sees things from a different angle and we want to avoid another

incident, this is an important follow-up to the crisis. Debriefing can also help staff decompress by sorting out thoughts and feelings about the incident. Other DSP staff can help you get a more complete and clear picture of what really happened. Discuss what happened before, during, and after the confrontation occurred.

Answer these questions during the debriefing:

- How did I feel before, during, and after the confrontation?
- What was the person doing before, during, and after the confrontation?
- What signs of agitation did I or others observe before the confrontation?
- What confrontation avoidance techniques & proactive options were used?
- What happened as a result?
- Did other staff assist? If "no" why?
- If "yes" was communication clear between staff? Were actions coordinated?
- Were other people present? Were they removed from the area/made safe?
- If the incident happened again, what would I do?
- How will this affect interactions with this individual in the future?

Debrief with the person involved in the confrontation, if appropriate, after he or she has calmed down and re-established self-control.

All physical injuries, unusual behavior, and all actions by DSP staff to calm the individual must be documented on an Incident Report. Documentation of agitated and aggressive behavior provides important information. Remember the DSP must be descriptive not evaluative when documenting. Write down what you see, not what you think those actions mean.

Remember we all become angry sometimes and we almost always have a reason for our anger. Sometimes there is a real and legitimate reason and other times it is a matter of perception: what we thought the person was doing or saying to us. Our perceptions impact how we interpret others behavior and actions. Most of us have learned how to control our anger. Many of the individuals we work with did not have the same opportunity to learn how to control their anger. The individual may be reacting to trauma they may have experienced or something in the environment or "fill in the blank", whatever the trigger and there are many it makes sense to respond in a calm and compassionate manner.

Remember the individual is NOT attacking you although sometimes it may feel that way. The DSP has got to be careful to be professional and separate personal feelings and reactions, becoming angry, yelling or having threatening body language will not help. These types of reactions from a DSP could escalate a situation into a "Me against You" confrontation which won't teach the individual anything and will damage the relationship between the DSP and the individual involved.

Are you familiar with the old saying "You catch more flies with honey than with vinegar?" Meaning be nice and you're more likely to get what you want, if the DSP treats people with respect and is a good role model then you will have very few problems and many great opportunities to assist people in positive ways.

## **IN SUMMARY:**

The Direct Support Professionals now have tools that they can use to help them support individual's they provide services to at the residential facility in which they work.

- The ability to look at challenging behavior from all angles.
- Figure out what the challenging behavior is trying to communicate.
- Examine the quality of life of the individuals.
- Examine the environment for positive improvements.
- Respect and honor the individual's choices.
- Have a support team they can depend on.

Everyone who provides support to the individuals needs to be willing to work as a team. We must be willing to change ourselves, the environment, the schedules, the teaching materials, the reinforcers, or whatever support is needed to achieve positive outcomes and improve the overall quality of a person's life.

## **To summarize: The best ways to support an individual who has challenging behavior are:**

1. Get to know the person. Look at them and listen to them while you do routine jobs. The better you know someone the better you understand them. The better you understand them the better you will be able to deal with the parts of their personality that are not likeable.
2. Remember that all behavior is a form of communication. Challenging behavior sends a message. Ask questions and learn about the individual's life and what it takes to make that person happy. Learn what causes the person to become unhappy. The challenging behavior may have something to do with what the person is being asked to do (their daily schedules, their goals) and "who" is doing the asking.
3. Help the person with severe challenging behavior develop a positive behavior support plan. Try to include the person in the planning process as much as possible. This will help improve the individual's relationships with others, community participation, increased choices, skill development, and allow them to make contributions to other team members.
4. Don't assume the worst about the person. Labels can cause us to underestimate the person's true potential. Stay focused on the person's strengths and abilities. Every person can make improvements with adequate support.
5. Relationships make all the difference. Advocate for the person to have positive role models in their life. Many individuals depend on family members or paid staff for their social relationships. Get creative with ideas for including the person in the community and setting up a social support network.
6. Help the person develop a positive identity. Often a person with challenging behavior is labeled as a "behavior problem". Build a positive identity by helping the person find a way to make a contribution. Put the "person first" when you talk about them. Talk about the "good behaviors" as much as possible. Share news about the good things that you see the person doing.
7. Give choices instead of requiring or demanding the person to do something. Allow the person to make choices as much as possible. This does not mean you

- give them everything they want. You can set limits with the person as long as you include them and provide some choices with those limitations.
8. Help the individual to have more FUN. Fun and humor are powerful cures for problems. Be a role model for “having fun” and being happy.
  9. Establish good working relationships with your co-workers, mental health professionals, family members, guardians, and doctors. Learn as much as you can about the person and who has influence in their life decisions. Being healthy both mentally and physically will have an impact on challenging behavior. This includes things like a balanced diet, good sleep, adequate exercise, and feeling supported by all the people in their life that care about them.
  10. Develop a support plan for yourself and co-workers. Help to create a supportive environment for everyone concerned. Direct Support Professionals need support too. The more supportive environment you work in, the less chance for punitive practices to take place.



Your role as a Direct Support Professional has an immediate impact everyday on the people to which you provide services. You will experience, over time, the incredible importance and value of relationships. On that amazing journey you will discover that you are building a better and healthier world and community for the sake of humankind. You may also discover that you are helping to take away the isolation in people’s lives, bringing equalities that all citizens have a right to, and offering care and compassion to those who sorely need it. In your work as a Direct Support Professional, you are given the opportunity to help instill in people a sense of value and dignity. This leads to healthier self-confidence and self-esteem and, along with your encouragement as a role model, may inspire others to give rather than habitually take. Finally, you are bringing hope and light to people and their communities; **and you will discover that without you the difference might never have been felt.**

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**DSP’s, after reading the unit on Non-Assertive Techniques (or Positive Approaches), please complete the following activities:**

1. [Teaching from the Learner’s Perspective](#)
2. [Quality of Life Questions](#)
3. [Functional and Age-Appropriate](#)
4. [What About Your Reinforcers](#)
5. [Say It Another Way](#)
6. [Quality of Life Worksheet](#)
7. [Important Values](#)

**Once the Activities have been completed, click on the link below to take the Non-Aversive Techniques test:**

- ❖ [Non-Aversive Techniques Test](#)