



What does Positive Behaviour Support look like?

The second of our guides for families describes what you should expect if your family member is receiving Positive Behaviour Support.

You can be involved in Positive Behaviour support as much or as little is right for you. You may want to support the assessment, review draft plans and reports, and have a role in delivering the plan itself.

Being Respected as Partners

Professionals should discuss with you how you want to be involved when Positive Behaviour Support is used, and this can be as much or as little as is right for you. Professionals should respect the fact that you know your family member very and spend considerably more time with them than they will. You should be respected for your expertise and be treated as an equal partner. The practitioner should explain their assessments and findings to you and see if you agree, if you have anything to add, or if you want to change anything.

You will also know what is achievable for you in your circumstances. So it is important that you are involved in devising the Positive Behaviour Support plan as you will know what is practical and achievable for you.

Realistic Expectations and Goals

Positive Behaviour Support is an intervention that is known to work for challenging behaviour. However, the expectations for Positive Behaviour Support should be explained to you in a realistic way. It is not a cure or a quick fix, and the solution is unlikely to be found overnight. The assessment itself can take up to 12 weeks to complete.

Positive Behaviour Support plans usually make small steps in increasing skills and progress is made slowly, one small step at a time. This can be frustrating, but it is important to remember that the goal is to increase skills that will be life-long. Data should be collected on progress so as you can see that the small changes are happening and the professional should check with you that you are able to cope with this long term plan.

Positive (Non-Aversive) Intervention Strategies

A genuine Positive Behaviour Support Plan should not have any negative consequences. Time-out, fines, corrections, reprimands, isolation etc are not part of a Positive Behaviour Support Plan.

A Positive Behaviour Support Plan will largely be focussed on supporting the person when the challenging behaviour is not happening. Plans should also understand what the challenging behaviour means to the person (this is usually described as the function). Plans should look to help people achieve this function easier in other ways so that challenging behaviour isn't necessary.

There should be clear expectations of the behaviours you want to see, rather than focussing on what you don't want to see. People who support your family member will be shown ways to increase the rewards experienced from the positive behaviours, making the positive behaviours the preferred option rather than focussing on reducing the challenging behaviours.

Planned Ignoring

Some professionals may suggest ignoring the behaviours you want to reduce. This is called "planned ignoring".

Planned ignoring is not a stand alone Positive Behaviour Support intervention, as it doesn't promote learning new skills, and only reduces behaviours. If it is used it needs to be carefully planned.

If you are asked to do this you should have clear guidance on how to ignore specific behaviours without ignoring your family member.

This should be used with caution as the challenging behaviours are likely to increase at first. You should be told behaviour are likely to increase, and the practitioner should check that you will be able to cope with this.

You should also ask what skills your family member will be supported to increase to replace the ones that are being ignored.



A visual schedule is an example of how environments can be made more predictable.

A Focus on the Environment

The term “environment” is used to describe places and the people in those places. Environments are reviewed to look for ways to enable people, reducing the impact of their disability, supporting them to be as independent as possible. This might include:

- increasing predictability
- reducing noises and distractions
- making tasks easier
- making communication more effective
- or changing approaches to how people are supported.

You should receive a clear explanation of why the changes are being suggested. Often when supporting changes for others we have to change ourselves. This may feel critical of you, but that should not be the intention.

Sometimes environmental considerations will need to consider the “systems” in place to support a person. For example, how consistency is achieved, what is the culture or attitude of the support, and what leadership and monitoring procedures are in place for support teams. A Positive Behaviour Support plan will consider how to support and develop these systems.

Environmental approaches can also include making things that someone likes are more available and easy to get. Giving people more access to preferred items and activities increases happiness, and therefore reduces challenging behaviour.

Removing Prompts

Sometimes environmental considerations will include removing or reducing things that may prompt the challenging behaviours. If we know something prompts challenging behaviour and we can avoid it then we probably should. However, sometimes we need to support people to cope better with prompts as it can be impossible to remove them at all times and learning to cope with them may be an important skill to develop.

A Focus on Meaningful Outcomes

The Positive Behaviour Support plan should be useful in real life situations. It should be realistically achievable for everyone who supports the person. There should also be a focus on supporting people to increase/develop meaningful skills that will improve independence and quality of life. Improvements in quality of life may be seen by:

- How happy your family member is,
- How many things they are doing now,
- How time doing nothing has reduced
- What new skills they have learnt,
- What new things they can do independently
- How many different places they go to
- How many different people they see.

The Positive Behaviour Support Professional should carry out assessments that collect information about behaviour and meaningful outcomes. This data should be shared with you to show progress.

Person Centred Approaches

Person Centred approaches are an essential component of support for people with learning disabilities. This focusses on what the person wants to achieve now, and what they may want to achieve in the future. A Positive Behaviour Support plan will consider what the person likes and dislikes, what are their personal goals, and how the plan can help the person to achieve these goals.

Many people with learning disabilities are not able to express their goals themselves. In these situations, it is important that people who know the person well are listened to about what the person likes and dislikes, and what goals would be meaningful for them.

Improving quality of life can be seen by being happier and doing more things



Long term focus

The goals of a Positive Behaviour Support plan should have a long term focus, aiming to develop life-long skills. The skills should be lasting and be usable in more than one place. For example, if you teach someone to make a cup of coffee at home, how will this work when visiting other places where the layout of the kitchen is all different? The plans need to constantly evolve to support your family member to learn new skills throughout their lives, as we all do. It is also important to ensure that the progress is maintained beyond the input from the Positive Behaviour Support professional.

Key points:

- You should be involved in Positive Behaviour Support as an equal partner. It is up to you how much or how little you are involved.
- Learning new skills can take a long time. Recordings are made to show small steps of progress.
- The Positive Behaviour Support plan shouldn't contain anything aversive. This means it shouldn't recommend things your family member doesn't like.
- There will be a focus on the environment. This may mean there are recommendations to change things at home, and it may mean you are asked to change your approach with your family member.
- There will be a focus on meaningful outcomes. This should include reviewing whether the challenging behaviour has reduced and looking for improvements to the persons quality of life.
- The focus of the plan should be on long term goals.

Thinking points:

- Have you considered how you would like to be involved with Positive Behaviour Support?
- If you have a Positive Behaviour Support Professional involved, have they asked how you would like to be involved? If a plan has been developed has this been checked with you how realistic it is?
- If there is a plan, do you think there is anything in the plan that your family member will be unhappy about?