

Advice Sheet 21

IDENTIFYING THE COMMUNICATIVE INTENT OF BEHAVIOUR

Every behaviour (positive and negative) is an attempt to convey a message / has a communicative intent, even though pupils may not always explicitly think it through like that: e.g. "I'm going to kick him now because I'm bored". A behaviour may show intent to intimidate or frighten another person; it may show frustration, anger, tiredness, etc. When we are on the receiving end of this behaviour, it is very difficult to see the other person's point of view.

Sometimes it helps if we can try to figure out what is the communicative intent behind the behaviour. Take an example of a baby crying – why? If the baby is crying because of a dirty nappy, we won't help by giving them a bottle. If the baby is crying because they need a cuddle, changing the nappy won't work. We might even make things worse.

Likewise, if a pupil doesn't do a task because he/she **can't**, the strategy we employ to support this pupil could include breaking down the task, pre-teaching and teaching the necessary skills. However, if the pupil doesn't do the task because he/she **won't**, we need to look closer to see why they won't – are they looking for attention? Both pupils are exhibiting the same behaviour, but the function of the behaviour is different and therefore the strategies we employ to eliminate the behaviour are also very different.

When we don't know the function of a behaviour, it is difficult to choose a strategy. We need to look closely at the behaviour and try to find the reason for it / the function of it. We can then decide on an appropriate strategy to minimise or eliminate the behaviour.

Some messages / functions of behaviour

I'm bored

I'm angry

I'm tired

I hate being here

Nobody cares about me

I can't do this work

I'm lonely

I'm very happy today

I feel sad

I'm hungry

I love doing this work

I want to get out of this room

I want to annoy you

I can't stand these rules

If we can figure out the message behind the behaviour, then we may be able to do something to avoid either the trigger / antecedent or the behaviour or the consequence.

By reflecting on the perspective of the pupil we are not condoning or accepting the behaviour. We are just recognising that the pupil / other person is expressing a feeling / conveying a message through his/her behaviour.

We find the function of the behaviour by closely observing and recording. Some observation and recording templates are available on the Advice Sheet 22 – *Individual Behaviour Support Plan*.