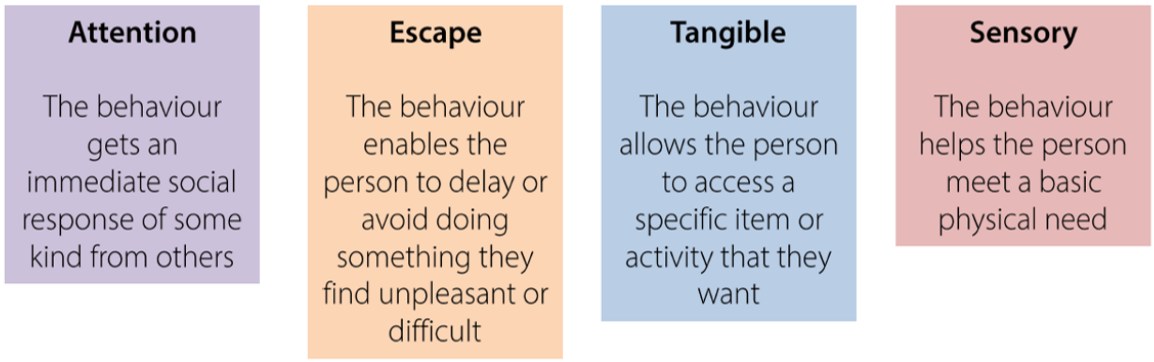
Behaviour, Habits and Technology

Parent Workshop Handout



The functions of behaviour can be broadly categorized into four main areas: attention, escape/avoidance, access to tangibles/activities, and sensory. Understanding these functions helps in comprehending why a particular behaviour is occurring, which is crucial for developing effective interventions and support strategies.

Here's a more detailed look at each function:

- **Attention:**

  Behaviours aimed at gaining attention from others, whether positive (e.g., praise) or negative (e.g., reprimand). For example, a child might whine to get their parent's attention, even if it's to get told off.

- **Escape/Avoidance:**

  Behaviours intended to avoid or escape from a situation, task, or demand that the individual finds undesirable. For instance, a child might refuse to do homework to avoid the stress and difficulty.

- **Access to Tangibles/Activities:**

  Behaviours that help an individual gain access to a desired object, activity, or privilege. A child might scream to get a toy at a store, for example.

- **Sensory:**

  Behaviours that are driven by the need for sensory input or stimulation, either to seek out pleasant sensations or to regulate or reduce unpleasant sensations. This could involve repetitive movements, such as hand-flapping, or rocking.

Why do behaviours continue?

•**Positive Reinforcement:** Adding something desirable to increase a behaviour (e.g., when getting good grades, child receives praise/sweets).

•**Negative Reinforcement:** Removing something undesirable to increase a behaviour (e.g., when getting good grades, child doesn't have to do chores).

Positive Reinforcement:

- **Adding something pleasant:**

  Imagine your child finishes their homework and gets to watch a favorite show as a reward. This is positive reinforcement – you're adding a desirable stimulus (the show) after a desired behavior (finishing homework).

- **Examples:**
  - Praising a child for sharing their toys.
  - Giving a child a sticker chart for completing chores.
  - Allowing a child to choose their dinner if they clean their room.
- **Benefits:**

  Positive reinforcement is generally more effective and creates a more positive and cooperative relationship with your child.

Negative Reinforcement:

- **Removing something unpleasant:**

  For example, if a child cleans their room to avoid being nagged about it, that's negative reinforcement. You're removing the unpleasant stimulus (nagging) after the desired behavior (cleaning the room).

- **Examples:**
  - A child finishing their chores to avoid having their video game privileges taken away.
  - A parent stopping nagging when their child completes a task.
- **Considerations:**

  While negative reinforcement can be effective, it's important to use it sparingly and avoid using it as the primary method of discipline. It can sometimes create a negative emotional environment.

The ABC Approach: Habits

The "ABC" of habit formation, means identifying an Anchor (A), a routine or activity that already exists, then pairing it with a behaviour (B), the new habit you want to form, and finally Celebrating (C) the new habit with a small reward. This approach makes habit formation more manageable and reinforcing, especially for kids.

Here's a more detailed breakdown for parents:

1. Anchor (A): Find a Reliable Routine:

- Identify a daily activity that your child already does consistently. This could be brushing teeth, putting on shoes, or getting ready for bed.
- This "anchor" provides a predictable cue for the new behavior.

2. behaviour (B): Introduce a Tiny Change:

- Choose a specific, manageable behaviour you want your child to form a habit of. For example, if the anchor is brushing teeth, the behavior could be washing their hands.
- Keep it small and achievable to build success and motivation.

3. Celebrate (C): Reinforce the New Behaviour:

- After the new behaviour is performed, give your child a small reward or positive reinforcement. This could be a simple praise, a sticker, or a small treat.
- This positive reinforcement helps solidify the new habit in your child's brain.

Example:

- **Anchor:** Brushing teeth after breakfast.
- **Behaviour:** Putting all their toys away after playtime.
- **Celebrate:** A positive comment like, "Wow, you cleaned up your toys so neatly!" or a small sticker for the cleanup chart.

Why this approach works:

- **Anchoring:**

  Pairing the new behaviour with an established routine makes it easier to remember and perform.

- **Tiny Changes:**

  Breaking down the goal into small, manageable steps prevents overwhelm and encourages consistency.

- **Celebration:**
  Positive reinforcement strengthens the connection between the cue, behaviour, and reward, making the new habit stick

Technology

Technology offers many benefits for children, including enhanced learning experiences, access to information, and preparation for the digital future, but it also comes with risks like digital distractions, over-reliance, and potential negative impacts on physical and mental health. Passive screen time, especially excessive amounts, can hinder social skills and language development, while active screen time, such as engaging in educational apps or video games, can be beneficial.

Pros of Technology for Children:

- **Enhanced Learning:**
  Technology can provide engaging learning experiences, offering access to a wealth of information and personalized learning options.
- **Communication and Collaboration:**
  Technology facilitates communication with family and friends, and can support children who may struggle with social interaction offline.
- **Preparation for the Future:**
  Exposure to technology helps children develop digital literacy and prepares them for a world increasingly reliant on technology.

Cons of Technology for Children:

- **Digital Distractions:**
  Excessive screen time can lead to distractions and negatively impact attention spans.
- **Over-Reliance on Screens:**
  An over-reliance on screens can hinder the development of essential life skills, including social interaction and problem-solving.
- **Physical Health Concerns:**
  Too much screen time can lead to decreased physical activity, sleep disturbances, and potential weight gain.

- **Mental Health Concerns:**

  Excessive screen time can contribute to anxiety, depression, and other mental health issues.

- **Social and Emotional Development:**

  Passive screen time can weaken communication and social skills, while excessive usage can impair emotional comprehension and promote aggression.

  Recommendations:

- **Balance Screen Time:**

  Limit screen time to promote healthy habits and allow for other activities like physical activity and outdoor play.

- **Quality over Quantity:**

  Focus on engaging and educational content rather than mindless consumption.

- **Active Screen Time:**

  Encourage active screen time that promotes learning, creativity, and social interaction.

- **Monitor and Engage:**

  Supervise children's online activities, be aware of the content they are accessing, and engage with them about their screen time.

- **Age-Appropriate Content:**

  Ensure content is age-appropriate and aligns with their developmental stage.

- **Create Digital Boundaries:**

  Establish clear rules and expectations regarding screen time, including bedtime restrictions.

- **Model Healthy Habits:**

  Parents should also model healthy screen time habits and demonstrate balance in their own digital usage.

  Passive vs. Active Screen Time:

- **Passive Screen Time:**

  Watching TV or videos without engaging in active interaction can be detrimental to development.

- **Active Screen Time:**

  Using technology for educational games, interactive apps, or collaborative projects can be beneficial.

Guidelines for Screen Time:

In the UK, screen time guidelines for children generally recommend no screen time for babies under two, up to one hour a day for children ages 2-5, and up to two hours a day for children ages 6 and older. The NHS and other health organizations also emphasize the importance of balancing screen time with other activities, including physical exercise and face-to-face interaction.

- **Babies (0-2 years):**

  The World Health Organization (WHO) recommends no screen time for babies under two, except for video calls with family members.

- **Preschoolers (2-5 years):**

  Screen time should be limited to no more than one hour per day, preferably shared with a parent or caregiver.

- **School-aged children (6-12 years):**

  Screen time can be up to two hours per day, but it's important to ensure it doesn't replace other important activities like exercise and playtime.

- **Older children and teenagers (13+):**

  Screen time should also be limited to a maximum of two hours per day.

Organisations and Resources:

- **NHS:** Provides general guidelines on screen time for children.
- **NCT:** Offers guidance on screen time for babies and toddlers.
- **Childnet:** Provides resources and advice on managing screen time for families.
- **Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health (RCPCH):** Recommends a balanced approach to screen time, emphasizing that it should not replace sleep, exercise, or family time.