



Wisconsin Department of Health Services

Positive Behavior Supports in the Workplace Module 1: Rethinking Challenging Behavior

Transcript

SPEAKER: Welcome to the Positive Behavior Supports in the Workplace Training Series, Module 1-- Rethinking Challenging Behavior. In this training, you will learn to define challenging behaviors, practice empathy using person-centered thinking and self-reflection, compare old and new ways of thinking about challenging behavior, identify factors that lead to a successful work experience.

Challenging behavior is conduct that interferes with a person's ability to engage in ordinary life activities, such as learning, work, and developing or maintaining relationships. Examples of challenging behavior at work include verbal aggression, such as name calling, yelling, or swearing at coworkers or customers. Physical aggression, which could be toward myself, others, or objects. Avoidance such as lying, avoiding work tasks, not showing up for work, or leaving the job before the end of the shift. Stealing from the workplace or others.

All behavior, whether it is considered acceptable or unacceptable, is a form of communication. Everyone uses behavior to communicate. Some people with intellectual and developmental disabilities-- IDD-- may not be able to fully express how they are feeling with words, which means we must pay close attention to their behavior to understand what they are trying to communicate. If a person you support exhibits challenging behavior at work, the first step is to consider the reasons why the behavior is occurring. Here are some common reasons why people show negative or challenging behavior. When a person is feeling overwhelmed, bored, restricted, ashamed, or embarrassed, anxiety or anticipation, emotional distress, physical distress such as pain, illness, fatigue, or hunger, or a lack of personal agency or control may be reasons why a person may exhibit challenging behaviors.

The first step to understanding a person better is to first understand your own feelings and behavior. First, reflect on how you would feel and react in each of these situations. Then,

imagine how you might behave if you cannot verbally communicate your feelings or people were not listening to you.

One, you are experiencing physical pain and can't call into work. Two, you don't know how to do a work task. Three, a new coworker is bossing you around at work. Four, you feel excluded or different from the people with whom you work. Five, you are going through many personal life changes. Six, in many ways, your personal life is controlled by others, including what you can eat, spend your money on, when you go to bed, what you wear, et cetera. Seven, someone at work is bullying you.

As a professional providing positive behavior supports, you need to recognize the power the disability service system has with people, including the vocational services. To better empathize with the person receiving disability services, watch this video called Seven Ways to Cause a Crisis by Peter Leidy. Leidy is a songwriter, consultant, and trainer from Wisconsin who focuses on personalized supports and community membership for people with disabilities.

For many years, professionals in the disability field thought people with disabilities needed to be fixed or cured because something was wrong with them. If a person showed negative or challenging behavior, the goal was controlling the behavior by changing or stopping it. This thinking led to punitive and restrictive behavior plans that did not work well because the interventions didn't consider the root cause of the behavior. Prior to the 1970s, institutional care was the only service option for people with IDD. Services centered on a medical model that generated treatment plans focused on therapies and medications to cure or manage a person's disability and behavior.

In the 1980s, the concept of person-centered thinking emerged as more people began to receive services in the community. Service planning became flexible and personalized based on areas important to the person and how they wanted to live their life. In 1998, three pioneers of person-centered thinking and planning-- Connie Lyle O'Brien, John O'Brien, and Beth Mount-- wrote that the disability service system had been preoccupied with three questions-- what's wrong with you? How do we fix you? What do we do with you if we can't fix you?

Person-centered thinking asks these key questions-- how can we help you discover and move toward the future you want? How can we offer needed assistance in a way that promotes valued experiences? How can we offer needed assistance in ways that support and promote community competence? Watch this video with Beth Mount to better understand the differences between service-centered thinking and person-centered thinking.

Approaches to addressing challenging behavior with people with IDD have shifted over the last few decades. Current approaches to providing behavior supports focus on how to learn the reason for a person's behavior, use compassion and empathy, never place blame on the person. Unfortunately, you will likely encounter people with outdated thinking. For example, caregivers who are not aware of power and control dynamics may not realize they are restricting a person's autonomy. Outdated thinking can show up as people saying, "They are doing this on purpose," "They're doing this to upset me," "We need to get them to stop this," "They know what they are doing," "They just want attention."

If outdated thinking happens, take those moments as an opportunity to shift thinking toward positive behavior supports. Ask the support team to consider what the person wants to communicate and the root causes of their behavior. Work with the employment team to gather data to identify the most likely cause.

Michael had been working in a cleaning and maintenance position at a hotel for a few months. He was regularly on time and doing his job well so the employment specialist faded workplace supports. Two months later, the manager called the employment specialist because Michael had started taking food from the customer breakfast area and employee break room. He also started wandering the hotel and acting aggressively toward coworkers asking him to return to work. Take a moment to consider how you would discover the reason for the change in Michael's behavior.

Possible reasons why this behavior is happening. One, did something happen before work? Two, have there been changes at home? Three, was he missing meals before going on his shift? Four, did something new at work trigger him? Five, was he being bullied at work? To find out, Michael's support team and his supervisor had a meeting. They discussed possible scenarios, and Michael's supervisor mentioned that they changed what section of the hotel Michael was responsible for. In addition, he had been scheduled to work shifts that overlapped his usual meal times.

No control. All of us want control over our lives. However, often when people with disabilities need support, family members and support staff may assume authority over their decisions, set limits, or control choices. Imagine how you would feel if someone else decided what time you go to bed, what you are allowed to eat, how you should spend your money, or kept you from dating or getting married.

Loneliness. David Pityonak is an internationally-recognized expert in the field of positive behavior supports. His profound theory is that "loneliness is the only real disability." He writes, "Many people who experience our services are profoundly lonely. Much of their suffering results from isolation, not disability." Difficult behaviors are often a person's only way of creating engagement. We must ask, who would this person be if he or she did not exhibit difficult behaviors?

David's approach to positive behavior support encourages support staff to recognize that most people with disabilities have experienced extreme loneliness and exclusion, which impacts their coping and communication skills. Many people with IDD have experienced life in separate classrooms, segregated day programs, work centers, and group homes. They have not been afforded the same social opportunities to develop meaningful relationships as people without disabilities. The disability service system compounds the issue by largely focusing on health and safety rather than fostering autonomy, relationships, and contribution.

Trauma. Many people with disabilities have experienced abandonment and trauma. People with IDD endure caregiver turnover, which impacts their ability to trust others. They are also 4 to 10 times more likely to be victims of abuse. Trauma-informed care recognizes that many challenging behaviors result from a trauma response triggered by an event or something occurring in the environment.

While this training doesn't cover trauma-informed care strategies to deescalate behavior, we encourage you to seek out additional information in training on this topic. Check out these trauma-informed care resources-- the Promising Practices website for professionals working to improve employment outcomes for people with disabilities has a section dedicated to the most recent, reliable information about trauma-informed care. [promisingpractices.com/strategies/trauma informed care](https://promisingpractices.com/strategies/trauma-informed-care).

Trauma-Informed Care Webinar-- the George Washington University offers a free webinar about trauma-informed care, including what trauma looks like in people and tips for being more trauma informed-- [gwcrcre.org/trainings/webinar trauma informed care](https://gwcrcre.org/trainings/webinar-trauma-informed-care). Disability Justice, this website provides research and statistics about abuse and exploitation of people with disabilities-- [disabilityjustice.org/justice denied/abuse and exploitation](https://disabilityjustice.org/justice-denied/abuse-and-exploitation).

From service-centeredness to person-centeredness, the shift in thinking from service-centeredness to person-centeredness is similar to the paradigm shift that occurred with providing behavior supports, moving away from managing the person to understanding the

person. The philosophy and core values of person-centered thinking are an essential foundation for providing positive behavior support. According to Connie Lyle O'Brien and John O'Brien, a person's quality of life is based on five key areas-- sharing ordinary places and activities, making choices, developing one's abilities, social respect and roles, having meaningful relationships.

Identifying outdated and service-centered thinking. Think back to the list of reasons people might express negative behavior. When people are segregated, restricted, disrespected, disempowered, and lonely, they do not have a good quality of life. When a person's quality of life is compromised, they may express their feelings with negative emotions and behaviors. Outdated thinking about behavior still exists, as does service-centered thinking. Service-centered thinking overlooks the emotional and quality of life needs of people with IDD.

As a professional who strives to provide positive behavior supports, you need to spot outdated and service-centered thinking in yourself and others. Then, you can work with a person's support team to use person-centered thinking to understand, what is important to the person? And what is happening in their life or in the moment to cause challenging behavior?

Improving your person-centered thinking skills. To improve your person-centered thinking skills, check out the Wisconsin Department of Health Services free online training about person-centered planning. While the training was developed for professionals who support people with mental and behavioral health disabilities, the content is also relevant for people with other disabilities-- www.dhs.wisconsin.gov/pcp/training.htm.

Understanding a person's likes and dislikes. Skills and abilities are an important factor to locate the right job. This is the most important factor for reducing the likelihood of challenging behavior at work,

Factors to consider when identifying a job. Some important factors to consider when identifying a job are one, productivity and performance. What are the job tasks and standards? Does this match the person's strengths and current or potential skills? Will the person feel competent with the tasks or will they feel too challenged or too bored?

Two, workplace culture. What are the social norms of the workplace? Do these match the person's character and personality? Three, potential for relationships and natural supports. Is there an inclusive vibe to the workplace? Do co-workers help each other out? Will the person feel like part of the team?

Four, interests and passions. Is the individual interested in this work? Do they have a passion for it that will keep them invested? You may also be able to find better job matches by using the discovery process. This process is outlined in more detail in module 2.

Job coaching or on-the-job support. The second-most important factor for success in competitive integrated employment is providing effective job coaching support. Job coaches can play a vital role in cultivating natural supports and fostering inclusion in the workplace. A job coach should support the person to take full advantage of the employer's typical new hire onboarding and training process. Consult with the employer to adapt or enhance their processes to accommodate the person. Only provide additional training through systematic instruction or support when needed. Facilitate and foster relationships between the person, their boss, and coworkers. Understand the person's motivations and reinforce the person's learning and communication style.

Job coaches who over-help, do not use systematic instruction properly, and do not fade supports can interfere with a person's relationships between their coworkers and supervisors. Having a job coach hovering at the job site can be stigmatizing for people with IDD making them feel different, inept, or restricted. All of the pitfalls may increase the likelihood of a person expressing themselves with challenging behaviors. Remember, what can result when people feel this way?

In this training, you learn to define challenging behaviors, practice empathy using person-centered thinking and self-reflection, compare old and new ways of thinking about challenging behavior, identify factors that lead to a successful work experience. Thank you for attending the Wisconsin Department of Health Services Training on Positive Behavior Supports in the Workplace. Make sure to join us for module 2.