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ABC APPROACH TO BEHAVIOUR

BEHAVIOUR/COGNITIVE

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Despite its simplicity, the ABC model for understanding and managing behaviour is at the core of many effective behavioural strategies.

This is an effective technique for taking the emotions away from challenging behaviours, analysing these behaviours, then creating effective responses. When creating a behaviour support plan, it will be important to work out which strategies you will use. These strategies are not to be used occasionally, but will need to be applied consistently by everyone who encounters the targeted behaviours. While they may be difficult at first, your chosen techniques will eventually become second nature.

Antecedents
What occurs before the behaviour (and may have triggered it)?
The antecedents are simply all the relevant things that happened before the behaviour occurred. They can also be considered as triggers for the behaviour, such as:
- things that other people did or said
- emotional state (e.g. depressed, tired, anxious etc.)
- the environment (e.g. hot, noisy, cramped, smell, bright lights).

Managing these antecedents, or triggers, is a proactive way to avoid behaviours occurring in the first place. Here are some useful strategies:
- Build and maintain good rapport
- Avoid or minimise known triggers
- Sometimes a distraction or redirection away from the trigger may be all that is necessary
- Involve the brain-injured person in discussing triggers
- Work together on possible coping strategies in dealing with triggers
- Suggest and encourage these strategies when a trigger occurs.

Graduated exposure to the antecedent
This is useful when antecedents can't or shouldn't be avoided. With time and patience, it can be a powerful technique. For example, Kirsten starts screaming in supermarkets due to sensory overstimulation. Her mother says they will just stand outside the supermarket for 30 seconds then go home. The next time, they go in for 30 seconds then go home. This is gradually lengthened until Kirsten has adapted to this difficult environment.

Preparing for the antecedent
An inability to cope with chaos, unpredictability and lack of routine is common after a brain injury. For example, if Chris finds the activity and noise of a supermarket unpleasant, it can help to talk about expected reactions and ways to cope before the event.

Behaviour
What happens during the behaviour (what does it look like?)
Before you respond to an actual behaviour, the key is to understand the purpose of the behaviour and what it may be expressing about unmet needs. Although emotions can be running high, there are still strategies that can prove useful during the behaviour itself:
- Stay calm and speak in an even tone
- Give simple directions and prompts about coping mechanisms
- Use non-threatening hand gestures
Manage your personal safety and remember the strategies agreed on for dangerous incidents
Recognise when it’s time for disengagement/exit strategies for crisis situations.
Ignoring the behavior

In some cases, behaviour occurs to get attention, so the best strategy may be to ignore it. As with many of these
techniques, tactical ignoring is best linked with positive reinforcement. For example, a child is ignored during a tantrum,
but is rewarded with praise, a treat or favourite activity once the tantrum is over.

Consequences
What are the immediate and delayed reactions from everyone involved?
Consequences can be pleasant or unpleasant. A pleasant consequence will reinforce the behaviour (e.g. "When I yell
everyone gives me what I want") while a negative consequence will discourage a behaviour (e.g. "When I yell everyone
ignores me completely"). A consistent response from everyone to challenging behaviour can have a very strong effect.

Positive reinforcement
This is generally the most effective behavior management strategy. An incentive is given immediately when a desired
behavior occurs. For example, Glen usually becomes quiet when anxious then suddenly starts shouting at everyone. He
is learning to tell family members when he is getting anxious and do his deep breathing exercises. Every time he
remembers to do this, his actions are praised.

The difference between reinforcement and bribery is that reinforcement comes after a task is completed, whereas
bribery is offered before. If you offered a treat before even making a request, you would be using bribery.
When choosing reinforcers, remember that each individual will respond to different things. Remember to:
Look at what has provided motivation in the past
Ask about likes and dislikes
Look at the person’s deprivation state - what do they want, that they cannot easily get?
Try to make sure the reinforcer is practical, ethical and valid for the behaviour being targeted.

Timing is critical to the effectiveness of positive reinforcement, and that the person feels that the goal is achievable.

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