

Family Voice Bulletin – Issue 23 (Oct 26th) Behavioral Support Therapy

Summarized by KJ (Krystal-Jyl) Thomas, MSW, RSW

In this week's session, facilitators KJ Thomas, MSW, RSW, and Tracey Kent, MSW, RSW were joined by guest speaker; Jessica Sargent, Senior Behavioural Therapist, The Royal, presenting Behavioural Support: A Guide for Caregivers.

Behavioural Therapy involves varying types of activities and learning that seek to lessen unhealthy behaviours. Through changing behaviours and habits, clients can work towards healthier mental health wellness goals. Assisting change of behaviours can be a combination of changing environments/systems, as well as personal changes. Behaviour management is a process that can help motivate clients towards actions, and empower them to manage their own behaviours.

There are a number of things that can be done to help guide a loved one. Doing our best to lead by example, support and praise efforts that are made, being proactive in providing healthy choices, and early intervention are a great start. We can also remind ourselves not to take behaviours personally, remain empathetic to the difficulty of changes, be proactive in facilitating open communication, and contribute to self esteem building. Try to avoid responding aggressive or abruptly, using loss of privileges as threats, or saying the word "No".

Strategies for behavior management

- When a person needs prompts, try to use visual/environmental supports like sticky notes, phone alarms, etc. These have shown to help build independence and lessen ongoing reliance on a caregiver.
- Living with a mental illness & some medications can mean difficulty concentrating or retaining information. Keep communication open, empathetic, and respectful.
- Avoid complicated or multi-step instructions and aim to keep language simple and concrete.
- When tension arises, work towards active/reflective listening, open body language, non-judgmental attitude, calm tones, and validation of another's feelings. When feeling overwhelmed, express that you are stepping away for a moment, but will return to the conversation when you are calmer (this also helps model the same behaviour expectation).
- When giving instructions, aim to provide choice, be specific, check in for understanding and follow through, and when possible, give warning of transitions and changes.
- Involve loved ones in the planning of activities; this can increase interest, investment, and positive outcomes.
- Rewards and incentives can be of value. The goal is to introduce positive outcomes for healthy behaviours. Verbal and written praise, high-fives/hugs, token economy etc., are all types of incentives.
- Punishment can lead to focusing on what was done wrong, and can lack constructive learning. Avoid punishment, and rather look at examining natural consequences. Instead of punitive action, follow up with outcomes, and reflect how different approaches may have led to more desirable outcomes.

Resources

- Website that includes PDF of modules and worksheets: Centre for Clinical Interventions (CCI) Behavioural Strategies for Managing Depression – Module 2: Behavioural Activation
<https://www.cci.health.wa.gov.au/Resources>
- Short understanding of Behavioural Activation and Depression
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HBVACTJCN3M>