Working with difficult behaviour
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Some assumptions about behaviour:
- Students want to conform and have a very high motivation to belong — something that would seem to have strong survival characteristics. This means that we have a lot going for us if we look to ensuring that these needs are being met.
- We do not want to 'manage' behaviour. We want to teach self-control. This means that we are looking at an educational issue, where luckily teachers have great expertise.

In consideration of any behaviour that a school is finding difficult, the normal process would involve several steps:

- What is the specific behaviour? Has it been clearly defined and recorded before starting any procedures?
- Is it a serious problem? For example, students with disability have been found to be judged more harshly.
- Is this behaviour out of character, and if so, what has changed in the environment that was associated with this change?
- Is the behaviour being exhibited in multiple environments or only in the school?
- If it is only (or mainly) at the school, are the occurrences more likely to be associated when there is contact with particular individuals? Are there other individuals where the behaviour does not occur? What are they doing that is different? Note that such changes in behaviour are often associated with a change of teacher aide or the way that the student is handled by specific individuals (or being bullied by particular students).
- Can we ask the student? Can we work with the student to negotiate a situation where their needs are being met in a way that will work for the school? This is normally a very effective strategy with teenagers who are often yearning to build independence from adult control. This process treats them as an adult with adult behaviour expected but they have a real say in it all.
- What is the rate of positive input to the student compared to negative? The aim is for all students to work on a ratio of *4 or more positive statements for every criticism or other negative consequence*. Commonly students experiencing behaviour difficulties are found to have a ratio opposite to this. Just changing the ratio has a dramatic effect on most students.
- If it is only (or mainly) occurring at school, what are the antecedents to the behaviour? This normally requires systematic collection of environmental data over several days (or longer for low frequency events) to look for possible events that may be associated with the behaviour.
- What need is the student trying to meet by using this behaviour? Common student needs are belonging and affection; power and control; freedom and autonomy; learning with fun.
- From this analysis, what 'hunches' do we have about things that seem to be associated with the behaviour occurring?
- How can we modify the environment so that these trigger events are either….?
    1. removed;
    2. ameliorated (e.g. if it is due to pressure, noise, over-stimulation etc. could this be reduced?);
    3. de-linked - we can work with the student to increase capacity to tolerate events that cannot be significantly changed or
    4. some combination of these.
- How can we meet the determined needs of the student in a positive and developmental way?
- What is the alternative incompatible behaviour that we are trying to establish? How is this to be encouraged and rewarded? What systematic procedures need to be established to ensure that the focus on the positive is maintained and the alternative behaviour firmly established?
- If the behaviour does occur, what action is to be taken that:
    1. ensures immediate safety of the other students, the student himself, staff etc.;
    2. gives the student an opportunity to move from an emotional state to a rational one and does not escalate the behaviour;
    3. provides an opportunity for the student to be engaged on the basis of having made a bad choice in that circumstance and what an alternative good choice would have been;
    4. Have the student verbally practice carrying out the alternative response in a similar situation.
- A consequence is often appropriate in these circumstances, strongly linked to the 'bad choice' that was made and how a 'good choice' would lead to a different consequence. The aim here is to engage the frontal lobes of the brain to build self-control through the student taking responsibility for good and bad choices with the attached consequences — which is what happens in life.

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