

Why Behaviors Occur: A Quick Reference to Assist in Planning

Guidance for Team Discussions

Use the guidance found in this document to assist a team to better understand **why** a challenging behavior may be occurring. Using the prompts included in the following pages, a team can explore what is occurring 'at the core' to better understand why a person may act or react with distressed or challenging behaviors. While a person may use a behavior to escape, avoid, or gain from these behaviors, this is only a small piece of the puzzle. The following information guides a team to discover deeper associated reasons **why** these situations, people, experiences or items may result in challenging and distressed behaviors.

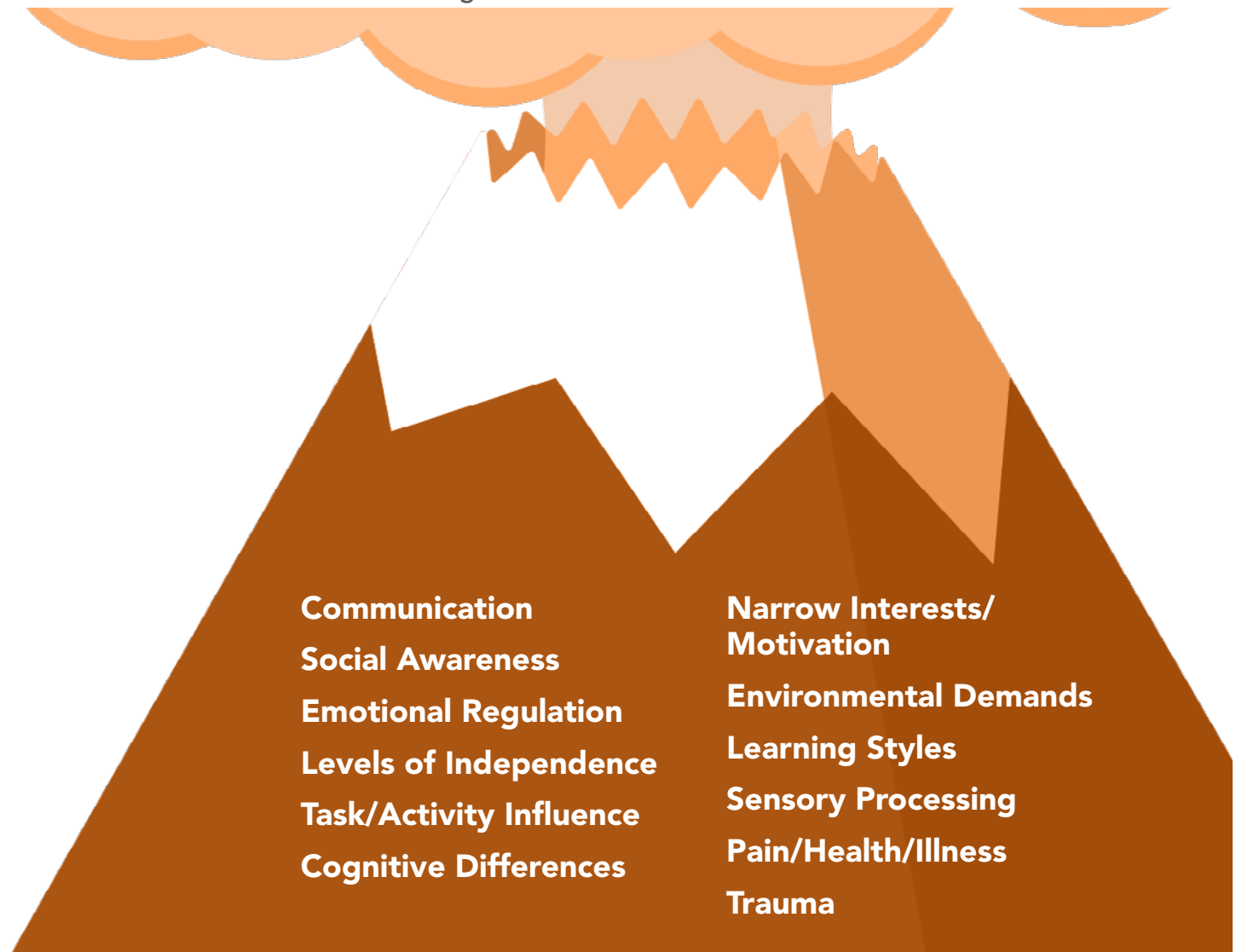


It is these underlying or core issues that require support and skill development. These core factors become the targets for intervention.

What Factors May Be Associated with Behavioral Challenges?

Many factors may contribute to the escalation and eruption of behaviors. Some may be difficult to identify unless a team is primed to consider multiple influences.

Core factors can include the following.



As part of a complete Functional Behavior Assessment, a team will need to explore potential factors that contribute to the escalation of the behavior as well as the reoccurrence of behaviors. These discussions go beyond what might be occurring immediately before, during or after the behavioral escalation. Teams must look deeper and determine how core factors are connected to the distressed or challenging behaviors.

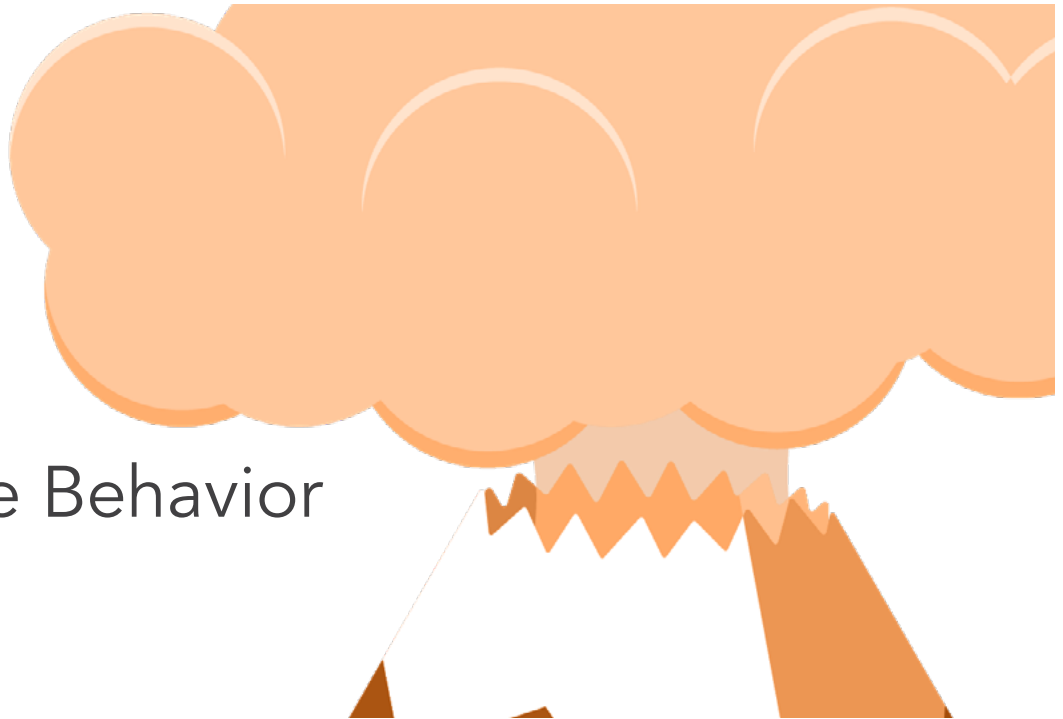
On the following page are a variety of guiding questions. Use these questions to develop insights and offer potential answers to "Why the Behaviors Occurs?"

Identify the Behavior of Concern

The first important discussion is for the team to decide what behavior should be the focus of the discussion. What is the concerning or distressing behavior that the team would like to help the person change?

Define the behavior of concern in a way that creates a clear picture of what occurs, how it looks, sounds or other aspects that can be observed. This is the description of the “eruption” of the behavior.

Describe the Behavior of Concern



After agreeing on the description of the behavior, the team is ready to look deeper at the Core Factors that are associated with the concerning behavior.

These Core Factors will be the target of the interventions and supports.



Core Factor: Communication

What is the communicative intent associated with the behavior?

Could the behavior be communicating the need to:

1. *Socialize?*
If so, why does the person choose to interact with a particular peer or adult?
2. *Gain Attention?*
If so, why does the person want or need attention?
3. *Request- To Gain Something?*
If so, why does the person desire the activity, object, etc.
4. *Request- To Stop Something?*
If so, why does the person want the activity to stop?
5. *Protest?*
I don't like it, I don't want it, I don't want to do it. If so, why does the person dislike the activity, the person, etc.?
6. *Express Emotions?*
If so, what emotion is the person expressing?
7. *Question or Clarify?*
If so, why is the person confused or has misunderstood?

Does the person have the ability and the necessary supports to effectively communicate a message using methods other than challenging behaviors?

- If so, why is the person not using the established form of communication?
- If the person is unable to effectively use other forms of communication, strategies and supports for communication must be addressed.
- **Communication will always be a factor associated with challenging behaviors.**

Notes, Discussion, Core Factor Implications

Core Factor: Trauma

Is the behavior associated with trauma?

Explore the impact trauma may have on the escalation of behavior by exploring what is known about the trauma history of the individual.

1. *Environmental Trigger*. Does the behavior occur primarily in the same locations? Does the environment trigger memories of traumatic experiences? (ex: a bus, hospital, small room, etc.)
2. *People*. Are the same people present when the behavior occurs that were present with previous trauma? Or people that remind the person of a traumatic interaction (ex: doctor, police, etc.)?
3. *Activity*. Is there a connection between a previous traumatic experience and the activity or task (ex: music, academic activity, shower, etc.)?
4. *Odors, Sounds or Tactile*. Are there any sensory experiences that trigger a trauma memory? (ex: certain food odors, soaps or lotions, loud voices, certain fabrics, etc.).
5. *Personal Space*. Does the behavior tend to occur when the person is in closed spaces or at risk of being touched? If so, is there a history of abuse?
6. *Traumatic Loss*. Has the person sustained the loss of an important person or pet in their life? Has the person received counseling or therapy to work through the loss? Could the behavior be connected to activities, locations, times of the year, etc. that are connected to when the loss occurred?

Notes, Discussion, Core Factor Implications





Core Factor: Sensory

Is the behavior associated with sensory processing?

Is the individual attempting to avoid a sensory experience?

Or does the individual seek out a desirable sensory experience?

Consider each of the following sensory areas for preferences or dislikes. Identify if behaviors of concern occur in connection to sensory experiences.	Notes, Discussion, Core Factor Implications
Auditory/Sound. Is the person sensitive to certain sounds, pitches or frequencies? Does the person seek out or desire specific types of sounds? Are the sounds in the environment (pitch or loudness) associated with the occurrence of behaviors?	
Visual. Is the person sensitive to light or visual movement? Or do lights and colors attract the individual? Do certain types of visual input and colors calm or agitate?	
Olfactory/Odors. Is the person sensitive to odors? Or does the person need to use the sense to smell to learn about people, environments or objects? The sense of smell can elicit distinct memories that may be calming or upsetting.	
Gustatory/Taste. The sense of taste is closely associated with tactile. Consider the flavors, foods and textures the individual enjoys or cannot tolerate. Is the behavior associated with mealtime? Or the foods served? Is the behavior associated with the desire to obtain certain favorite foods?	



<p>Tactile/Touch. Is the person sensitive to being touched? Does the person pull away when someone gets close or attempts to touch? Does the person seek out deep pressure and is this calming? Does the person need large personal space? Does the behavior of concern occur when people enter personal space or attempt to touch or hold the person? Is the person calmed with deep pressure?</p>	
<p>Proprioception. Proprioception is connected to body awareness. It provides a sense of where the body is in time and space. When activated by 'heavy work' it can assist with calming the sensory system. Does the person seem to need to push, pull, stomp, lift, throw, etc.? Does this activity calm the person?</p>	
<p>Vestibular. The vestibular system provides the brain with information about motion and supports balance & posture. Vestibular input from movement is alerting providing heightened awareness. Does the person move frequently and watch movement? Is the behavior associated with attempting to engage in movement activities or does it result from excessive engagement in movement?</p>	
<p>Interoception. Interoception is the perception of sensations from inside the body such as hunger, pain, and the feelings associated with emotions. Does the person seem to recognize these sensations before becoming overwhelmed? Is the person able to recognize when his body is in need of food, a calming break, or rest? Is the behavior connected to these events or times of day?</p>	



Core Factor: Task/Activity/Learning Style

Is the behavior in response to what the person is doing, being asked to do, or how they are asked to perform or learn?

Consider how the individual views the tasks, activities or requests that are associated with times when the behaviors occur. If tasks are associated with instruction or performance, how might this be connected to escalations of behavior?

1. Is the task/activity

- Meaningful?
- Useful?
- Purposeful?
- Functional?

... to the individual?

2. From the individual's point of view, is the activity/task

- Too difficult/complex? Confusing?
- Too simple/boring?
- Too abstract?

Does the activity/task:

- Require extensive verbal communication?
- Build on the individual's strengths?
- Require the individual to struggle in areas of challenge?
- Utilize the individual's interests as a motivation?

3. At the times the behaviors occur, is the person being asked to:

- Perform a skill that is too hard?
- Perform a skill that has not been taught?
- Accomplish a task without the necessary supports?

Notes, Discussion, Core Factor Implications



Core Factor: Independence

Is the behavior associated with the individuals seeking assistance? Or is the behavior connected to the person's desire for independence?

Does the behavior occur when:

- The person is involved in independent activities?
- Assistance is offered to the person?
- Assistance is not offered or not available?
- 1-on-1 aide is present?
- Limited options or opportunities are provided?
 - When choices are provided, is the behavior less frequent?

During or After the behavior occurs:

- Is assistance or help offered?
- Is more time, less assistance, less guidance provided?
- Are choices provided of activities or when/how activities are completed?

Does the person:

- Have a consistent way to request assistance?
- Have a consistent way to request more independence/less assistance?

Are these requests honored?

Notes, Discussion, Core Factor Implications



Core Factor: Social Interaction

Is the behavior associated with attempts to gain or escape social interaction?

How do others in the environment respond when the person engages in this behavior?

- Do others attend to the person?
- Do others avoid the person?
- Do others not change their level of attention?

Does the person:

- Gain social attention when the behavior occurs?
- Gain any type of attention when the behavior occurs?
- Avoid a social situation as a result of this behavior?
- Engage in the behavior more frequently with a specific person (or persons)?
- Engage in the behavior only in specific social situations?
- Have frequent and meaningful opportunities for social engagement in their life?

What is the person's level of social competency and social understanding?

- Does the person understand how to access social interaction in a positive manner?
- Can the person take the perspective of others? Does the person understand how his actions can make others feel?
- Does the person model social behavior from others at home, school, community to learn social behavior?

Notes, Discussion, Core Factor Implications

Core Factor: Health and Wellness

Is the behavior associated with medical concerns and illness?

Explore the impact of chronic or acute illness, medications and health on the occurrence of challenging behaviors. Below are only a few areas of consideration.

Could the person be experiencing one or more of the following health concerns that have been associated with contributing to behavioral challenges:



Allergies causing sinus pressure, sore throat, headache, etc.

Tooth or Jaw Pain – Ear, Dental or Sinus infections

Seizures

Constipation, diarrhea, hemorrhoids

Nausea, reflux, IBS etc.

Headaches

Visual strain

Low Blood Sugar

Vitamin Deficiencies

Arthritis

Endocrine Issues

Mood disorders – cycling of moods

Menstrual Cramps

Other health conditions known or suspected

Does the person have restful sleep? Or could the person be experiencing:

Sleep Apnea

Nightmares

Inconsistent sleep patterns

Sleeping too much

Not enough sleep

Could medications have side effects that contribute to behavior?

Physical Discomfort (ex: headaches, nausea, diarrhea, light sensitivity, dizziness, painful joints)

Cognitive impact that challenges the ability to complete tasks/learn

Mood changes. Elevation or depression

Disrupted sleep

Intense restlessness

Increase /decrease hunger and weight gain/loss

Medical concerns, health issues and the side effects of medications should always be considered and explored as soon as challenging behaviors begin to occur.

Notes, Discussion, Core Factor Implications

Core Factor: Environmental Demands

Is the behavior a result of an environment that is overwhelming or does not include sufficient support?

Environmental factors will intersect with other core factors previously discussed areas, but it is helpful to review the impact of the environment as environmental modifications can often be implemented quickly.

Consider the following questions as you review the environment. Determine if the environment is a positive support for the individual or is the environment creating demands that can lead to challenging behaviors.



Supports Positive Behaviors

Does the environment...

- Support the person's mode and method of effective communication?
- Provide safety for the person, promote healing and is free of triggers that can re-traumatize the individual?
- Promote predictability, structure and routine?
- Proactively support the individual's sensory needs, sensitivities, preferences and ability to regulate?
- Include activities and items that are motivating and reinforcing to the individual?
- Support opportunities for desired social interactions?
- Support and promote the individual to successfully engage in independent activities (to the degree possible)?
- Support the person to be able to participate in activities that match their skills and abilities?
- Promote health and wellness and avoids environmental factors that stress medical conditions?

Creates Risk for Challenging Behaviors

Does the environment...

- Create barriers to communication or does not include needed communication supports?
- Feel unsafe to the individual, includes experiences that may re-traumatize or is not able to support healing.
- Lack routine, create confusion or is inconsistent?
- Challenge the individual's sensory system and create barriers to the person being able to regulate?
- Lack interests and reinforcement that the individual would find motivating?
- Create barriers to successful engagement in social interactions?
- Hinder independence and create barriers to opportunities for independence?
- Most often require activities and tasks that the person has yet to be taught or are without the needed supports?
- Include stressors that can exacerbate medical conditions and challenge the health of the individual?

Notes, Discussion, Core Factor Implications