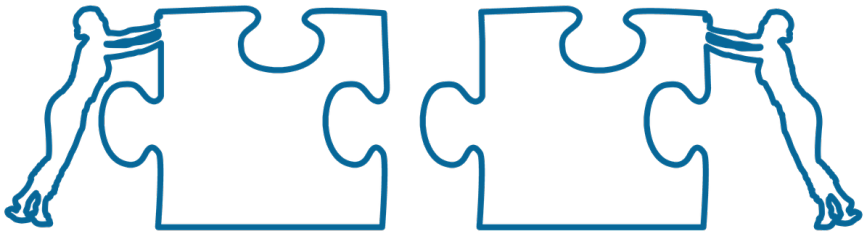


Community Paediatric
Psychology Service




Understanding behaviour


Information for you



 Follow us on Twitter @NHSaaa

 Find us on Facebook at www.facebook.com/nhsaaa

 Visit our website: www.nhsaaa.net

 All our publications are available in other formats



When we are trying to understand behaviours that feel difficult or challenging it is important to remember that all behaviours are a communication. They are a way of telling us something.

Sometimes a young person may not have the skills to communicate what they want/need in another way. They may be less able to use their skills when distressed.

**Behaviours can have four main functions.
It can tell us that a young person:**

Wants to get away from something (escape)

I don't want to / I can't...

Wants something (tangible gain)

I want...

Wants you to do something (attention)

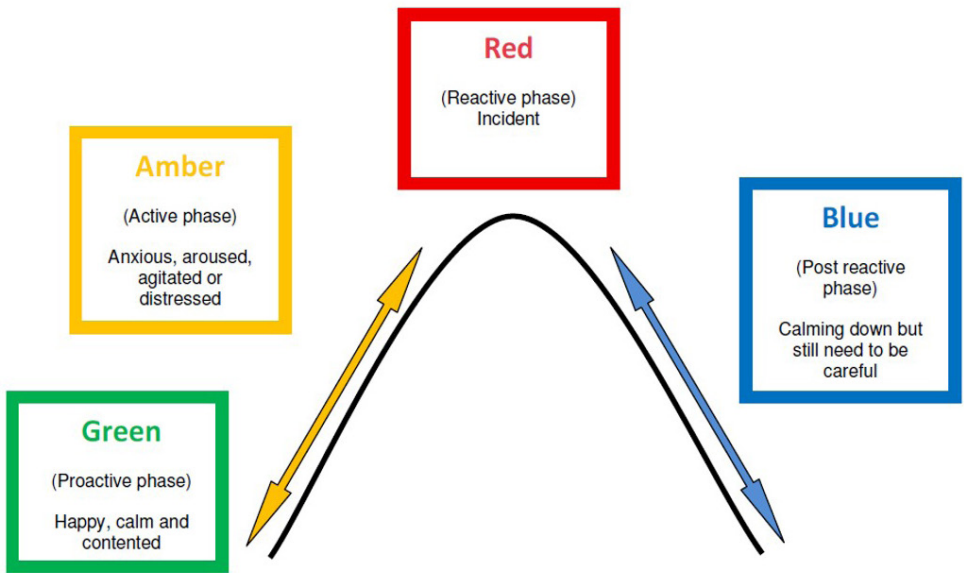
I want you to...

Likes the sensation (sensory)

This feels good...

The same behaviour can have different functions at different times.

When we think about patterns of behaviour we think of it in four stages that form a **behaviour curve**:



Maintain

- In this phase a young person is feeling mostly calm and relaxed.
- This is the phase where we focus most of our effort. By providing a young person with the supports they need we aim to help them stay in this phase as much as possible.
- The supports a young person will need to stay in this phase will vary. This depending on their individual likes and the things they find difficult. They may include things like:
 - time each day to do activities they enjoy or find relaxing
 - movement breaks
 - knowing what is going to happen that day
 - being given information and instructions in a way they can understand.

Act

- In this phase a young person may be starting to get distressed and we might see their behaviour start to change. The aim is to identify this phase quickly and take action.
- It may be possible to spot some triggers. Triggers can come from three places:
 - Internal to the child (feeling tired, hungry or in pain)
 - in their environment (noise, temperature, not having something to do)
 - other people (being asked to do something too difficult or not having company)
- Triggers can be fast/immediate or can build up slowly over time.
- There are often multiple triggers that build up over time. We think of people as having a 'bucket of tolerance'. This bucket can be filled up by different stressors over time and will eventually 'spill over'.
- We can help to 'empty this bucket' and lower distress by dealing with triggers and /or adding activities a young person finds calming or relaxing.
- If we spot a trigger we can stop it if possible, change it to make it easier for a young person, or give support to help them cope with it.

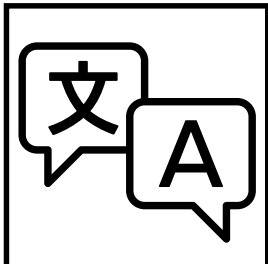
Think safety

- In this phase emotions are high and a young person may be behaving in a way that feels challenging.
- In this phase the focus is on keeping everyone safe and trying not to do anything that will make emotions/behaviour escalate or last longer.
- **Safety:** Think about the environment. Is it possible for the young person to move to a safer space or remove things from around them that they may hurt themselves on. If other people such as younger siblings are nearby consider asking them to move away.
- **Preventing escalation:** Try to slow down and lower the tone and volume of your speech. Try not to ask questions or give instructions. Think about other things in the environment that maybe causing or adding to distress, for example, noises. Stay supportive and give the young person the message that it's okay and they are safe.
- Think about items or activities that might be calming or soothing to the young person, for example, a favourite blanket, a hug, rocking. Some children may not want or tolerate these things until they are in the 'Blue/recovery' phase.

Be aware

- In this phase the incident is over and the young person is starting to recover and feel calmer.
- In this phase a young person isn't fully back to the 'green', calm and contented phase. Their emotions and behaviours could quickly escalate again. We imagine that their 'bucket of tolerance' is still quite full and could easily spill over again.
- In this phase our focus is on being aware of any potential triggers including others' tone of voice. Try to minimise verbal instructions or demands while a young person is still in this phase.

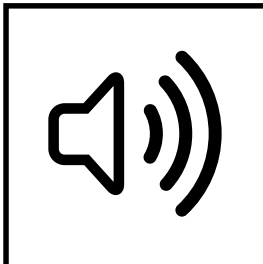
We are happy to consider requests for this publication in other languages or formats such as large print.



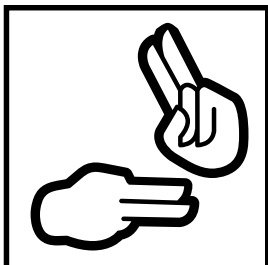
Translations



Easy to read



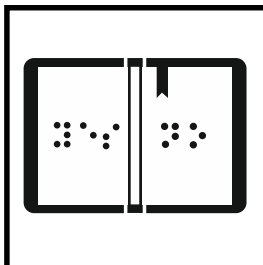
Audio



BSL



Large print



Braille



Call: 01563 825856



Email: pil@aapct.scot.nhs.uk



Tell us what you think...

If you would like to comment on any issues raised by this document, please complete this form and return it to our Feedback and Complaints team: PO Box 13, Eglinton House, Ailsa Hospital, Dalmellington Road, Ayr KA6 6AB.

Alternatively, you can call free on **0800 169 1441** or email complaintsteam@aapct.scot.nhs.uk

Name

Address

Comment
