APPLIED BEHAVIOUR ANALYSIS & POSITIVE BEHAVIOUR SUPPORT

**APPLIED BEHAVIOUR ANALYSIS**

Applied Behaviour Analysis (ABA) is the scientific foundation for Positive Behaviour Support (PBS). ABA gives an understanding of what drives behaviour and how behaviours can be weakened or strengthened. ABA concepts include both punishment and reinforcement. PBS is a framework for improving the quality of life of consumers by understanding what drives their behaviour and addressing those needs. PBS uses only the concept of reinforcement, not punishment. PBS has a focus on the rights of the consumer. Consumers should be involved in their PBS plans as soon as they are able.

The aim of this brochure is to provide a simple definition of some ABA concepts and how we apply them in our work using PBS.

**POSITIVE BEHAVIOUR SUPPORT (PBS) PLANS**

**Who, what, when and why**

- **Basic PBS Plan**: A basic PBS plan is created for all consumers admitted to the Apsley Unit.
  
  Is there uncertainty in relation to the function of the target behaviour?

  - Yes
  - No

- **Intermediate PBS Plan**: An intermediate PBS plan involves functional behavioural assessment completed by nursing staff to allow for further information on the function of behavior.
  
  Has the patient been admitted to Apsley previously or are they planned for discharge to elsewhere in TEH?

  - Yes
  - No

- **Advanced PBS Plan**: An advanced plan involves referral to the unit psychologist for in depth functional behavioural assessment and development of a more detailed intervention plan.

**WHAT THE...?**
Positive is not good, negative is not bad - it's all about plus and minuses

Here's where ABA starts to get tricky, there are two types of reinforcement and punishment: positive and negative. It can be difficult to distinguish between the two because we assume positive or negative means good and bad, particularly when applied to behaviour.

When ABA describes punishment or reinforcement as positive or negative it's defining them in mathematical terms: the adding and subtracting of different kinds of behavioural stimulus.

In ABA, positive punishment or reinforcement means adding a stimulus and negative punishment or reinforcement means removing a stimulus.

For example:

**REINFORCEMENT**
- **Positive reinforcement**
  - Adding a stimulus, aims to strengthen behaviour
  - A patient has access to a kiosk run (adding the stimulus) when noticing that they have not cleaned their bedroom (behaviour)
  - A patient has 1:1 nursing observation removed (removing an aversive stimulus) after a period of not engaging in drug seeking behaviour (behaviour)

**PUNISHMENT**
- **Positive punishment**
  - Adding a stimulus, aims to weaken behaviour
  - Verbally berating a patient (adding an aversive stimulus) when noticing that the patient has not cleaned their bedroom (behaviour)
  - A patient has access to kiosk removed (removing a stimulus) after making threats to a nursing staff member (behaviour)

**Negative punishment**
- Removing a stimulus, aims to weaken behaviour
  - A patient has 1:1 nursing observation removed (removing an aversive stimulus) after a period of not engaging in drug seeking behaviour (behaviour)
  - A patient has access to kiosk removed (removing a stimulus) after making threats to a nursing staff member (behaviour)

Confusing right? Don’t worry, ABA is complex and can take a while to get the hang of. The most important thing is to keep on trying. The more you practice the easier it gets. Think about your own behaviour, what do you find reinforcing; what do you find punishing?

Getting the most out of positive/negative reinforcement

Some people engage in aggressive or challenging behaviour even when it seems detrimental to themselves. While it may be frustrating and hard to understand, the reason why they engage in challenging behaviours is because those behaviours serve a particular function; in other words, they are receiving some kind of benefit from the challenging behaviour, e.g.

When I make verbal threats (behaviour), you leave me alone, serving the function of me removing the aversive stimulus – you!

PBS uses the science of AB to develop strategies to reinforce new, alternative behaviours that meets consumers’ needs and can replace challenging behaviours, e.g.

When I raise my voice (behaviour), you provide reinforcement that meets the function of my behaviour – i.e. you leave me alone. This means that I’ve had my needs met (being left alone), without having to engage in threatening behaviour. The behaviour (raising voice instead of making threats) is strengthened.

Reinforcement allows consumers to have their needs met in a constructive way. Research shows positive consequences are more powerful than negative consequences for improving behaviour.

When applied consistently, PBS allows for the creation of new behavioural pathways for consumers that can lead to improved behaviour and recovery outcomes.

The key to mastering PBS is to:

1. **Define the behaviour**
   Aggressive and challenging behaviour serves a purpose. What is the particular behaviour you’re targeting?

2. **Understand the function of the behaviour**
   By understanding what’s driving the behaviour, we can begin to manage it. What triggers the behaviour? What is the outcome of the behaviour? What purpose does the behaviour serve?

3. **Formulate a plan**
   Develop proactive strategies to meet a person’s needs. Everyone is different and displays behaviours with different needs, drivers and purposes. Try to understand the background factors that may contribute, such as trauma or cognitive impairment.

4. **Embed the plan into practice**
   Be consistent – PBS needs to be continually acted on and followed through – it won’t work if you only use it sometimes. If you’re new to using PBS, keep on trying, and discuss it with your colleagues. It’s normal for it to feel hard when you first start using it but it will become second nature after a while.

5. **Review the plan**
   The more we get to know our consumers the more we develop to help them, and the more they’ll be able to contribute to their plan. As new strategies are developed, add them to the plan and discuss with the consumer and the team to make sure everyone is on board.

Positive support for you

If you’re having trouble understanding ABA and PBS or you’re looking for advice on your strategies speak to your unit psychologist. They’ll be able to provide you with the support you need to improve your understanding of PBS and how it applies to consumers.