

# Positive Behaviour Support Planning Workbook: A Practical Guide for Educators and Practitioners

Developed by Associate Professor Erin Leif



## Table of Contents

<b>PART 1: STUDENT STRENGTHS &amp; PARTICIPATION PROFILE .....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>PART 2: SELECTING AND DEFINING TARGET BEHAVIOURS .....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>PART 3: GATHERING INFORMATION ABOUT BEHAVIOURS .....</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>PART 4: GATHERING INFORMATION ABOUT THE ABCS .....</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>PART 5: IDENTIFYING THE FUNCTION OF THE BEHAVIOUR .....</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>PART 6: BUILDING STRENGTHS-BASED BEHAVIOUR SUPPORT STRATEGIES .....</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>ADDITIONAL RESOURCES .....</b>	<b>19</b>

## Part 1: Student Strengths & Participation Profile

**Instructions:** Complete this profile with input from educators, families, and students. Use this information to guide strengths-based supports, proactive planning, and participation-focused behaviour support.

### Section 1: Student Strengths Snapshot

- What does this student do well? (Check all that apply)
    - Visual learning
    - Social engagement
    - Imitation/modelling
    - Persistence
    - Creativity
    - Problem-solving
    - Empathy/kindness
    - Sense of humour
    - Memory for routines
    - Other: \_\_\_\_\_
  - When does the student appear most confident and successful?
  - What brings this student joy or motivation?
- 

### Section 2: Capabilities & Learning Profile

- How does the student learn best? (Check all that apply)
  - Visual supports
  - Hands-on learning
  - Repetition and practice
  - Small group instruction
  - Peer modelling
  - Clear routines
  - Movement integrated into learning
  - Other: \_\_\_\_\_
- What supports increase independence?

### **Section 3: Communication Strengths**

- How does the student communicate effectively? (Check all that apply)
    - Spoken language
    - Key word signing
    - AAC device
    - Gestures
    - Visual symbols
    - Facial expression
    - Behaviour as communication
    - Other: \_\_\_\_\_
  - What communication strengths should we build on?
  - What communication situations are most successful?
- 

### **Section 4: Relationships & Belonging**

- Who are the student's key connections at school?
  - Where does the student experience belonging?
  - How can we intentionally strengthen peer connection?
- 

### **Section 5: Defining Meaningful Participation**

- Meaningful participation looks like:
  - Goals for the next 3 months:
    - Academic participation:
    - Social participation:
    - Independence:
    - Self-determination:
- 

### **Section 6: Family Voice**

- Child's greatest strengths:
- What helps your child feel safe and confident?
- Strategies that work well at home:

- Family goals for child:
  - Important considerations (culture, communication, identity):
- 

### **Section 7: Student Voice (adapt based on the student)**

- I like:
- I am good at:
- I want help with:
- I feel happy when:
- At school, I want to:

## **Part 2: Selecting and Defining Target Behaviours**

**Instructions:** Strong practice in behaviour support begins with choosing behaviours that matter to the student and their context. When we focus on meaningful and observable behaviours, we can design interventions that are respectful, effective, and strengths-focused. This guide provides a framework to support educators and practitioners in selecting meaningful target behaviours for change and defining them clearly.

### 1. Selecting Meaningful Target Behaviours

First, write down the specific behaviour of concern:

Next, think about or discuss these key considerations, to determine if behaviour would be meaningful and important to the student and others:

#### a) Person-Centered Relevance

- Does the behaviour matter to the student's quality of life?
- Will changing this behaviour enhance the student's independence, inclusion, or well-being?
- Example: Instead of targeting "compliance," focus on behaviours like "initiating communication to request help."

#### b) Contextual Importance

- How does the behaviour impact the student's participation in school, work, or social settings?

- Consider whether the behaviour enables meaningful engagement rather than just reducing inconvenience.

c) Potential for Skill Development

- Can addressing this behaviour support skill acquisition or self-determination?
- Example: Replacing yelling out in class with raising a hand supports self-regulation and communication skills.

d) Feasibility and Safety

- Is the behaviour measurable within the available environment and resources?
- Does changing it reduce risk or promote safety for the student or others?

e) Data Availability

- Can the behaviour be reliably observed and recorded?

Strengths-Based Tip: Frame behaviours as skills to be developed or enhanced, not only problems to be eliminated.

---

## 2. Writing a Clear, Objective, and Complete Behaviour Definition

Characteristics of a Good Behaviour Definition:

1. **Observable** – You can see it happening. Avoid internal states like “frustrated” or “upset.”

- Instead of: “Student is aggressive”
- Use: “Student hits peers with open hand”

2. **Measurable** – You can count how often or for how long it occurs.

- Instead of: “Student is inattentive”
- Use: “Student looks away from task materials for more than 3 seconds during independent work”

3. **Specific and Complete** – Includes who, what, when, and how.

- Instead of: “Student disrupts class”
- Use: “Student calls out answers without raising hand during math instruction, occurring at least twice per 10-minute lesson segment”

### Example of a Clear Behaviour Definition:

- Yelling Out Definition: The student verbally calls out answers during lesson instruction without raising their hand, occurring more than once per 5-minute interval.
- 

### Practical Tips:

- Observe and document behaviour across settings and times before deciding on the target behaviour
  - Use video, anecdotal notes, or frequency counts to clarify patterns
  - Collaborate with the student, family, and other important people to ensure the target behaviour aligns with values and goals
  - Revisit the definition regularly—behaviours evolve as skills grow
- 

### Quick Checklist: Selecting Meaningful Behaviours:

- Relevant to student's goals or quality of life
  - Supports participation or inclusion
  - Promotes skill development
  - Safe and feasible to measure
  - Supported by observable data
- 

### Writing Your Behaviour Definition:

Now, check that it is:

- Observable
- Measurable
- Specific and complete

Remember: Target behaviours should empower the student and focus on strengths and growth, not just the reduction of challenging behaviours. The way we define behaviour sets the tone for respectful, effective support.

## Part 3: Gathering Information About Behaviours

**Instructions:** This tool guides educators in gathering information and identifying patterns in behaviour, focusing on when, where, and with who certain behaviours are more and less likely to happen.

### Step 1: Interviews

#### Who to Interview:

- Educators (classroom teachers, support staff)
- Family/caregivers
- The student (if appropriate)

#### Interview Focus Areas & Questions:

##### A. Understanding Strengths and Interests

- What are the student's strengths, talents, or skills?
- What activities or subjects does the student enjoy most?
- What motivates or excites the student?
- How does the student like to engage with peers and adults?

##### B. Understanding Challenges and Triggers

- Are there specific situations or activities that are difficult for the student?
- Are there identifiable triggers for stress, anxiety, or challenging behaviour?
- How does the student respond when upset or frustrated? What does this look like?

##### C. Supportive Situations

- Can you describe a time when the student was highly engaged or successful?
- What strategies or supports have been most effective?
- How does the student communicate needs or preferences in these situations?

#### Notes / Key Insights:

---

## **Step 2: Understanding Communication**

**Purpose:** Explore how the student communicates to support inclusion and behaviour understanding.

### **Questions to Consider:**

- How does the student communicate wants, needs, and feelings? (verbal, gestures, AAC, behaviour)
- How does the student respond to verbal instructions, visual cues, or prompts?
- What strategies help the student understand expectations?
- How do peers and adults respond to the student's communication?
- Are there times when communication breakdowns lead to frustration or behaviour concerns?

### **Notes / Observations:**

---

## **Step 3: Review of Student Schedule and Engagement**

**Purpose:** Identify patterns in mood, engagement, and support needs throughout the day.

### **Questions to Explore:**

- Which times of the day or activities are the student most happy, relaxed, and engaged?
- Which routines or subjects are more challenging, stressful, or require extra support?
- Are there transitions or unstructured times where difficulties emerge?
- Are there routines where the student's strengths can be highlighted or leveraged?

### **Notes / Observations:**

#### **Step 4: Review of Physical Space**

**Purpose:** Ensure the environment supports participation and highlights strengths.

**Questions to Consider:**

- Are materials and resources accessible?
- Are visual cues, schedules, or prompts supporting the student?
- Does the environment encourage engagement and independence?
- Are there areas that may cause stress or distraction?

**Notes / Observations:**

---

#### **Step 5: Review of Routines and Expectations**

**Purpose:** Identify how routines support or limit participation.

**Questions to Consider:**

- Are expectations clear, predictable, and consistent?
- Which routines allow the student to demonstrate strengths?
- Are there routines where additional supports are needed?
- How can transitions be smoothed to reduce stress?

**Notes / Observations:**

## Part 4: Gathering Information About the ABCs

Instructions: Observe over multiple days or settings to identify consistent patterns. - Focus on strengths and opportunities, not just challenges. Use this tool collaboratively with the student, family, and other staff when possible.

### 1. Before the Behaviour (Antecedents / Triggers)

Setting / Context: Where was the student? What activity were they engaged in?

What was happening: Was there a specific instruction, transition, interaction, or change in routine?

Strengths to note: How does the student engage with their environment or peers before the behaviour?

Possible barriers: Consider environmental, sensory, social, or communication factors that may make participation harder.

---

### 2. The Behaviour (Observable Actions)

Description of behaviour: Use concrete, observable language (e.g., “knocks materials off desk” instead of “disruptive”).

Frequency / Duration / Intensity: How often does it occur? How long does it last? How strong is the impact?

Strengths to note: Does the behaviour show a skill or need being communicated (e.g., persistence, creativity, need for movement)?

---

### 3. After the Behaviour (Consequences / Responses)

Adult / Peer response: What supports or responses were provided?

Student response / outcome: Did the behaviour stop, escalate, or shift? How did the student feel or respond afterward?

Strengths to note: Does the student self-regulate, seek help, or try an alternative approach?

---

#### 4. Environmental & Communication Considerations

Environmental barriers: Noise, seating arrangement, lighting, sensory input, access to materials?

Communication barriers: Was the instruction clear? Was the student able to express their needs or understand expectations?

Opportunities to leverage strengths: How can the environment or communication be adjusted to support participation and engagement?

## Part 5: Identifying the Function of the Behaviour

Instructions: This worksheet helps educators interpret student behaviour by examining patterns, context, and potential needs. It frames behaviour as a form of communication, emphasizes student strengths, and identifies environmental supports that can enhance participation and engagement. It can be helpful to review all the information as a team to identify the function, or reason *why*, the student is engaging in the behaviour of concern.

### Step 1: Gather Observations and Review All Data

Behaviour Details: Describe the behaviour using observable and measurable terms (e.g., “pushes chair,” “withdraws from group activity”).

Environmental & Communication Context: Are there sensory, social, or communication factors that may affect the behaviour?

Antecedents / Triggers: What happens before the behaviour? Consider the environment, instructions, transitions, and social interactions.

Consequences / Outcomes: What happens immediately after the behaviour? How do adults, peers, or the environment respond?

---

### Step 2: Generate a Hypothesis About Function

Use the data to explore what the behaviour might be communicating. Check all that may apply:

[ ] Gain connection – Is the student seeking attention, support, or social interaction? How do you know?

[ ] Escape overwhelm – Is the student avoiding difficult tasks, sensory overload, or transitions? How do you know?

[ ] Access preferred items/activities – Is the student attempting to obtain something they want or enjoy? How do you know?

[ ] Communicate unmet needs – Is the behaviour a way to express feelings, pain, or frustration that cannot be verbalised? How do you know?

Behaviour is communication. Look for patterns and think: “What is this student trying to tell us?”

---

### Step 3: Consider Strengths and Supports

- What skills or strategies can the student use instead of the behaviour?
  - How can the environment or communication be adjusted to support the student’s needs?
  - What proactive supports can help prevent the behaviour from occurring?
- 

Write down a few sentences about when, where, and with who the behaviour is most likely to occur, and what the student is communicating when engaging in the behaviour of concern:

## Part 6: Building Strengths-Based Behaviour Support Strategies

Instructions: This section guides educators in turning assessment insights into practical, strengths-based behaviour support strategies. It focuses on proactive environmental adjustments, explicit skill teaching, and reinforcement approaches that increase participation, independence, and belonging.

## Turning Your Insights into Practical Supports

Now that you have:

- Identified strengths and participation goals
- Defined the behaviour clearly
- Gathered contextual information
- Analysed the ABCs
- Developed a hypothesis about function

The next step is to design supports that are proactive, skill-building, and participation-focused.

Effective behaviour support is not about “stopping behaviour.”  
It is about:

- Reducing barriers
- Teaching new skills
- Strengthening communication
- Enhancing belonging
- Increasing meaningful participation

Think of your plan as building a bridge — from where the student is now to where they want to be.

---

### **Step 1: Strengthen the Environment First (Prevention)**

Before teaching new skills, ask:

**What can we adjust in the environment to reduce triggers and increase success?**

Environmental adjustments might include:

#### **Predictability**

- Visual daily schedules
- First–Then boards
- Clear transition warnings

- Visual countdown timers

### **Task Accessibility**

- Breaking tasks into smaller chunks
- Providing models or worked examples
- Reducing fine motor load when needed
- Offering alternative ways to demonstrate learning

### **Physical Space**

- Clear boundaries for work areas
- Minimising noise or visual distractions
- Ensuring materials are accessible

### **Reflection Prompt:**

What small environmental shift could reduce stress for this student tomorrow?

Remember: Many behaviours decrease simply when the environment becomes more supportive.

---

### **Step 2: Teach Replacement Behaviours (**

We need to teach the student safer, easier, and more understandable ways to communicate their wants and needs.

Ask:

“If this behaviour is communicating something, what skill can we teach instead?”

### **Examples**

If behaviour functions to gain connection:

- Teach: raising a hand
- Teach: using a help card
- Teach: appropriate peer initiation

If behaviour functions to escape overwhelm:



- Teach: requesting a break
- Teach: asking for help
- Teach: using a visual coping strategy

If behaviour functions to access a preferred item:

- Teach: requesting appropriately
- Teach: waiting using a visual timer

Replacement skills must:

- Be easier than the behaviour
- Be explicitly modelled and practised
- Be reinforced consistently

**Checklist:**

- Have we clearly taught the replacement skill?
- Has the student practised it in calm moments?
- Are adults responding consistently when it is used?

---

**Step 3: Enhance Communication Supports**

Because behaviour is communication, strengthening communication is often the most powerful intervention.

Consider:

- Adding visuals to verbal instructions
- Providing sentence starters
- Increasing wait time
- Ensuring AAC is accessible at all times
- Teaching emotional vocabulary

Ask:

“Can the student clearly express what they need in this moment?”

If not, behaviour may fill that gap.

#### **Step 4: Reinforce Participation and Skill Use**

Behaviour support must include positive reinforcement.

Reinforce:

- Attempts to use replacement skills
- Independent transitions
- Engagement with peers
- Persistence with challenging tasks

Effective reinforcement is:

- Immediate
- Specific
- Meaningful to the student

Instead of:

“Good job.”

Try:

“I noticed you asked for help — that helped you stay in the group.”

Celebrating small progress builds momentum.

---

#### **Step 5: Align Across Adults and Settings**

Consistency builds security.

Ask:

- Are all staff responding in similar ways?
- Is the family aware of the strategies?
- Are we using common language?

A shared approach prevents confusion and strengthens learning.

---

#### **Step 6: Monitor and Reflect**

Behaviour support is dynamic.

Collect simple data:

- Frequency counts
- Duration
- Engagement levels
- Student self-report and family feedback

Then ask:

- Is the behaviour decreasing?
- Is participation increasing?
- Is independence growing?
- Does the student feel more successful?

If not, adjust. Behaviour plans should evolve as skills grow.

---

### **Strengths-Based Reminders**

- ✓ Focus on participation, not just compliance
- ✓ Teach skills instead of punishing behaviour
- ✓ Adjust environments before blaming learners
- ✓ Celebrate growth
- ✓ Protect dignity and belonging

The most effective behaviour support plans increase independence, voice, and inclusion — not simply reduce behaviour.

## Additional Resources

### **The Positive Classroom Management Strategies**

The Victorian Department of Education's Positive Classroom Management Strategies provide evidence-informed guidance to help teachers create safe, inclusive and productive learning environments. Grounded in prevention, explicit teaching and relationship-building, the strategies support teachers to proactively establish clear expectations, routines and classroom norms that promote student engagement and minimise disruption.

These approaches emphasise modelling and reinforcing expected behaviours, using consistent and predictable responses, and fostering strong, respectful relationships between teachers and students. The guidance also highlights the importance of culturally responsive practice, differentiation and adjustments to meet diverse learning and behavioural needs.

Importantly, positive classroom management in Victoria aligns with a tiered framework of support, where universal strategies are provided for all students, and additional targeted or intensive supports are implemented when needed. The overall aim is to maximise learning time, strengthen students' social and emotional capabilities, and build classrooms where every student feels safe, supported and ready to learn.

You can access these resources here: <https://www.schools.vic.gov.au/pcms>

### **Behaviour Assessment and Support in Schools (BASIS)**

The Victorian Department of Education's Behaviour Assessment and Support in Schools (BASIS) modules and resources are designed to build the capability of school staff to understand, assess and respond to student behaviour in ways that are proactive, evidence-informed and inclusive.

BASIS supports educators to move beyond surface-level descriptions of behaviour and instead explore the underlying functions, environmental influences and skill gaps that may be contributing to student distress or disengagement. The modules guide staff through practical processes such as conducting functional behaviour assessments (FBA), identifying replacement skills, and developing comprehensive behaviour support plans that prioritise prevention, teaching and positive reinforcement.

BASIS is only accessible to Victorian Department of Education staff.

You can access BASIS here: <https://www2.education.vic.gov.au/pal/behaviour-students/resources> (LearnED)

## **Down Syndrome Association UK**

The **Down's Syndrome Association (UK)** website's *Approaching and Understanding Behaviours with Care* section offers compassionate, practical guidance for families, caregivers and professionals supporting individuals with Down syndrome. It emphasises that behaviour is a form of communication and can reflect needs, preferences or discomfort, rather than being “bad” or intentional misbehaviour. The resources encourage people to look beyond surface-level actions to understand why certain behaviours occur, taking into account communication challenges, sensory needs, emotional responses and environmental factors commonly experienced by people with Down syndrome. By promoting respectful, person-centred understanding and support strategies, the guidance aims to help reduce distress, improve wellbeing and build stronger relationships, while reinforcing the idea that adaptive behaviour can be nurtured through positive, informed responses.

You can access the website here: <https://www.downs-syndrome.org.uk/about-downs-syndrome/lifes-journey/children-families-and-education/behaviour/>

## **Additional Teacher-Friendly Articles**

How to find the underlying reasons for challenging behaviour with functional behaviour assessment: <https://www.monash.edu/education/teachspace/articles/how-to-find-the-underlying-reasons-for-challenging-behaviour-with-functional-behaviour-assessment>

How to develop effective positive behaviour support plans in schools: <https://www.monash.edu/education/teachspace/articles/how-to-develop-effective-positive-behaviour-support-plans-in-schools>

## **Research Articles**

- Aguilar, M., Sariah, L., Williams, J., & Valdovinos, M. G. (2024). An Exploration of Challenging Behavior Associated with Down Syndrome. *Journal of Mental Health Research in Intellectual Disabilities*, 17(1), 29-42.
- Feeley, K., & Jones, E. (2008). Preventing challenging behaviours in children with down syndrome: Attention to early developing repertoires. *Down Syndrome Research and Practice*, 12(1), 11-14.
- Neil, N., & Jones, E. A. (2018). Communication intervention for individuals with Down syndrome: Systematic review and meta-analysis. *Developmental Neurorehabilitation*, 21(1), 1-12.
- Patel, L., Wolter-Warmerdam, K., Leifer, N., & Hickey, F. (2018). Behavioral characteristics of individuals with Down syndrome. *Journal of Mental Health Research in Intellectual Disabilities*, 11(3), 221-246.