



What is positive behaviour support and how did it evolve?

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Introduction

Positive behaviour support (PBS) is an evidence-based approach for enhancing quality of life and reducing behaviours that can have a negative impact on the individual's preferred lifestyle. In the UK the first guidance that eluded to PBS, *Challenging Behaviour: Unified Approach. Clinical and Service Guidelines for Supporting People with Learning Disabilities Who Are At Risk of Receiving Abusive or Restrictive Practices (2007)* stated that a PBS framework should be ethically valid and psychologically informed by functional assessments. By using applied science (e.g. Applied Behaviour Analysis) that uses educational methods to expand the person's opportunities and independence through redesigning environments will create systems change that is durable in enhancing quality of life.

The evolution of PBS emerged in the mid-1980s. This was considered an alternative to the dominant behaviour management practices that emphasised the manipulation of consequences to produce behaviour change. This practice became the norm, causing an over-reliance on contingency management strategies that led to the use of highly aversive and stigmatizing punishment based procedures. The application of these aversive interventions was almost always seen among individuals with severe learning disabilities and/or autism and were regularly practiced in community residential based settings.

Philosophically, PBS subscribes to the early principles of normalisation which simply refers to people with learning disabilities should be able to live in the same social settings as anyone else and be able to access the same opportunities as others. A fundamental component of normalisation has social role valorisation at the core. This ensured that people who are at risk of being devalued and disadvantaged were supported to assume a valued social role within their community. The phenomena led to the 'inclusion movement', which also prohibited the use of painful and restrictive practices and promoted skill building through new person centred strategies (Lucyshyn et al., 2015).

In the early 1990's 'positive behavioural support' became the popular description, which was largely due to the work of Horner et al (1990) and continues to be the preferred name used today. In 2002, Carr et al. provided an updated definition of positive behaviour support:

PBS is an applied science that uses educational methods to expand an individual's behaviour repertoire and systems change methods to redesign an individual's living environment to first enhance the individual's quality of life and, second, to minimize his or her problem behaviour.

Carr (2007) emphasised the centrality of PBS by adapting positive and supportive environments for the promotion of positive behaviour:

'Our chief concern is not with problem behaviour, and certainly not with problem people, but rather with problem contexts. Our job is to redesign the counter-productive and unfair environmental context that so many people, with and without disabilities, have to contend with in their everyday lives.'

At this time the policy context in the UK was clearly emphasising and focusing on the behaviour of an individual however Carr (2007) was highlighting the appreciation of the role of the context in which the individual lives and the essential influences of environmental design. Behaviours of concern as Carr alluded too are socially constructed, an outcome of the person–environment interaction. Therefore, such behaviours are a 'challenge' to service systems and providers where the environment is not fit for need.

Moreover, research was producing evidence-based literature that behaviours of concern were often the reaction of inappropriate environments due to lack of person centred communication methods, lack of autonomy, stimulation (over or under) and behaviours presented due to frustration. Carr promoted a more inclusive approach that incorporated intrinsic factors such as the nature and severity of impairment and contextual factors such as the attitudes of others, the extent to which the environment is enabling or disabling and wider social and economic influences. Behaviours of concern may therefore represent 'protest or resistance' when the environmental responses are neglectful, socially and morally unacceptable, abusive or restrictive, particularly when human rights are violated. In other words, it is system attitudes, practices and structures that are disabling, not necessarily facets of the person.

PBS has been an energetic and innovative practice over the past 25 years. Over this time, PBS has expanded its applications across a wide range of countries and populations (Lucyshyn, Dunlap & Freeman, 2015), including people with autism and complex needs. The definition of PBS has been inconsistent due to migrating into different specialisms however Kincaid et al (2015) proposed a revised definition of PBS to the US Association of Positive Behaviour Support:

PBS is an approach to behaviour support that includes an on-going process of research-based assessment, intervention, and data-based decision making focused on building social and other functional competencies, creating supportive contexts, and preventing the occurrence of problem behaviours.

PBS relies on strategies that are respectful of a person's dignity and overall well-being and that are drawn primarily from behavioural, educational, and social

sciences, although other evidence-based procedures may be incorporated. PBS may be applied within a multi-tiered framework at the level of the individual and at the level of larger systems.

Positive behaviour support is applicable to all people; it has been applied to provide support to children and adults, to provide support and intervention for people with and without disability and for people in a range of settings. It is applicable to all people with behaviours of concern, regardless of cognitive functioning or disability.

Positive behaviour support recognises that all human behaviour serves a purpose, including those behaviours that are considered to be behaviours of concern. In order to bring about systematic and adaptive change, it is important to understand the purpose of the existing behaviours, the person's aspirations and the range of knowledge and skills they already have. In order to develop effective behaviour change strategies, it is important to understand the context in which any behaviours of concern occur and the environments in which the person lives and needs to learn to use more adaptive behaviours.

PBS is an empirical approach that, in practice is based on scientific principles; it is subjected to formal research validation tests; and finally it collects and applies data (Dunlap et al., 2008).

The PBS philosophy embraces the humanistic values of person centred approaches and is the first component that commences PBS practice. Person centred values are blended with the technology of behaviour science, in other words strategies are judged not only for their efficacy but also judged with respect to the ability to enhance opportunities, choice and dignity of the person. The use of person centred planning allows for PBS strategies to be tailored specifically to the needs and goals of the person, which empowers them and leads to self-determination and durable lifestyle changes.

These values and objectives evolved as a result of empirical research and through the differing perspectives over the years have led to a more unified approach, hence the 2015 definition.

The principles of PBS

PBS promotes ethical led principles that are the backbone of any PBS practice framework. The following principles complement current policy and were adapted by the seminal research of Carr et al (2002):

- *Enhancing quality of life through comprehensive lifestyle change:* to support people in improving their holistic needs, e.g. social relationships, leisure opportunities, community integration, self-determination etc;
- *Examines the person's life and not just the behaviour:* a lifespan perspective recognises that achieving sustained behaviour reduction will take years;
- *Proactive and person centred functional assessment:* apply behavioural science in real life community settings and analyse the function of the unmet need through person centred approaches and focuses on antecedent conditions;
- *Multicomponent intervention:* There is a recognition that there are multiple functions and structural variables that influence behaviour and will require a multi-dimensional strategic approach;
- *Reduces behaviours of concern over time:* Applying the least restrictive alternative as short term strategies only to prevent serious harm to self, others or the destruction of property;
- *Collaboration and Stakeholder Participation:* Stakeholders are active participants in the PBS model and are integral in defining quality of life whilst planning, assessing and designing intervention strategies;
- *Systems Change:* focus on problem contexts, not problem behaviours, through system change that enables change to occur and be sustained; adopt a common vision, clear direction, adequate resources and training and incentives to change.
- *Emphasis on prevention:* Development of proactive skill building to support systems change;
- *Flexibility of science practice:* Develop systematic data sources to evaluate and guide intervention;
- *Social Validity:* Define success by its objective effectiveness, practicality, desirability, contextual fit and subjective effectiveness (quality of life and behaviours of concern) as viewed by stakeholders.

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