



Information sheet:

Understanding why children behave the way they do

Behaviour is a form of communication and it serves a purpose. When you understand its purpose, you can understand how to respond and intervene.

Also appreciate:

- the developmental factors that might contribute to unwanted behaviour – significant events that might have occurred previously in a child or young person's life
- ecological factors that can influence behaviour, such as home, peers, friends, neighbourhood, school practices and climate, socio-economic status and the current point in time
- what may trigger the behaviour – usually things outside the immediate environment
- that teachers can influence and interrupt patterns formed in the above environments.

Understanding behaviour

Behaviour is effective – it works

Behaviour is most likely meeting the child or young person's needs, otherwise it wouldn't exist. They are communicating in the most effective way they know at the time. Behaviour is a form of communication and it serves a purpose. Managing challenging behaviour is often unsuccessful because we try to manage the form (what) of the behaviour rather than its function (why).

Behaviour is controlled (weakened or reinforced) by what happens after it (consequences).

The way we respond to behaviour impacts the occurrence of the behaviour. For example, if we remove a child from the room or an activity when they have tantrums to avoid work, we are increasing the chances of the behaviour happening again.

An alternative behaviour can be taught to replace challenging behaviour (may take time!)

When we identify the function or purpose of the behaviour, we can more effectively intervene. There are often many behaviours that can be used for the same outcomes. It is possible to teach a child or young person a new behaviour to replace a challenging behaviour, to get the same result.

If you meet the need, you address the unwanted behaviour.

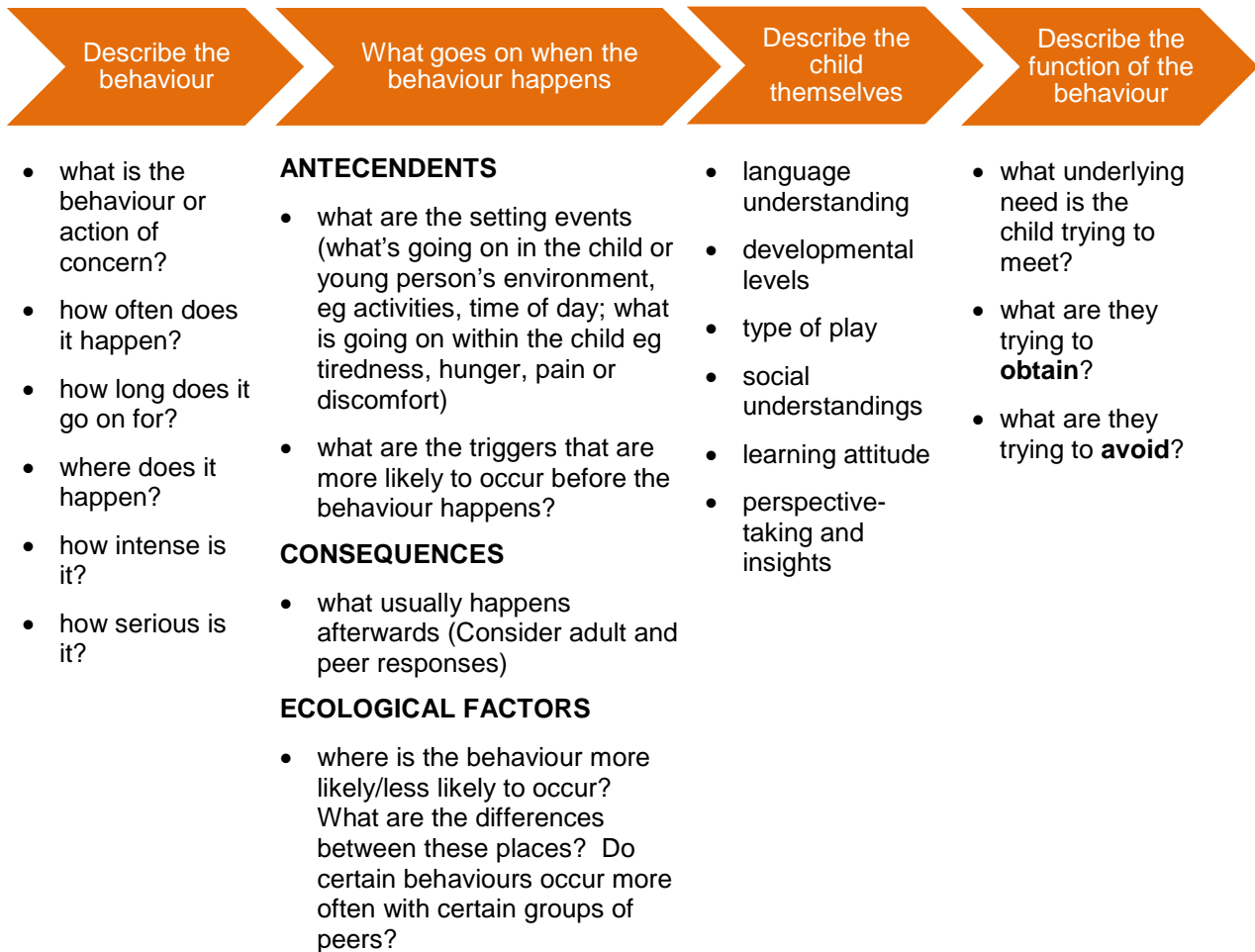
If a child's need is fulfilled it is most likely that the unwanted behaviour used to communicate that need will disappear.

The two most common purposes of behaviour are to:

- **obtain** peer or adult attention, a desired object or activity, or sensory stimulation
 - a behaviour will be more likely to recur if something (object or event) is given or presented after the behaviour occurs

- **avoid** a difficult, boring, or easy task, a physical demand, an activity the child or young person doesn't like, or a peer
 - a behaviour will be more likely to recur if something (object or event) is avoided, escaped, or removed after the behaviour occurs.

Identifying why behaviour might be occurring



Developing a plan for promoting positive behaviour and learning

Once you understand the purpose of the behaviour, use this to inform a plan. Include what you will do to:

- **prevent**: make the challenging behaviour irrelevant (environmental redesign)
- **model** and teach: make the challenging behaviour inefficient (teach new skills)
- **extinguish**: make the challenging behaviour ineffective (minimise reward for challenging behaviour)
- **reinforce**: make the desired behaviour more rewarding
- **ensure** safety of everyone (what to do in dangerous situations, if needed)
- **deliver consequences**: socially appropriate, delivered only when the behaviour occurs, and that the child or young person will not like.

A child or young person's behaviour won't change unless the adult behaviour changes first.