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# Developing a Personal

## Behaviour Support Plan :-

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Primary age level : basic framework  
(with a supplementary note on  
calmness in anxiety and anger)

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The following essential understandings and support approaches within a behaviour support plan involve :-

- *A personal behaviour/learning support plan* to help the student with those behaviours causing them (and others) concerns at school.

This behaviour *support* plan would need to be developed by the grade teacher (with senior teacher support). It will mean spending some dedicated one-to-one meetings with the student once a week on this such a plan.

*Initially*, at the first meeting, the teacher would identify *with the student*, the behaviours of concern. This ‘behaviour conversation’ needs to be conducted in a *respectful, supportive manner*.

This one-to-one meeting obviously needs to be conducted outside of classroom time. Teachers normally allocate 15-20 minutes (at lunchtimes) once a week.

The plan will focus on *expected, fair, necessary behaviours* (in contrast to the behaviours of concern) **to help me in classtime** (or playground time if the focus of the plan is playground behaviours ...). The emphasis is on the student ‘owning’ the plan rather than on ‘imposition’ by the teacher. The plan is personalised **to help me** :

**Eg To help me with my behaviour in classtime, my plan is to :-**

- Go straight to my table group.
- Sit relaxed in my seat.
- Organise my work area.
- Think through my learning activity (chat with my table buddies to be clear).
- Use my partner-voice.
- Start and give my work my best effort.
- If I need teacher help, remember hand up without calling out.

This example looks quite detailed and specific. This is not accidental. A plan needs this kind of specificity when addressing any *behaviour focus* and behaviour change.

Some teachers have a space (at the bottom of the plan) to allocate 'smiley' stars or smiley 'ticks' ...

The essential key is for the teacher to develop such plans (in these one-to-one contexts) in a tone and manner of encouraging support. Such a plan is not another form of directive 'must' or consequential/punitive process.

It can also help if the grade teacher uses a 'social story' to set the context for the plan and then *model the behaviour* with the student and invite them to *practise the positive behaviour (of the plan)* in the safety of this one-to-one context.

- These plans will need to be reassessed each week and fine-tuned and student feedback given ('What is the easiest part of your plan?', '... hardest part ...?', 'Why?', 'How can we continue to make your plan work well for you?', 'What can I do to help ...?').

The plan is drawn up on a small card (postcard-sized or a little bigger) – see examples in the notes : (33) *Summary of Individual Behaviour Plans* and (41) *Example of Individual Behaviour Plans*.

- It is important to make sure the specialist teachers, T.A.s, and senior leadership colleagues get a copy of any such plans.

Along with any such plans should be suggestions on how to give quiet, *descriptive* regular encouragement to the student (rather than praise) when he remembers his plan. See notes on encouragement : (29a) *The Language of Encouragement*.

- Begin each day with a quiet – encouraging – *personal aside* with the student to focus on *what their plan is today ...*
- In classtime, if the student 'forgets' his plan or he is having a particularly 'bad day', or is overly mutable it will help if the teacher has a quiet, firm, respectful reminder or question : '... *what do you need to be doing with your plan – now?*' or '*Remember your plan.*' Then give the student take-up-time ... (ie : walk away to convey our trust and grace ...).
- It might be necessary – on some occasions – to give the student some *cool-off-time* (in class time) to calm down and re-think ... and then continue *within the guidance* of their plan.

- Regular, quiet (even brief) encouragement will support them when they are making an effort with their plan :- ‘*You remembered to ... (be specific) ...*’. See notes (29a) : *The Language of Encouragement*.
- It can also help to develop – with the student – a specific plan for self-calming. Many children do not know how to ‘calm themselves down’. It normally does not help a child, when they are frustrated or angry to say, ‘Calm down’. It is more helpful to say, ‘*When you’ve calmed down (always preface with their first name) then we can talk and I’ll try to help.*’ It can also help to say – at the outset – ‘*I can see you’re very upset; when you’ve calmed down ... then we can talk*’. Then allow some cool-off-time in the classroom (perhaps sitting away from other children for 5 minutes or so ...).

Out-of-class time-out (supported by a senior teacher) should be used sparingly and only when a child’s behaviour is *repeatedly* distracting/disruptive or evidencing hostile, aggressive or threatening behaviours. See notes on : (1) *Anger and Aggression at School*.

Any plan for self-calming skills needs to be developed and *taught* in a safe one-to-one context (in non-class time) by identifying the skill, *modelling* the skill and *practising* the skill with the child (see appendix and notes on *Anger/Aggression*).

- A regular meeting with the child’s parent– say once a week – to share with them the grade teacher’s behaviour-learning support programme (see later) and to keep the home/school ‘connection of understanding, care and support’.

I know this sounds labour-intensive – it is. It is also (I believe) our supportive obligation to children who need *support for behaviour* as much as children with learning needs do. It is also crucial that all teachers have the moral and organisational support to enable them in developing and maintaining such plans.

Sanctions *seem* an easy response as if ‘we’re doing something to stop poor/bad behaviours...’, ‘... showing the child what he shouldn’t do!’. However – sanctions do not teach the child what they should (and can) do, and why ...

Behaviour consequences and sanctions *are* a necessary part of behaviour policy. When they are fair, appropriate, balanced with moral weight they can also teach, *providing they are supported with restorative practices*.

(I would advise some clinical assessment for symptomatic behaviour disorders eg :- ADHD that might entail medication for ADHD symptoms. At least a 3-month trial if the assessment is clear).

- The 'fresh start' every day needs to be genuine; a reality. The student needs to feel *accepted and to belong*; this is a crucial and primary need all children have in the time they spend at school. Such behaviour plans are not a 'quick fix'; it is commonly 'three steps forward, one step back'.

There are some children – with high social/emotional intelligence who could take on the role of learning/peer-buddies in class time (or even in playground time if a 'plan' might help – also – in that context).

I hope these suggestions will be of some use. I know all too well the challenge that such behaviour support entails.

Please feel free to pass on these suggestions to other colleagues such as *wellbeing colleagues and senior leadership*.

## Appendix

### Our calmness in anxiety and anger

One of the most commonly quoted skills to *enable* calmness and focus (when one is anxious or frustrated) is that of *conscious breathing* – for a few, or several, minutes. This does not mean *deep* breathing, rather it refers to our *conscious effort to breathe calmly* for a few minutes when we are aware of heightened frustration or anxiety.

This kind of breathing is sometimes called ‘*directed breathing*’, ‘*breathing awareness*’ or ‘*conscious breathing*’. Thanks to our autonomic nervous system our breathing (awake or asleep) require no conscious effort! However when we feel *particularly* anxious or frustrated, a *conscious* switch from rapid, shallow breathing to a more measured, conscious, calmer ‘breathing pattern’ is a way of both distracting the child from their anxiety and frustration and directing conscious energy into (a) *conscious breathing* for a few minutes

Many doctors (and surgeons) suggest this skill before a stressful medical procedure.

It involves breathing to a conscious cycle of counting : we breathe *in* a single breath to a count of 3 slowly; hold that breath for a count of 3; exhale (slowly) to a count of 3. Practitioners vary in the number of seconds to this ‘*patterned*’ *conscious breathing*. For young children a count of 2 for the cycle of 2, 2, 2 is appropriate. This works out to about 6 or 7 breaths a minute for 2-3 minutes. This is a skill we teach to children as young as 5. My colleagues and I have also taught these skills to whole classes.

One of the very helpful books in this regard is *The Calm Technique* (1985) by Paul Wilson and for teachers, Jenny Rickard’s excellent book :- *Relaxation Activities for Children* (1994) ACER Press.

You’ll note (if you try this approach as an adult) that as you breathe in (consciously to the count of 3) one’s breath is cool (even on a hot day). As one exhales, one’s breath is warm (even on a cool day). This is a feature of ‘breathing awareness’ we teach to children.

What we’re doing in this kind of breathing is taking *short – relative – control over this crucial bodily function* and ‘saying’ – to our body – “*Hang on, I know you’re tense, I’ll breathe consciously for a while (instead of shallowly and fast) just to help my general physiology to regain some perspective and control.*”

Another, attendant, skill is that of *consciously tuning into our bodily* tenseness by *re-tensing* brows, neck, shoulders (in turn). We concentrate on that tense part of our body (say brows) and clench (*re-tense*) for 3-5 seconds, then consciously *untense* for 3-5 seconds (wide eyes here) and so on for the other tense parts of our body (jaw, shoulders, hands, knees to thighs).

You will have noticed (even as an adult) those times when sitting for a long period where you have become aware of how hunched and tight the shoulder muscles can become *until* we consciously relax them. This is a common experience even when sitting and working at a desk.

The physiology of both *anger and anxiety* addresses what happens in our body when we are particularly anxious or angry.

- The heart rate; the shallow breathing; the tenseness in our body (the frown, tenseness of 'scrunched-up' shoulders; clenched fists; constriction of abdomen and thighs ...).
- The basic 'fight or flight' aspects of physiology when faced with pressure, stress or perceived or real threat (even a *perceived* threat *feels* real ...) and while an exam is not a 'threat' (per se) some children who experience high level of 'test anxiety' experience significant physiological symptoms.
- The *normality* of anxiety, frustration and anger and 'levels' or 'degrees' of anger. We also explore *proportionate* anger as between – say – annoyance, irritation and anger in relation to the sorts of experiences common to children and adolescents.
- The difference between *angry feelings* (which we cannot stop *coming* ...) and *angry behaviour* : what we *do* and *say* **when** we get angry. This includes holding in of emotion; 'stifling' one's anger for fear of what it might look like if we were to give 'free reign' to our emotions; we also explore the dangers inherent in just giving 'free reign' to the emotion of anger.
- Our *characteristic thinking* patterns and self-talk *affect how we feel when we get very* anxious or angry. The clear link between what we *characteristically* say to ourselves *during* and *after* we have expressed significant emotion have a continuing physiological and psychological effect and can develop into self-defeating *patterns* of thinking ( and behaviour).

Eg "No-one cares about me!" "All teachers are mean, unfair ..." "Teachers *shouldn't* tell me what to do!!"

We encourage our students to *challenge, reframe* such thinking. "While *some* teachers are unfair, (or appear not to care) are sometimes 'mean' ... while *some* teachers and fellow

students don't care (or appear not to care ...) ... not *all* are like that." (This *reframes* reality and enables *realistic* thinking ...) "While it's not pleasant, clearly not *all* teachers or students are uncaring (whatever). Not *all* teachers are unfair ...".

"Just *demanding* that no one *should* tell me what to do ... is making me *feel* more angry or anxious than I need to be. It's not helping me deal with my feelings right now, *and it's not helping me with what I need to do to make things better.*"

This is not a mere 'twist' in language. It means recognising how a *dominating* and *ruminating pattern of thinking itself* creates more emotional stress than we need to carry. In some students (and adults) it also triggers a *more demanding pattern of behaviour*. "No one is going to tell me what to do!!" "I'll *show* them!"

We emphasise that while we can't *initially* stop any negative self-talk 'coming' into 'one's head, as it were, we can recognise it *when* it comes and then challenge (self-dispute) one's 'self-talk' and re-enable more *realistic* thinking about stressful event(s) that trigger such thoughts. (Rogers, 2012 *The Effective Guide to Managing Teacher Stress*).

This is not an easy attitude or approach to take to our thinking; even for adults. It means *learning* to recognise *overly negative* angry (or anxious) thinking and then disputing its intensity. It is a skill (even habit) that needs practice. "Hang on ... not *all* teachers are ... there are many helpful teachers here such as ...".

This 'disputing' can, then, enable *a more realistic pattern of self-talk* that can enable a *less stressful* response in one's behaviour.

An excellent book in this regard is *Learned Optimism* by Professor Martin Seligman.

The skill of realistic thing has a long history in philosophy (mainly Stoic philosophy) and in psychology (mainly cognitive-behaviour psychology).

The key premise is that it is not *merely* – or *only* – the stressful situation (including relationships) that *directly* (and only) *causes* one's anxiety or anger responses. Our *characteristic* beliefs, and self-talk, about what *should* (!) and *shouldn't be* also affects the *degree* of emotional arousal we experience and also contribute to how usefully and constructively we address the issues, concerns and relationships that occasion stress and anxiety in our lives.

We discuss with the student *typical self-talk patterns* (see Fig. ) that contribute to high levels of anger and then posit (with the students) the ‘unrealistic’ nature of such thinking (eg ‘things *must* be better’, ‘Things *must ...*’ this way or else I *can’t* be happy ...) and how *over-dwelling* on such thoughts and self-talk affect how one is likely to feel and *then* behave (if that pattern of thinking continues (the rumination or *idee fixe ...*)

These *skills* are quite challenging; particularly to those of a more choleric nature. Even adults find these skills a challenge to the way they perceive social reality about what *should* and *shouldn’t* be in their lives.

These skills, however, can be taught at upper primary level in whole-class settings as well as when working in one-to-one settings (as in counselling or case supervision for behaviour support).

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Notes are also available that bear in these issues :-

*Anger and Aggression (01);*

*Working With Highly Attentional and Power-Seeking Children and Adolescents (based on the psychology of Alfred Adler and Rudolf Dreikurs) (29);*

*Summary of Individual Behaviour Support Plans (33);*

*Variables Which Affect Student Achievement (34);*

*Stop/Start Behaviour Plan (35)*

*Examples of Individual Behaviour Support Plans (41).*

These are available on request.

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