

## PBS Helpline Resources

# 10 things you can do for someone with concerning behaviours

*(Based on the work of David Pitonyak, [www.dimage.com](http://www.dimage.com))*

### 1. Get to know the person really well

Find out as much as you can about them, what matters to them, what makes them ‘tick, what upsets or worries them and how they see themselves. Plan to spend time with them doing things that they enjoy, somewhere where they feel safe and relaxed; if it’s something you enjoy as well that’s even better. At some point, when you’ve really got to understand these things about them, and only then, pick your time carefully and if it feels right, let them know that you’re concerned about some of their behaviour and ask if you can help. The important thing is to ask their permission to help.

### 2. Don’t assume anything

Sometimes we can underestimate how much someone can do or understand, based on the fact that they have a disability. Often a person’s ability depends on how much support they get and with a little help and patience people may be able to be involved in a whole range of activities, make choices and decide how they want to spend their time. Everyone has skills and gifts, regardless of their disability or diagnosis. We’re all humans with the same basic rights; always remember to speak directly and respectfully to the person, explain things clearly and don’t assume they can’t understand.

### 3. Help the person to build a support plan

With them, develop a plan that aims to improve their overall quality of life and includes all the things that make the person happy, things they want to do, people they want to spend time with and things that gives their life meaning. John and Connie O’Brien suggest also asking these questions to help build the plan:

- How can I help you achieve health and wellbeing?
- How can I help you maintain important relationships and build new ones?
- How can I help you be involved in the community as much as you want to be?
- How can I help you have more choices in life?
- How can I help you learn or develop skills that matter to you?
- How can I help you make a contribution to others?

#### **4. Build a support plan for you**

To support someone well you need to get your own needs met and it's important you plan how to get them met. Consider the things that you do and the people that you see that improve your overall quality of life and make sure you schedule time for these. You might want to ask some of John and Connie O'Brien's questions in 3 (above) of yourself. Also think about what will make you feel safe and OK when the other person is behaving in concerning ways.

#### **5. Remember that all behaviour has a meaning**

Concerning behaviours are important message which can tell us things about how things are for someone. All behaviour means something, it always happens for a reason and concerning behaviours usually mean that something is not right or someone isn't getting something that they need. The concerning behaviour may be telling us that they're lonely, bored, confused, scared or in pain. It might mean the person doesn't feel valued, or liked. Ask the person what they need to be happy, what they like to do, who they like to be with. Also asks what makes them unhappy, what they don't like to do and who they don't want to spend time with. Also think about whether the person might be unwell, or emotionally distressed. Finally think about when any concerning behaviour usually happens but, more importantly, when does it always never happen.

#### **6. Build good relationships with health professionals**

When we're not well we're not ourselves. Sometimes people aren't able or very good at telling us when they don't feel well and sometimes their concerning behaviour might be because they're unwell. Having a doctor, nurse or dentist who knows the person and is used to seeing them and communicating with them is really important, as is the person feeling comfortable with their doctor, nurse or dentist. Sometimes we may need to help the person and the health professional to understand each other.

#### **7. Instead of ultimatums give choices**

If a person's behaviour is concerning or challenging, providing choices is better than trying to control them. Longer term try to help the person find better ways to express that they're upset or angry ("next time you're cross, what would be a good thing to do"). In the meantime we could try saying "I can see you're getting upset, what would help? Do you want to do this or that?" Also, allow the person to make decisions and choices throughout the day. This isn't the same as the person always doing exactly what they want; there are limits that affect us all and there needs to be give and take in any relationship but it's about thinking about who is setting the limits and why. We shouldn't be wanting to control the person; if limits are imposed on people without their input and if they feel powerless then when we do ask them to do something or try to set a limit it can feel like we're just telling them what to do which often can make someone angrier. Overall it's about being fair and remembering that if they've been told what to do a lot in the past that we may need to be more flexible until we show them that we're not trying to control them.

## **8. Relationships make all the difference**

Your relationship with the person may be hugely important to them so try not to underestimate this. Helping people maintain existing relationships and build new ones, on their terms, is really important to avoid the person being lonely and isolated. This is also important so that if the person does lose touch with someone, or someone important to them leaves, that there are other people for them to be with.

## **9. Help the person to develop a positive identity**

It helps if people have a role and an identity that they feel good about, rather than only being someone with a disability, who needs looking after and who's behaviour is described as concerning. Help the person to recognise all the things that are great about them, that make them valued by others and support them to find ways they can make a contribution and to help others. This might mean helping with chores, volunteering, joining groups or supporting their friends. It's important to remember that the person has things they can share and contribute.

## **10. Help the person to have more fun and things to look forward to**

Having fun is good for us and our wellbeing. Remember to notice all the things that the person enjoys doing and the places they enjoy being in. Ask yourself:

- Are they having enough fun?
- Do they experience enough joy?
- Is theirs an interesting, fulfilling, rewarding life?
- Do they have a good life with things to look forward to?
- How can I help them improve the quality of their life overall?