

Challenging Behaviour during COVID-19 Restrictions

This leaflet is for the family and carers of people who have a learning disability.

It provides information on managing challenging behaviour during the current COVID-19 restrictions.



This is a difficult time for everyone, including people who have a learning disability. Normal activities and routines have stopped, and lots of people are worried about the virus.

This might mean that the people we support are more likely to show challenging behaviours. This is because they perhaps do not quite understand what is happening or they might be finding it difficult to manage their feelings.

Challenging behaviours include behaviours that can threaten the safety of the person or others. It can be difficult to know how to manage challenging behaviour- this leaflet provides some information that might be useful.

People with Learning Disabilities may find this a difficult time because:

- Their usual routines and activities have stopped
- They can't see their friends and family
- They are worried about their friends and family
- They don't understand what is happening or know how long this will go on for.

Here are some tips that might help to prevent challenging behaviour:

► **Keep to a routine**

Try to agree a new routine with the person and use a daily or weekly planner. Include activities they enjoy. For example, if the person used to go to an art class on a Wednesday morning and yoga on Thursday afternoon, you could do them at the same time in their new weekly 'at home' planner. To help weekends feel different to weekdays and give the week an 'ending', Friday could become movie night and Saturday could be takeaway night, for example. Some people have found it helpful to have different food for breakfast at the weekend.

► **Use video calling**

Using video calls and other technology can help the person stay in touch with family and friends and feel less alone. It can also give them a chance to talk about how they feel about the current situation, and to understand that any worries they have are normal.

► **Talking about COVID-19**

If someone does not understand COVID-19, they might worry - setting aside some time to talk about COVID-19 and ask questions might help to reduce their worries. Try to limit their time on social media or watching news if this increases distress. Tell the person that it is ok and 'normal' to feel worried and scared just now, but that in time it will pass. SCLD has some booklets that can help when explaining COVID-19 to a person with a learning disability:

<https://www.sclld.org.uk/covid-19-guided-self-help-booklet-series/>

► **Increase exercise and activity**

Fitness is good for our mood. Because we are staying at home, we may find that we are less active. It is important to support people to exercise at home. This could include doing online fitness videos (e.g. yoga, Zumba) or using an exercise bike, you can also exercise out with the home during the day for example going for a walk.

► **Talk about emotions**

People with learning disabilities sometimes struggle to understand and talk about how they feel. They may be feeling many different feelings that they are finding difficult to recognise and cope with. Asking them how they feel and encouraging them to talk about this can be helpful. If it is difficult for them to use words to say how they feel, you can use other methods like pictures, photos, objects or Makaton.

► **Use relaxation**

Relaxation can help to reduce anxiety. It might be useful to help the person complete relaxation exercises, such as 'progressive muscle relaxation' or controlled breathing. Try to do this at least once each day for around 10 minutes if you can.

The SCLD link above (section 'Talking about Covid') has a video relaxation exercise and a guide showing how to use it properly with people who have a learning disability.

► **Improve sleep**

Better sleep can help to improve mood and reduce anxiety. There are some things that you can do to help someone sleep better. You can: avoid giving caffeine and fizzy drinks after late afternoon and don't drink too much near bedtime; don't do physical exercise too close to bedtime; get into the habit of going to bed and getting up at the same time each day; have a warm bath or shower 1 hour before bed; and avoid naps throughout the day.

► **Understand early warning signs**

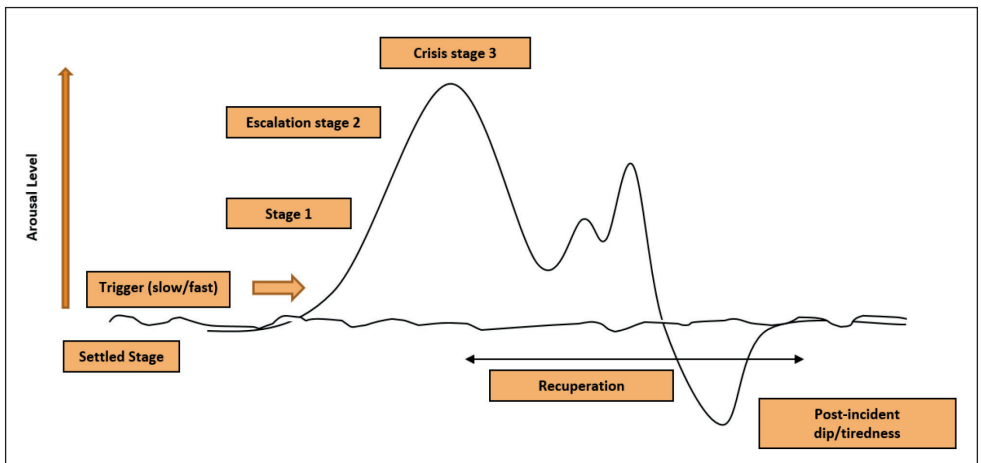
Watch out for early warning signs that the person usually shows before the behaviour starts (e.g. walking quickly, hand flapping, talking loudly). What can you do at this time, what has worked before, can you distract the person onto something else? If there are things that you can do at this point which usually helps (e.g. remove to a quieter room) try these.

Responding to episodes of distress¹

Some of the people you support may need help to contain their distress. If they already have a reactive strategy developed by a professional, please refer to this.

Distress comes in many forms, and is different for everyone. When someone is showing signs of distress, they may show more subtle signs to start with which escalate over a period of time.

This is a diagram of how distress and behaviours can escalate over time. There are general principles that you can apply when supporting an individual to de-escalate safely.



¹ *The advice in this section has been provided by Dr Judith Wishart, Consultant Clinical Psychologist, NHS Grampian

Stage 1 and 2 – is about creating a calm, low stimulating environment.

- Try to remain calm and model calm. This can be difficult to do when you are experiencing a level of stress yourself. Slow down your movements and speech.
- Limit verbal communication with the individual. Do not try to reason with them, as their understanding will be significantly impaired.
- Say the person's name to gain their attention before directing them to a low arousal/calming activity (something they enjoy that is not going to be too stimulating or exciting).
- Some people need space while others like to be close to their carer. This is individual to the person you are supporting.
- For people that can tolerate close contact, it might help to sit down with the person and write down their thoughts and worries. Even if you don't have any answers for them, it shows you are taking time to listen to them.
- Some people may respond to consistent use of positive phrases such as "David is safe", "David is okay".
- Start to think about making the environment safe e.g. cooker off, ornaments/sharp objects tidied away, direct other service users or the person you are supporting to a different area of the house.
- If the person is prescribed 'as required' medication, it is helpful to administer before the levels of distress become unmanageable. Please refer to person's 'as required medication' (often called PRN) protocol/administer as per medical professional's advice.

Stage 2 – 3

- As the person is escalating in distress and behaviours become more difficult to manage, it can help to give the person space to calm down.

Stage 3 – is about establishing and maintaining safety

- Do not speak.
- Keep yourself safe, give space. Monitor person's safety.

Recovery/Recuperation/Post-incident

- It can take a long time to fully recover from high levels of arousal due to the stress hormones in the person's body.
- Keep this period as low demand as possible to prevent the person from re-escalating.
- The person may be tired and need to rest.
- It can be unhelpful to 'debrief' the individual afterwards. Make sure you give a reasonable amount of time before you try to talk about what has happened.
- The person may seek a lot of reassurance.

If the challenging behaviour continues and/or if there is a risk to the safety of the individual or others, it might be appropriate for your local community learning disability team to offer support. You can contact them via your GP or social worker, or you can contact your local Learning Disability Team directly on the following numbers:

East Dunbartonshire	0141 304 7450
East Renfrewshire	0141 800 7814
Glasgow North East	0141 201 4109
Glasgow North West	0141 232 1333
Glasgow South	0141 276 2337
Inverclyde	01475 715 295
Renfrewshire	0141 207 7800
West Dunbartonshire	01389 698 345 (During COVID restrictions) 0141 562 2331 (Usual Number)

The following resources may be useful:

<https://www.challengingbehaviour.org.uk/supporting-you/for-families/for-families.html>

<https://www.scie.org.uk/publications/ataglace/ataglace37.asp>

http://oxleas.nhs.uk/site-media/cms-downloads/Positive_behaviour_support_families_-_AH_Layout_1.pdf

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-supporting-adults-with-learning-disabilities-and-autistic-adults>

<https://www.challengingbehaviour.org.uk/learning-disability-assets/supportingchildrenandadultswithsevrelarningdisabilitesathomeduringthecoronaviruspandemic.pdf>