

Communication assessment and behaviours of concern

Hagiliassis, N., Johnson, H., Di Marco, M., Solarsh, B., Iacono, T., & Quilliam, C.

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- **Scope**
 - A not-for-profit organisation providing disability services throughout Victoria (Australia) to thousands of children and adults with physical and multiple disabilities. Scope was formerly known as the Spastic Society of Victoria.

www.scopevic.org.au



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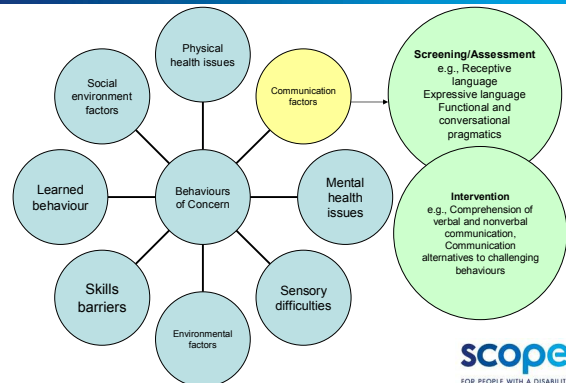
Disability Act 2006, Victoria, Australia

- The Disability Act 2006 (Victoria, Australia).
- Provides for protection of the rights of people with a disability who show challenging behaviour and are subject to restrictive interventions or compulsory treatments.



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Understanding and responding to challenging behaviour: multi-element approach (Lavigna & Willis, 1995)



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Principles of effective communication assessment and intervention

- All behaviour has meaning.
- Need to focus on the service context (Carr et al., 2002; McClean, 2005; Carnaby, 2007).
- Assessments and interventions implemented by a person's normal carers (instead of external specialists) are more likely to be effective (Carr et al., 1999).
- Long-term outcomes depend on collaboration within natural settings (Lowe & Felce, 1994).



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DSW and Allied Health Roles

- Speech pathologist role to screen, assess and intervene around communication issues;
 - Training in administering and interpreting communication assessments.
- BUT*
- Only a small number of speech pathologists (37/400) working in Victoria with people with challenging behaviour (Johnson et al., 2011).
- The role of direct carers is crucial in promoting person-centred positive outcomes for the service user (NSW Department of Ageing, 2009);
 - DSWs as active participants in behaviour support planning (Greene et al., 1984).
- BUT*
- DSWs do not always feel equipped with the skills/knowledge to undertake a comprehensive assessment and then write and develop a behaviour support plan (Clement & Bigby, 2007),



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Aim of project

- To build the capacity of speech pathologists
- To better understand the factors that stakeholders identify as important for:
 - Good communication assessment and intervention for people with behaviours of concern.
 - Effective behaviour support planning more broadly
- To identify key recommendations for practice, policy and research.



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What we did

- We developed a set of resources for communication assessment. These have been developed for speech pathologists mainly, and there is also some information relevant to the role of DSWs.
 - [Assessment, Training & Intervention Resources, children & adults](#)
 - [Functional Communication Training Fact Sheet](#)
 - [Functional Behaviour Assessment tools \(ABC & STAR\)](#)see www.scopevic.org.au
- We interviewed direct support workers, service managers and allied health staff going through the process of communication assessment and broader behaviour support planning.
- We did this at a residential service supporting a number of service users with behaviours of concern subject to restrictive interventions.



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How many people participated? How was data collected?

Participants:

- Service users (n=2),
- DSWs (n=4),
- House coordinator/service managers (n=3)
- Psychologists (n=2)
- Speech pathologists (n=2)
- Occupational therapist (n=1).

Data collection:

- Collected over a six month period via interviews, focus groups, observations and researcher audit trails; analysed thematically.



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Key findings

The need for support workers and allied health professionals to develop rapport and maintain regular contact for monitoring strategies:

"I think possibly if we'd had more time to develop those relationships I might be able to speak with people directly rather than going through (others) and maybe I can speak with people directly."

"It would give me confidence and familiarity and knowledge of the professionals involved. And what keys they held, for locked doors that I face in my everyday world here."

Attention to resources and structures in order for DSWs to participate in behaviour support planning:

"... (staff) need to actually have the resources that they can to develop them [strategies] themselves ... (staff) need access to the computer and email and board maker, and time within their schedule."



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Key findings

1. Resources found to be useful; some resources more useful than others;
2. The development of services that are founded on principles of responsiveness, continuity, collaboration and inter-staff communication;
3. Strengthened opportunities and frameworks for reflective practice for support workers.



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Recommendations – Speech Pathologists

- Development of a set of professional standards and practice guidelines for speech pathologists working in the area of behaviour support.
- Continuing professional development for speech pathologists (including post-graduate speech pathology courses).
- Multidisciplinary community of practice e.g., on-line mechanisms



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Recommendations – Direct Support Workers

- Opportunities/frameworks for reflective practice.
- Training that acknowledges the complexities associated with the DSW role, behaviour support planning and service settings.
- Accessible information (e.g., fact sheets) about communication assessment/intervention.
- Time, resources and structures in order to participate in collaborative behaviour support planning.



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Other ideas and resources

- Learn a bit about communicating with people who have cerebral palsy, intellectual disability or autism spectrum disorder.
- Look at ways of you might change the way you communicate. Using more sign and gesture might help.
- Look at ways you might change the environment to help everyday communication for everyone, such as by using a timetable.
- Talking mats is a simple clear way to help people make choices. The people must be able to recognise pictures.
- Think a communication aid might help? – check some out <http://www.scopevic.org.au/index.php/site/resources/communicationaids>.
- In Victoria you can get a free communication aid go to <http://www.scopevic.org.au/index.php/site/whatweoffer/communicationresourcecentre/necas>
- Ask for help. Talk directly with your speech pathologist. Make sure your supervisor knows and gives you some client free time to do that.



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Resources

- Educational resources: available on the Scope website www.scopevic.org.au
- Assessment, Training and Intervention Resources for Behaviours of Concern for Children and Adults.
- Annotated list of resources (websites, fact sheets, tip sheets, articles, podcasts, training modules, conference presentations).
- Training modules



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