

# Minimising Restrictive Practices and Reducing Risk for All (Part One): *The Team Teach Approach*

## Introduction

At Team Teach Australia & New Zealand we have been providing training for nearly 20 years that promotes the reduction of the use restrictive practices and risk for those being supported, staff working in caring settings, and the organisations that provide these services.

Over this time, we have found that there are some key attitudes, skills and knowledge that can be shared to promote a positive approach to behaviours of concern and what, on occasions, might be unsafe behaviour.

What follows is part one of a two-part series on our key findings that we hope proves useful and we'd be very happy to have further conversations to see how we might support you and your organisation.

## Behaviours of Concern

It is important to remember that not all behaviour described as being of concern by staff is a problem for the person exhibiting the behaviour. It is equally important to remember that not all behaviours of concern are deliberate. Some people are not aware that their behaviour is of concern. Others are aware but cannot help it. Some people cannot control their impulses to act in ways that result in problems for them. They are as frustrated and bewildered by their condition as those around them.

Staff need to remind themselves that often the behaviour is not personal. Professionals have a choice about whether or not to take it personally. People need to be aware of their own responses to a range of behaviours of concern. They can then begin to change their own habitual responses and more effectively influence behaviour change in the people they care for. Even when neurological dysfunction is part of the disability, staff should still try to look for ways to change behaviour. If we focus on the disability we tend to make excuses for behaviours of concern rather than helping people to change it.

In Team Teach the focus is meeting individual needs whilst encouraging growth and development through supported learning. Some people are more susceptible to innate emotional responses than others, but very few people are completely immune. Most people are aware of the buttons which trigger inappropriate responses of disgust, anger and aggression if they are pressed. Staff need to be particularly aware of what affects them because it is only by being honest that they can learn strategies to help them manage their responses. For example, many people who work in the caring professions are confronted by situations which trigger innate disgust responses. Excrement, vomit, urine, blood and spit are all unpleasant, but caring professionals have to deal with them. Self injury, head banging, rocking, teeth grinding, masturbating, grunting, squealing and howling are all forms of behaviour that may be exhibited. The behaviours may not be deliberate but they can be extremely wearing when they are persistent, because they trigger habitual responses. The drip, drip, drip effect of persistent low level disruption, taunting and teasing is a major cause of stress for staff, yet it is not just persistent behaviour which poses the challenge. It is when behaviour is perceived to be

deliberate and personal that staff are most likely to respond in anger. What really seems to push the buttons of staff are defiance, expressions of contempt, sexually explicit and abusive language, threats, pushing and spitting. Behaviours are challenging when we allow them to become personal. Those working with people who have social, emotional, and mental health difficulties have to respond to a cauldron of behaviours, some of which that may be intentionally driven, but often they are not.

## Behaviours that Challenge

The Behaviours that Challenge tabletop activity is included in every Team Teach course. We are all human and experience natural human responses to challenges. Professionals cannot always afford to react naturally. They need to take a step back both physically and mentally. People's behaviour is often driven by feelings: how people feel about themselves and how they feel about the way they have been treated. In the Team Teach model professionals are encouraged to think about how Experiences, Feelings and Behaviours are feed off each other as well as from the reactions of others. Professionals need to control their own reactions so that they do not feed the spiral into conflict. The most effective way of influencing other people's behaviour is by controlling our own. When behaviour is practised over and over it gradually becomes automatic and effortless, freeing the conscious mind to do other things - like dynamic risk assessments.

## Team Teach Thinking

Effective people tend to develop a range of habitual thinking responses which focus on moving forward towards solutions rather than blocking suggestions. In order to do this they have to be flexible in the way they think and respond. They listen carefully to the views of others and take time to think of ways to avoid stalemates and win/lose situations. They tend to act as if they are in control, even when they may not be feeling that confident. They are always looking for a better way of doing things. Effective team members do not try to deal with every situation themselves. Nor do they expect colleagues to cope without help. But they do retain personal responsibility for problems and attempt to move them forward and follow them through to a conclusion, rather than passing them on for others to deal with.

In care settings effective people look forwards not backwards. They always respond to the first sign of acceptable behaviour, no matter what has happened before. They are paid to help people out of difficult situations, but it is also in the interests of carers to respond immediately to any positive behaviour, even if it is inconvenient at the time. The more often people respond immediately to examples of positive behaviour, the greater the likelihood of positive behaviour being repeated. As the opportunities to seize positive behaviour become rarer those moments become more valuable. We should never waste a valuable opportunity. That is why professionals should always welcome people back, accept apologies and seize any opportunity to solve a problem and move on, rather than prolong it over some perceived matter of principle. Habitual movers maintain a sense of proportion and model good practice, which is picked up both by colleagues and the people they care for. They can be just as influential in a positive way, as the habitual blockers and professional cynics can be in a negative way.

## States of Mind

A state of mind involves a particular level of physiological arousal, accompanied by thoughts and feelings. When people are depressed, they tend to have negative thought patterns. As they rehearse negative thoughts they reinforce miserable feelings, and miserable brains tend to generate miserable thoughts. True clinical depression involves a chemical imbalance which may require drug therapy, but some people are just trapped in habitual patterns of thinking, feeling and behaving

which keep them in a miserable loop. They find themselves in a bad mood, without really being aware of how it happened, and without any strategies for changing the situation. Learned helplessness is a state in which people are so crushed, they can no longer motivate themselves to do anything to change their circumstances.

## Choice

The psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, former Professor at Chicago University, dedicated his career to the study of what makes people happy. He identified a key feature of human happiness as the need to feel in control of the events which shape our lives. When people suffer from depression they often report a feeling of helplessness, and a loss of control. Stress is not just about the demands being made on a person, but the capacity of that person to control events and do something about it. The perception that people have choices and can influence the events which shape their lives both reduces stress levels and increases the endorphins in the brain that are associated with pleasure. One way of influencing other people's feelings in a positive way is to create choices for them. This is particularly important for people who are looked after by others and who often have decisions made on their behalf, which can erode their perception of control and participation. For that reason it is important that an effort is made to allow participation in decision making at all levels. Nobody has unlimited choice and not everything is open to negotiation. However, opportunities can be created to allow people a limited range of options to choose from. Even when the options available are not open to negotiation, the timing and order of delivery could be.

## Summary

In part one I have introduced some of the key discussion points that, in our experience, are important to consider within organisations and for individuals working in those settings to increase self-reflection.

In Part Two I will share some strategies and approaches we have found it useful for organisations and staff to consider implementing.

At Team Teach we are very keen to further share our experience in other 'caring' sectors with those in the Aged Care sector and also to learn from those with deep sector knowledge to refine our training and support to enable better services to be provided, so please do get in touch if you'd like to explore how we might partner with you to ensure how we keep everyone safe.

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