

## External Causes of Behaviours that Challenge

**When people have limited expressive language abilities they are more likely to show behaviours that challenge.**

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### **Others responses to behaviour alters the likelihood of it being shown in the future**

When we think about the external causes of behaviours that challenge we mean factors that are in the environment that seem to affect the level of behaviours that challenge. The most important of these is the effect that the responses of others have on the behaviours that challenge and this usually takes two forms: presenting rewarding attention and removing unpleasant demands. These are described in turn in the following sections.

### **Thinking about behaviours that challenge as communication**

Another way to think about behaviours that challenge, as we describe these processes of reinforcement in the following sections, is to consider behaviours that challenge as a form of communication. This is a useful analogy as it allows us to understand that behaviours that challenge can, in fact, be a very adaptive behaviour in some respects. This is particularly the case when people have poor expressive [communication](#) and a limited repertoire of behaviours that they may call upon in order to affect the behaviour of others.

Effective and appropriate ways of communicating that someone with limited verbal language might use include:

Eye-pointing, leading you toward an object or place, making sounds, nudging you, sign language, Picture Exchange Communication System (PECS)

Other effective (but inappropriate) ways of communicating with people that someone with limited expressive language might use include:

Crying, screaming, shouting, hitting, spitting, scratching (self or others), throwing objects, damaging objects, sitting down and refusing to get up, grabbing.

Sometimes, although individuals with intellectual disability may have learnt effective and appropriate ways of communicating (such as Makaton or PECS), they will use inappropriate ways of communicating (such as hitting and kicking) in some situations because they may be more efficient ways of indicating their needs and desires. In other words, using inappropriate ways of communicating can sometimes get a quicker and more reliable response

from other people than appropriate methods.

**NEXT: Positive social reinforcement**