

## 7.3. Undertaking structured behavioural observation

### Planning the observation

- An ability to identify when behavioural observations can contribute to the assessment and formulation process (usually when behavioural issues are relevant to, or are the focus of, the intervention)
- An ability to identify a specific focus for observation (e.g. a particular behaviour, interaction or event)
- An ability to draw on knowledge of the main strategies used in behavioural observations, in order to select the most appropriate method
- An ability to draw on information from the assessment to establish when, where and for how long observations should take place (e.g. drawing on information about the settings or circumstances are most likely to elicit particular behaviours, or the frequency of a specific behaviour)
- An ability to reflect on one's own perceptual or attitudinal biases and maintain an objective, open-minded stance
- An ability to draw on knowledge of the ways that subjective judgments can introduce bias (e.g. where the meaning of a behaviour is ambiguous, or where previous observations of the child/young person in other contexts influence the observer's judgments)
- Where possible, an ability to obtain consent from the child/young person and/or their carer(s) to carry out the observation

### Gathering data

- An ability to draw on knowledge of the main strategies used for naturalistic behavioural observation (including their strengths and weaknesses)
- An ability to engage relevant members of the team in collecting and maintaining diary records
- An ability to explain the rationale for, and procedures used in, behavioural observation (i.e. the need to gather accurate information about a behaviour to plan an intervention)
- An ability to make use of diary records (a chronological record of behaviour made after it occurs), and:
  - an ability to draw on knowledge of the potential limitations of diary records (e.g. consistency and accuracy of recording, observer bias, the risk that unstructured recording will result in too much detail)
- An ability to make use of a 'running record' (a sequential record made while the behaviour is occurring, which identifies the circumstances surrounding particular events or activities)
- An ability to make use of 'time sampling' (recording the frequency with which behaviours occur within a given period of time)
- An ability to make use of event sampling (recording the frequency of behaviours that occur when a particular event or activity takes place), and:
  - an ability to draw on knowledge of the potential limitations of event sampling (e.g. the challenge of applying this to covert behaviours, its inefficacy for behaviours that only occur infrequently)



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■ Across all approaches to observation, an ability accurately to record:

- the frequency of target behaviours
- the content of target behaviours
- environmental factors that may be temporally related to target behaviours

### Ability to monitor the child/young person's environment using an ABC chart

■ An ability to draw on knowledge of the use an ABC chart to monitor the child/young person's environment and to identify:

- Antecedents: setting conditions and specific triggers for the target behaviour
- Behaviour: a record of target behaviour and any variations in severity and frequency in different settings and contexts
- Consequences: what happens after the target behaviour occurs, identifying, possible reinforcers (both positive and negative)

■ An ability to draw up an ABC chart that includes:

- a clear operational definition of the behaviours to be observed
- any guidance that is needed to obtain reliable recordings (e.g. criteria for defining when one incident ends and another begins)

■ An ability to select the contexts and situations to be monitored, guided by knowledge of the contexts and people associated with a greater likelihood of the target behaviour occurring

■ An ability to engage other people in completing the chart, where required, offering appropriate training and checking inter-rater reliability

### Ability to minimise 'reactance'

■ An ability to reduce the risk that the process of observation produces significant changes to behaviour:

- where the observer is in close proximity to the child/young person, an ability to maintain an unobtrusive stance and minimise interaction with them
- an ability for the observer to place themselves in a position that minimises their visibility and their impact on the behaviour being observed

### Ability to draw appropriate inferences from the observation

■ An ability to ensure that conclusions about behaviour need to be based on adequate evidence

■ An ability to recognise when inferences about the causes of, or relationship between behaviours are being made and to record them as needed

■ An ability to draw on knowledge of cultural differences in the meaning of behaviour and communication, when attempting to understand the function of those behaviours



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	■ An ability to draw on knowledge of developmental and learning theories to help understand:	
	■	how the activities of the people interacting with the child/young person impact on that person’s behaviour
	■	how the activities of the child/young person impact on their environment
	■	An ability to include an account of the child/young person’s perspective when interpreting their behaviours or circumstances (e.g. their capacity to understand the impact of their behaviour)