

The Behaviour Checklist



Finding the things that matter for children with an intellectual disability

Are you worried about your child's behaviour? This checklist will help you to quickly look through a list of things that might be causing your child to behave in ways that are concerning.

Deciding whether something needs to change.

The checklist can help you to decide whether something needs to change. Once you've completed the checklist, take it to your healthcare professional and talk to them about what you've found.

How will this help?

The checklist can help to structure conversations that can generate new ideas about how to create change. The checklist doesn't offer solutions, but it does help you and your healthcare professional to find new ways to support or improve your child's behaviour.



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Naming the behaviour

Name the behaviour of concern as clearly as you can so that everyone knows what is meant (e.g., hitting others, banging their head on objects or surfaces, self-isolation, screaming, throwing themselves to the floor, knocking objects over, emotional outbursts, etc.). Your child might also be showing a behaviour of concern that isn't in this list. Sometimes it can be hard to think about which behaviour to focus on if many occur together, so ask yourself, what harm does a behaviour do? What effect does it have on the person and others? And how concerned are you about the behaviour?

Date:					
Diagnosis received: Yes ☐ No ☐ If yes, please state the diagnosis:					
Behaviour of concern:					
How long has this been occurring for (e.g., how many months or years?)					
Frequency: How often has the behaviour occurred in the last month?	1 Never	2 Once a month	3 Once a week	4 Once a day	5 At least once an hour
Caregiver response: How often has the caregiver had to prevent or stop the behaviour in the last month?	1 Never	2 At least once a month	3 At least once a week	4 At least once a day	5 At least once an hour
Child distress: This rating gives you a baseline. If your child is showing signs of distress, we would want to see a reduction in distress over time.	1 No signs of distress	2 Occasional minor distress or brief episodes of distress	3 Some episodes of distress that lasted quite a while or were quite noticeable	4 Frequent episodes of distress that lasted a while or were quite noticeable	5 Very distressed for long periods
Caregiver distress: If you are showing signs of distress, we would want to see a reduction in your distress over time.	1 No signs of distress	2 Occasional minor distress or brief episodes of distress	3 Some episodes of distress that lasted quite a while or were quite noticeable	4 Frequent episodes of distress that lasted a while or were quite noticeable	5 Very distressed for long periods

Checklist items

Each of these items could be a potential cause of the behaviour of concern. Pain and discomfort are often the most overlooked cause and should always be considered carefully. Consider the nature of the behaviour during the last month as you rate each item. Some of the checklist items might be associated with your child's diagnosis and so this should be considered when completing the checklist.

1. Pain and discomfort: Pain is often overlooked, but evidence shows that this is an important factor to consider. Also consider oral pain, constipation, reflux, and ear infections.

Signs to look out for: Facial expression (two lines in forehead), crying\groaning\screaming, cannot be comforted, frequent leg movements, unable to be still, defends a body area, pokes or touches an area of their body, Behaviour or negative emotion occurs unexpectedly. Look out for changes in patterns around food such as change in appetite, avoidance of foods, changes in habit, and chewing and drooling more than usual.

Notes: Affects sleep. Can trigger learned behaviours and anxiety. Can cause emotional and physical stress.

1	2	3	4	N/S
No sign of this	Some signs but not really a concern	Definitely signs of this and causes concern	Definitely signs of this and a significant concern	Not sure, need to check this

Download Pain: A Guide for Parents: <https://cerebra.org.uk/download/pain-a-guide-for-parents/>

2. Sensory avoidance or sensory seeking

Signs to look out for: Sensory avoidance: moves away from or avoids noises, textures, lights, temperatures, tastes, and smells. Sensory seeking: seeks lots of touch (people and textures), hugs, movement, intense motion, tastes, and smells. Sensory seeking might also look like over-fidgeting, bumping and crashing activities, and excessive food-seeking.

Notes: Can affect sleep. Can cause phobias to develop. Can trigger learned behaviours and anxiety. Not the same as sensory impairments such as visual or hearing impairments. Can be related to strong social seeking.

1	2	3	4	N/S
No sign of this	Some signs but not really a concern	Definitely signs of this and causes concern	Definitely signs of this and a significant concern	Not sure, need to check this

Download Sensory Processing: A Guide for Parents: <https://cerebra.org.uk/download/sensory-processing/>

3. Anxiety

Signs to look out for: Moves away from, resists, refuses to be in or avoids situations or events. When in situations or events seeks reassurance or clings to someone. Appears fearful or tense (muscles are tense). Might stay in a situation or event but is fearful, tense, and distressed.

Notes: Can affect sleep, pain, and discomfort. Can be a response to sensory sensitivity, or unpredictable events or situations. Can be a trigger for learned behaviours. Can cause low mood. Anxiety can occur in response to a specific situation, or it can be more widespread and long-lasting.

1	2	3	4	N/S
No sign of this	Some signs but not really a concern	Definitely signs of this and causes concern	Definitely signs of this and a significant concern	Not sure, need to check this

Download Anxiety: A Guide for Parents: <https://cerebra.org.uk/download/anxiety-guide-a-guide-for-parents/>

4. Low mood

Signs to look out for: Doesn't enjoy activities or being with people, low levels of interest in things around them, rarely smiles or laughs (if at all).

Notes: Can be caused by pain and discomfort, anxiety, environments that are unstimulating or lack choice and opportunity.

1	2	3	4	N/S
No sign of this	Some signs but not really a concern	Definitely signs of this and causes concern	Definitely signs of this and a significant concern	Not sure, need to check this

Download Anxiety: A Guide for Parents: <https://cerebra.org.uk/download/anxiety-guide-a-guide-for-parents/>

5. Sleep difficulties

Signs to look out for: (As appropriate for age and family's desired sleep behaviours). Wakes during the night or very early, cannot settle to sleep, needs to sleep with parent or carer, snores a lot, sleepy in the day.

Notes: Anxiety, pain, discomfort, and breathing difficulties can contribute to sleep difficulties. Sleep difficulties can also be caused by lots of other things that haven't been listed here. Poor sleep can make impulsivity and learned behaviours more likely.

1	2	3	4	N/S
No sign of this	Some signs but not really a concern	Definitely signs of this and causes concern	Definitely signs of this and a significant concern	Not sure, need to check this

Download Sleep: A Guide for Parents: <https://cerebra.org.uk/download/sleep-a-guide-for-parents/>

6. Impulsivity

Signs to look out for: Cannot wait, needs instant response, wants things immediately, interrupts, excitable, finds it difficult to wait their turn, seems to do things without stopping to think, responds to instructions before they've been fully given.

Notes: Can make anxiety and learned behaviours more likely.

1	2	3	4	N/S
No sign of this	Some signs but not really a concern	Definitely signs of this and causes concern	Definitely signs of this and a significant concern	Not sure, need to check this

Download Cognitive Difference: Cognitive Inflexibility and Impulsivity: <https://cerebra.org.uk/download/cognitive-difference-cognitive-inflexibility-and-impulsivity/>

7. Insists on sameness

Signs to look out for: Must have routine, resists or dislikes change, checks things a lot, tidies and arranges a lot.

Notes: Insistence on sameness might be response to anxiety and could also be a cause of anxiety. Can lead to avoiding events or places. Could trigger a learned behaviour.

1	2	3	4	N/S
No sign of this	Some signs but not really a concern	Definitely signs of this and causes concern	Definitely signs of this and a significant concern	Not sure, need to check this

Download Cognitive Difference: Cognitive Inflexibility and Impulsivity: <https://cerebra.org.uk/download/cognitive-difference-cognitive-inflexibility-and-impulsivity/>

8. Strong social seeking

Signs to look out for: A particularly strong motivation for seeking out people in general or a specific person. Strong reaction if not able to be with that person.

Notes: Can be related to anxiety. Can make learned behaviours more likely. A strong motivation for social contact can be a normal part of development, so consider whether the strong desire for social contact is connected to the child's developmental stage or not.

1	2	3	4	N/S
No sign of this	Some signs but not really a concern	Definitely signs of this and causes concern	Definitely signs of this and a significant concern	Not sure, need to check this

9. Strong social avoidance

Signs to look out for: Moves away from or refuses to be with others. Avoids social events or activities.

Notes: Can be related to anxiety, particularly social anxiety. Can make learned behaviours more likely.

1 No sign of this	2 Some signs but not really a concern	3 Definitely signs of this and causes concern	4 Definitely signs of this and a significant concern	N/S Not sure, need to check this
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Communication

Problems with verbal and non-verbal communication can increase distress and the occurrence of behaviours of concern. Think about how your child communicates the needs listed below.

10. Communication, verbal or non-verbal (wanting, needing): Child can express the following needs:

	1 All of the time or very nearly	2 Most of the time	3 Some of the time	4 Not at all or hit and miss	N/S Not sure, need to check this
Can the child communicate that they want something to start?	1	2	3	4	N/S
Can the child communicate that they want something to stop?	1	2	3	4	N/S
Can the child communicate that they want social contact?	1	2	3	4	N/S
Can the child communicate that they want food or drink?	1	2	3	4	N/S

Communication continued....					
	1 All of the time or very nearly	2 Most of the time	3 Some of the time	4 Not at all or hit and miss	N/S Not sure, need to check this
Can the child communicate that they want an activity or object?	1	2	3	4	N/S
Can the child communicate that they want help?	1	2	3	4	N/S
Can the child communicate that they want to go somewhere?	1	2	3	4	N/S
Download Cognitive Difference: Cognitive Inflexibility and Impulsivity: https://cerebra.org.uk/download/communication-with-children-with-severe-or-profound-intellectual-disabilities/					

Learned behaviour

Recognising whether the behaviour of concern is learned or not is helpful for understanding the cause of the behaviour. Think about whether the behaviour of concern is triggered by something such as being asked to do something, go somewhere, stop doing something, someone moving away from the person, being refused or unable get something, or going into a specific place. If it's a learned behaviour, it tends to stop when the trigger is removed or stops.

1.1. Learned behaviour

Signs to look out for: Behaviour is triggered by something such as being asked to do something, go somewhere, stop doing something, someone moving away from that person, being refused or unable to get something, going into a specific place. Behaviour tends to stop when the trigger is removed or stops.

Notes: Probably the most common cause of behaviours but is affected by nearly all other checklist items.

1 There is strong evidence of learned behaviour	2 There is some evidence of learned behaviour	3 There isn't any evidence of learned behaviour	4 Not sure
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Notes

Have you ever checked for pain (e.g., dental or ear pain)? ☐

Do you need to speak to the GP or dentist? ☐

Have you considered your own wellbeing? ☐

Has your child experienced an extremely positive or negative situation recently? ☐

Have you checked the downloadable guides for parents from www.Cerebra.org.uk? ☐

For more resources, please access the Find Resources website: www.findresources.co.uk

Space for notes:

Notes

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