

# Behaviour and Communication

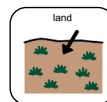
## The Impact of School Actions on Individuals and Families

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*Parent and General Manager, Two Way Street*

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*Director and Speech Pathologist, Two Way Street*



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## About us



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## About Us

**We believe in a world where communication brings autonomy, belonging, connection and opportunity for all.**

### Online Learning

Designed to guide you confidently into different types of AAC, step-by-step, for better conversations

### Consultation & Training

We work with health professional and educators to support strategies for implementing AAC in your setting

### PODD & Resource Development

Following a consultation with our Senior Speech Pathologists, we align your person's language and access requirements with the right communication tools for maximum autonomy

### Communication Access Accreditation

We consult with, train and create resources for organisations seeking to become more communication accessible.



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## Acknowledgement of Cultural Influence

We recognise the cultural biases and influences that shape our perspectives in the information that we share, particularly the predominant Western viewpoints on communication, autonomy, belonging, connection and opportunity.

While we strive to be inclusive of all individuals and communicators, we understand that our own cultural backgrounds may pose limitations. We invite everyone to engage with the information and resources we share through their own cultural lenses, and we welcome feedback and modifications that enhance our collective understanding.



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## Terminology

**Complex Communication Needs (CCN) is becoming an out of date term**

- AAC and PWCD may not be universally preferred.
- Individuals have the right to choose their own terminology.
- Two Way Street has chosen to use the term “People with Communication Disability” (PWCD).
- The term PWCD reflects a model of disability recognizing dynamic interactions between various factors.
- Meaningful communication is shaped by individual, communication partners, environment, and conversation topics.
- PWCD encompasses anyone experiencing breakdowns in communication due to personal methods, communication partners, or barriers from a non-inclusive environment.

## All modes without judgement



## Acknowledgement of Contributors

**We are thankful that the people we support have consented to using their photos and video**

- You are welcome to take photos of content slides
- Please do not take photos or videos of slides that have people on them
- We can provide de-identified copies



## Outline for Today

- Suspensions at school
- Effects on communities
- Whole School strategy
- Autonomy and Control
- Environments of Concern
- Communicating human needs
- Tools and resources



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### Notice of suspension from school

[REDACTED]

Dear [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] has been suspended from school for a period of 2 school days from [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] has been suspended because I have reasonable grounds to believe that he has threatened or perpetrated violence.

A brief reason for the suspension is [REDACTED]

A *Reconnection Meeting* has been arranged for [REDACTED] Thursday morning.

At the *Reconnection Meeting* we will:

- talk about the reasons for suspension
- plan [REDACTED] return to school
- work together on a behaviour support plan. The behaviour support plan is a plan to support [REDACTED] safe and positive behaviour in future.



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## We agree that...

- Suspension and expulsion are ineffective.
- Clear relationship between school suspensions and a range of detrimental health outcomes.
- Students with a disability are disproportionately excluded from schools.
- Inequitable access to education perpetuates inequalities.
- Inclusion creates better outcomes for all students.
- 40 years of research favours inclusion over segregation.



### Our purpose – why we are here

We create a better future for all Australians through education.



Down, B., Sullivan, A., Tippet, N., Johnson, B., Manolev, J., & Robinson, J., (2024). What is missing in policy discourses about school exclusions?, *Critical Studies in Education*,



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## Sticks and stones

“...threatened or perpetrated violence...”

“...reason for the suspension is:...”

### Why do behaviour problems happen?

Most students behave safely and positively if they can. When a student can't, it's usually because they don't have the skills to do what they are being asked to do.

A student might still be learning communication, emotional or social skills. Or the student might not be able to use their skills because they are feeling upset, stressed or unwell. Some students are trying to meet their needs for friendship, respect and inclusion, but haven't done this in the best way.

### How does suspension or exclusion help?

Suspension and exclusion are not used as punishment. They are responses to student behaviour that affects the safety and learning of others.

Suspension and exclusion:

- help schools to be safe and positive learning places for everyone
- are used when other things have not helped students to behave safely and positively
- are problem solving processes
- help students, parents, carers and the school work out how to support students to behave safely and positively in future.



Department for Education: Suspension and exclusion parent and carer fact sheet



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## Impacts of suspension and seclusion

- Student
- Peers
- Family
- Staff
- Community



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**“I communicated in the only way I could,  
my body”**

Jordyn Zimmerman

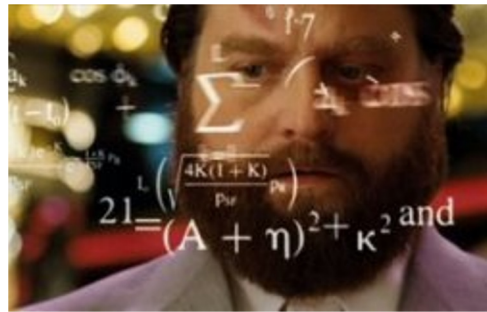


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Behaviour = Communication

Communication = sender transfers thoughts into a message that is sent to the receiver who must decode meaning and interpret the message.

What is the meaning?



**Close your eyes**

## Plutchik's Wheel of Emotions

- In the moment

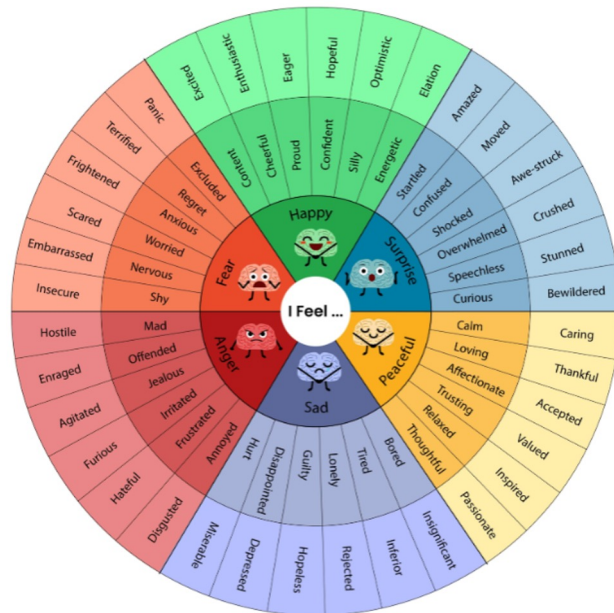


Image source: <https://mentalhealthcenterkids.com/blogs/articles/emotion-wheel-for-kids>



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# Close your eyes



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## Plutchik's Wheel of Emotions

- In the moment
- In the moment before

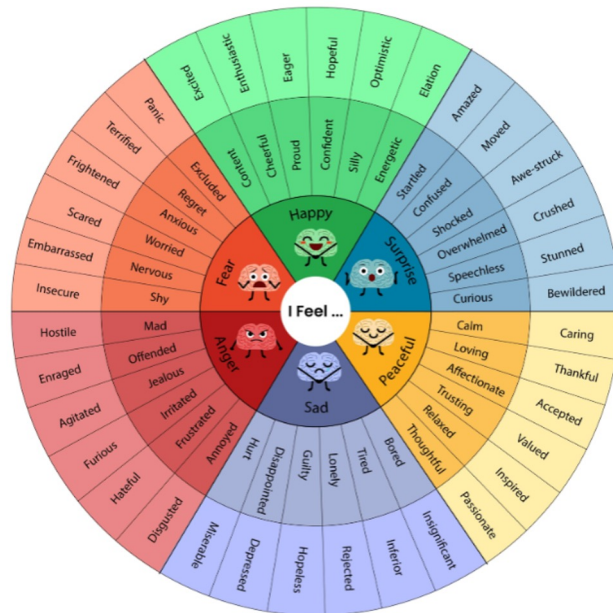


Image source: <https://mentalhealthcenterkids.com/blogs/articles/emotion-wheel-for-kids>



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# Close your eyes



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## Plutchik's Wheel of Emotions

- In the moment
- In the moment before
- In the moment before that

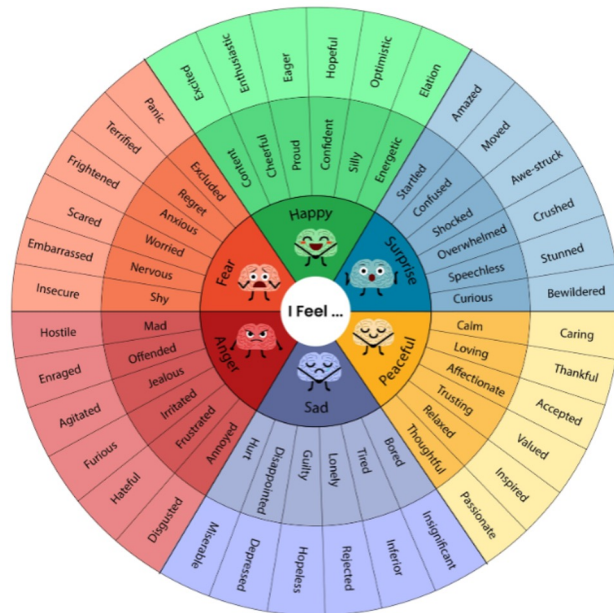
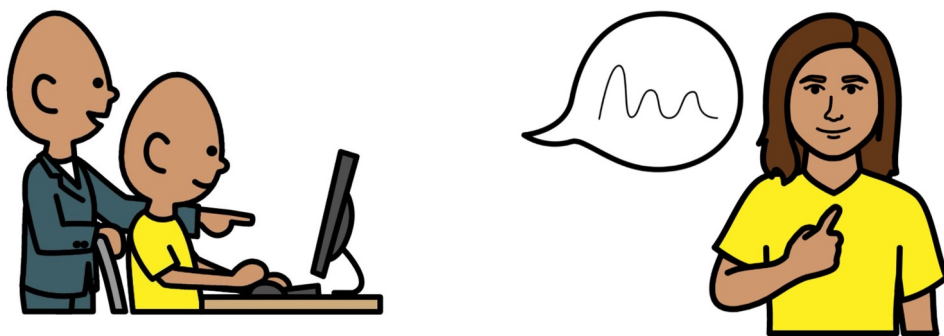


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## Autonomy and Control and Consistency



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## A School Solution

**Student** → **Class** → **School**

- Physical feeling
- What can I do
- What can others do
- Tolerance varies
- Build trust: consistency, consistency, consistency



**It's about skill,  
not will.**

Rating	How does this feel?	How does look?	What makes me feel this way?	How can I tell?	What can I do?	What can others do?
5		Angry Red face Shaking	When I don't think anyone understands how I am feeling.	Shout Throw things	Space and time Don't talk to me	Leave me alone Give me some space
4		Irritated Frustrated	When people ignore me When I lose at table tennis in a close match When I can't find something I'm looking for.	Throw things	Show my card Take a break Get outside	Don't ask me too many questions Leave me alone Don't ask me to drink water
3		Annoyed Worried Butterflies in stomach Heart beats faster	People talking too much When things don't go as planned	Pacing Talking	Walk to the park/outside Play table tennis or b/ball Ask for help Take a break Listening to my "happy" music	Go for a walk with me Suggest I take a break
2		Feeling a little anxious but mostly calm	Staff changeover School days		Take breathers Fidget toys Take a break Listening to my "happy" music	Suggest I take a break Offer me fidget toys
1		Feeling happy, calm, good, energetic, listening	A good night sleep OTFC Table Tennis Action Figures	Feeling happy Feeling springy Feeling light	Keep going	Let me keep going Tell me I am doing well

## Communication strategies

- Efficient
- Age appropriate
- Multi-modal
- Respected



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If they haven't got well being,  
they haven't got well learning.

Cheryl Jercic, Authentic Inclusion

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## The language we use



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### Terminology

- Often terms used are 'Behaviours of concern' and 'Challenging behaviour'.
- These terms may imply:
  - that it is **intentional** or **understood by the person** as harmful to others
  - that **they can stop doing it if they choose to**
  - that only **neurotypical or conventional** methods of communication should be acknowledged
  - that the **responsibility is on the individual** rather a two way process, and/or
  - that their actions are **not considered as messages or initiations of messages** unless they fit societal acceptance.



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## Autonomy and Control

"In its simplest sense, **autonomy** is about a person's ability to act on his or her own values and interests"

<https://www.ifamilystudy.eu/what-is-autonomy-and-why-does-it-matter/>

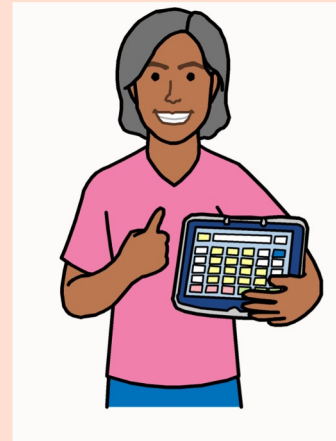
Autonomy is crucial  
We are most calm and content when we feel in control.

Autonomy is:

- Self governance
- Choice and control over one's own life
- Being understood

(Erin Sheldon - Communication for Choice and Control. July 2019)

As humans, we begin our journey toward autonomy from birth.



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If we can't express ourselves with words then we have to find another way to express our autonomy.

Sometimes the "behaviour" that you see was not the first time that person expressed that message. It's just the first time you noticed it.

Sometimes the "behaviour" that you see is the 'final straw'.

Sometimes the "behaviour" that you see is not related to anything that you can see, hear, feel or know.



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### “Behaviour” may be:

- ignored
- misinterpreted
- extinguished
- punished

### and this may lead to

- escalation
- withdrawal
- self harm

### Question?

Are the ‘behaviours’ that we are seeing just a natural human response to unmet or unappreciated human needs?



## Let's discuss: Environments of Concern

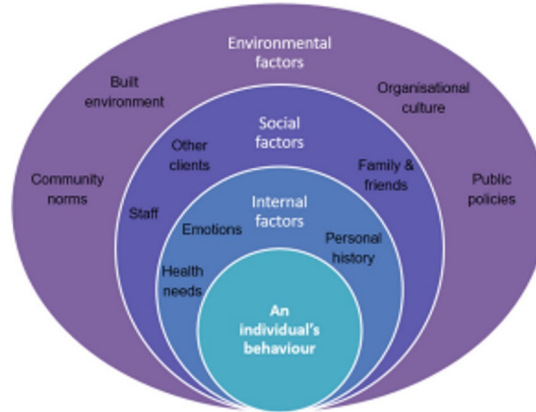


Figure 1. A social-ecological model adapted for behaviour.



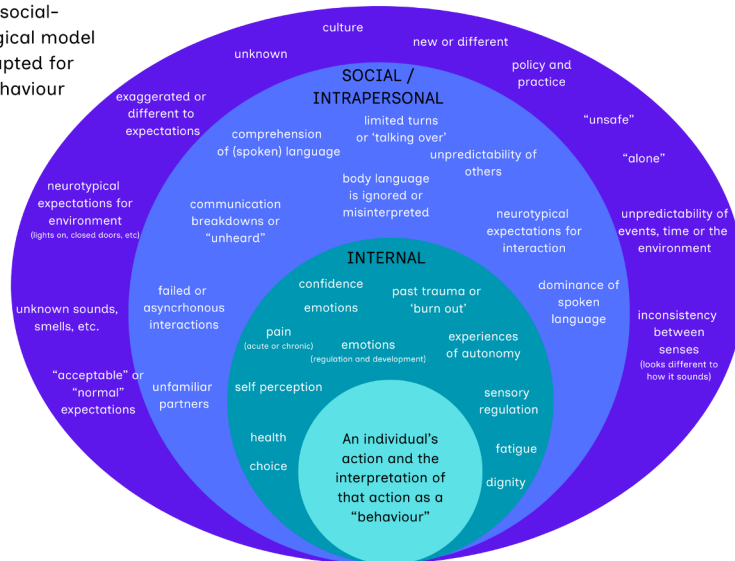
Jorgensen, Nankervis & Chan (2023)



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## More details: Environments of Concern

A social-ecological model adapted for behaviour

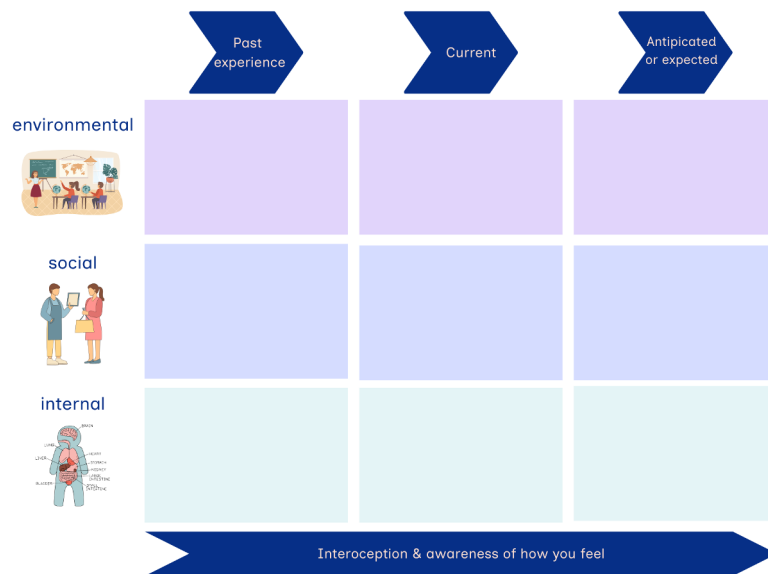


Adapted from: Jorgensen, Nankervis & Chan (2023)



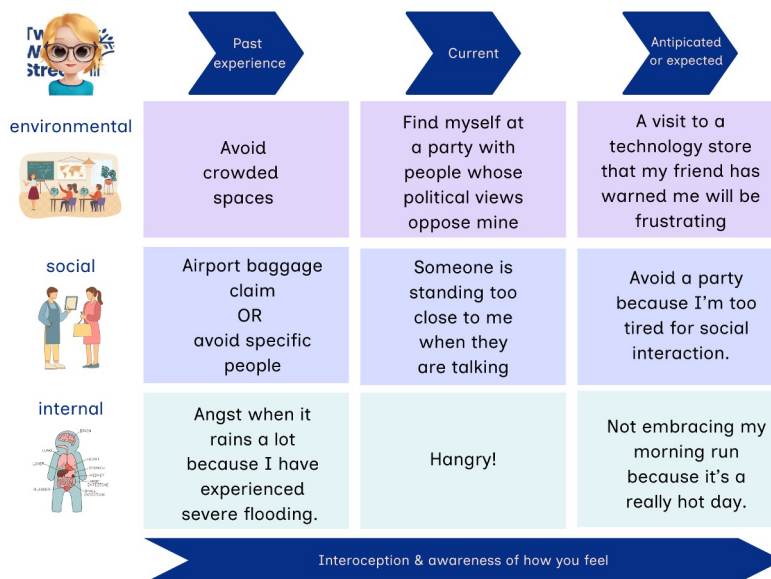
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## A matrix to consider



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## My own example



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## Put yourself in their shoes



environmental



social



internal



Past  
experience

I can't help it but I stiffen my body when "put" on the change table after a mishap last year

Current

I am being asked to sit still and listen but I can't do both of those things at once. I have to move to listen.

Anticipated  
or expected

I often refuse to enter the classroom in the morning because I don't know if smells like cleaning product.

I avoid the playground because some children do not understand my signs so I never get a turn.

The teacher said Maths first, then iPad. I don't understand how many questions in 'Maths'

New people make me anxious so I push them away. (interactions are unpredictable)

My teacher last year would lock the classroom door to confine me. I don't like teachers.

Feeling dysregulated today due to change in routine. Anything could kick me off!

I am not confident to get in the pool at the swimming carnival.

Interoception & awareness of how you feel



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Is the behaviour, actually a  
“very functional way to quickly and  
easily communicate distress?”

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**“Targeting behaviour without offering an alternative method of communicating its underlying message is a strategy with a very short shelf life.”**

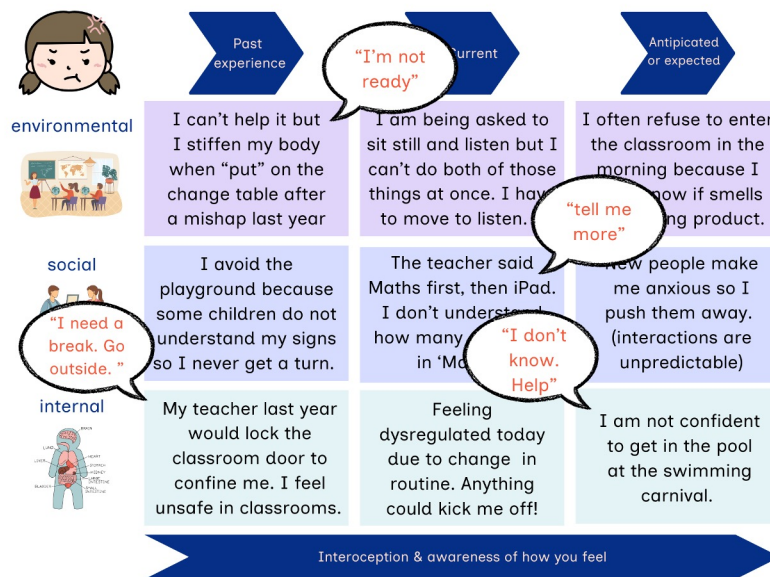


<https://www.facebook.com/adiaryofamom/posts/pfbid02YHKRwL1qcRZVGih98B7oYMCno2hZ3UrgppECXYHB46jRkHs3wDHQvaiBD65Cm73mJ>



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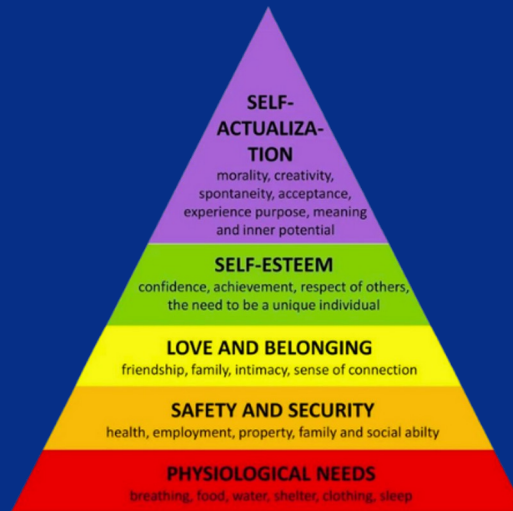
## Give them another way



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# Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

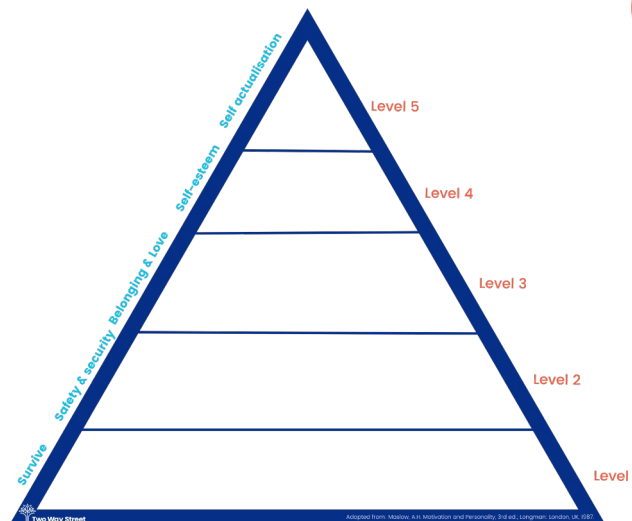


<https://www.simplypsychology.org/maslow.html>



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## Communicating human needs



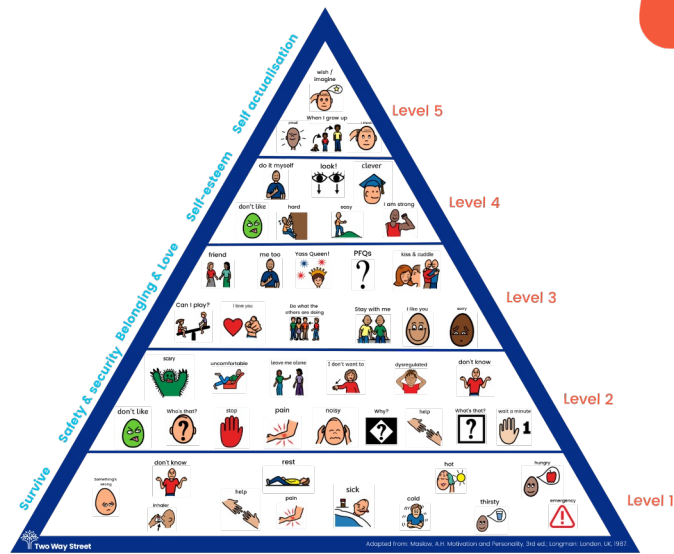
Adapted from: Maslow, A.H. Motivation and Personality, 3rd ed., Longman, London, UK, 1957.

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## Communicating human needs - Vocabulary ideas



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If behaviour is communication, why do people have behaviour support plans without communication support plans?



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# It's a Two Way Street

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# Resources and Communication Tools

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## Can you think of ways that someone you know expresses their autonomy with “behaviour”?

Write down what you see, what you think they are expressing, and how they might be feeling.



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**SOME CLUES ABOUT WHAT I'M THINKING**

People who know me can watch and learn the ways I communicate. You can help too. Sometimes I do the same things for more than one message but if you watch carefully and check with me, we can figure out the message together. This chart can help you and I to figure things out together. Please add to it as you get to know me.

WHAT YOU SEE	WHAT IT MIGHT MEAN (Can be more than 1 thing)	SHOW ME HOW TO SAY IT (WHAT TO MODEL)	WHAT I MIGHT NEED

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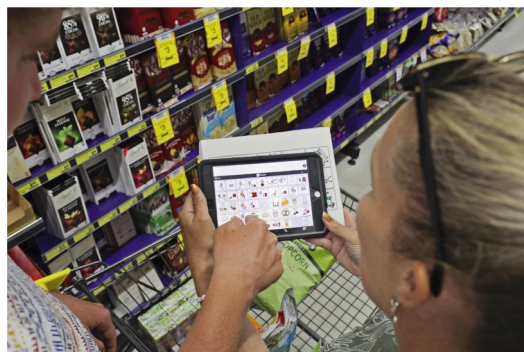
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## Robust communication system

**There are a wide range of reasons why “behaviours” occur. A person’s communication system should have all those words**

But owning an AAC system doesn’t mean you know how to use it. Do your students know how to communicate:

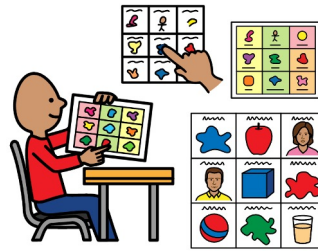
- I am dysregulated, I need a sensory break
- I’m in pain and where
- “stop it” or “don’t touch me”
- I need more information
- you’re not listening to me
- more “appropriate” ways of getting attention



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## Communication Boards

- General term - Core Word Boards / Natural Aided Language Displays/ Boards
- Number of cells = range of vocabulary
- Aided Language Display (ALD) / General Interactive Displays - TWS, Chat Now
- Useful within context
- Lots of options to download on the internet
- Know the limitations



Core vocabulary is a statistical concept related to overall word frequency.

The most frequently occurring words = 80% of the actual words spoken

78 – 80% of the words we use daily come from a set of fewer than 350 - 400 words

The 50 most frequently occurring words account for 40-50 % of total words said, while the 100 most frequently occurring = 60% of what is said



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<https://www.vantatenhove.com/files/handouts/CoreVocabWithECDCommunicators.pdf>



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## Adjunct quick communication

During an escalation of behaviour, it can be helpful to have additional strategies alongside a robust communication method.

Consider:

- what is wrong
- what could help
- remember to consider the vocabulary from your student's perspective
- collect information from multiple sources
- ensure the helping symbols are related to the context



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Acknowledge what she is telling you with her body. "I think you're telling me...", "I see that you are.."

uh oh      Something's wrong      upset, crying      don't like

"Maybe you are...."

scared      hot      I don't want to do it      don't know

children      playground

"It's recess/lunch time. (Add direction as required) maybe you could...."

library      playground      music      something else

Two Way Street

AUSTRALIAN INCLUSIVE  
SCHOOLING CONFERENCE  
AISC 2025

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## Stories to assist understanding

**Stories can help people understand what's happening, what they could do to communicate, and what can help.**

We want the story to be supportive, positive and based around helping our student rather than getting the student to "behave".

- what's the situation
- what keeps the student feel safe
- show the student how they can communicate and what they could communicate
- give the student ideas of what they can do to help them feel better or another option



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## Visual schedules for self talk, not compliance

Visual schedules are a great strategy to help students know what is about to happen.

Consider the following:

- can the student access their system while reviewing the schedule
- does the schedule focus only on complying with tasks
- can you build in ways for the student to control what is happening
- does the student have the ability to control what's happening outside of 'behaviours of concern'



## Another example of self-talk

close popup		how am I feeling?	take 4 deep breaths	I feel frustrated	My story
on the weekend I ate lots of		what just happened?	it's ok to need some quiet time	it's not fair	save to button
I did an easter egg hunt with		how are other people thinking now?	everyone makes mistakes sometimes	I don't want to do it	
		what could I do next time?	I need to make good choices	they don't understand	
		things don't always go my way			
		if I make bad choices I miss out on things			

## Reviewing after the fact

Sometime's our students are so distressed that it can't be a learning moment. We need to revisit once they have calmed down.

- make sure everyone is safe
- help the student to calm down
- check in: "hey I saw you were really upset before"
- suggest: "maybe you were saying 'I need to move', 'I'm uncomfortable', or 'something else'.
- link: "I noticed that bouncing on the trampoline helped"



## Match the intent

Consider how the student would replace this behaviour?  
Does the message you're suggesting match the kinetic and emotional energy?

- huge emotional and kinetic response to an unmet need doesn't match "I don't want to"
- what can we do?
- swearing?
- as teachers and educators, it's going to be really hard to teach students to swear because it's technically against the rules - who can assist? are there other options?



## Be OAWSM!

