



Registered
NDIS
Provider

Understanding Behaviour Challenges in Day to Day Life

Prism Early Intervention

Sumit Behl

Jason Hugh Ontario



Objectives



01

Understand behaviour as communication

02

Topography vs Functions of behaviour

03

Recognise the link between skill gaps and challenging behaviours

04

Apply strategies using real-life examples

05

Reflect through an interactive activity

Understand behaviour as communication

Behaviour is a form of communication

All behaviour serves a purpose - Behaviour communicates a need

When communication skills are limited, other behaviour increases
“Challenging behaviour” often reflects unmet needs

Key Message:

If a person had the skill, they would use it.



“I’m hungry!”

5 months
“Waaah”

1 years
Pulling
parents
toward
milk
bottle

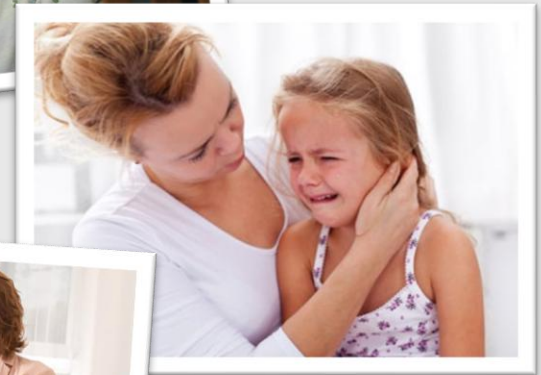
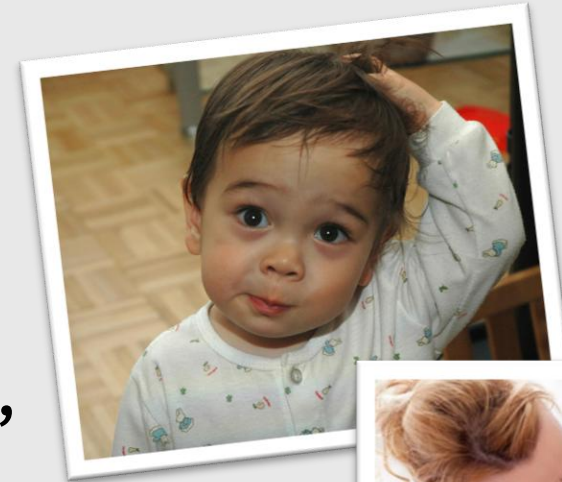
2 years
“Food
please”

5 years
“I’m
hungry”

10 years
“What
are we
eating
today?”

What Might Behaviour Be Communicating?

- “This is too hard.”
- “I don’t understand.”
- “Play with me.”
- “I am overwhelmed; this is too much!”
- “I want control.”
- “I don’t have the words.”



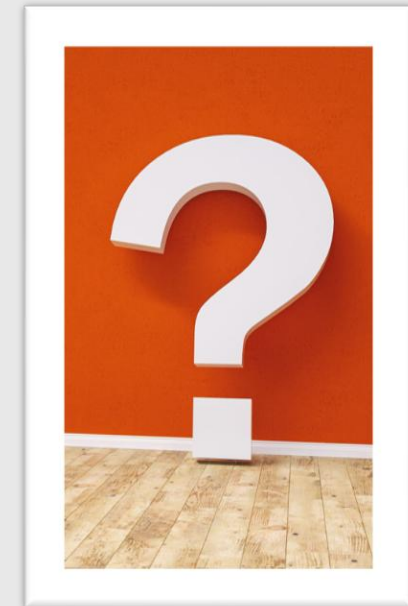
Topography vs Functions of behaviour

Challenging Behaviours

What is a challenging behaviour?

Let's navigate some examples:

- Is spitting a challenging behaviour?
- Is shouting a challenging behaviour?



Topography vs Functions of behaviour



Topography - What the behaviour looks like

- Hitting
- Crying
- Yelling
- Running away

Function - Why the behaviour happens

- Escape
- Attention
- Access
- Sensory

Functions of behaviour

Direct Access

- Immediate sensory stimuli
- Tangible reinforcers

Socially Mediated Access

- Adult attention
- Peer attention
- Tangible reinforcers

Direct Escape

- Unpleasant social situations
- Lengthy tasks
- Difficult tasks
- Aversive physical stimuli

Socially Mediated Escape

- Unpleasant social situations
- Lengthy tasks
- Difficult tasks
- Aversive physical stimuli

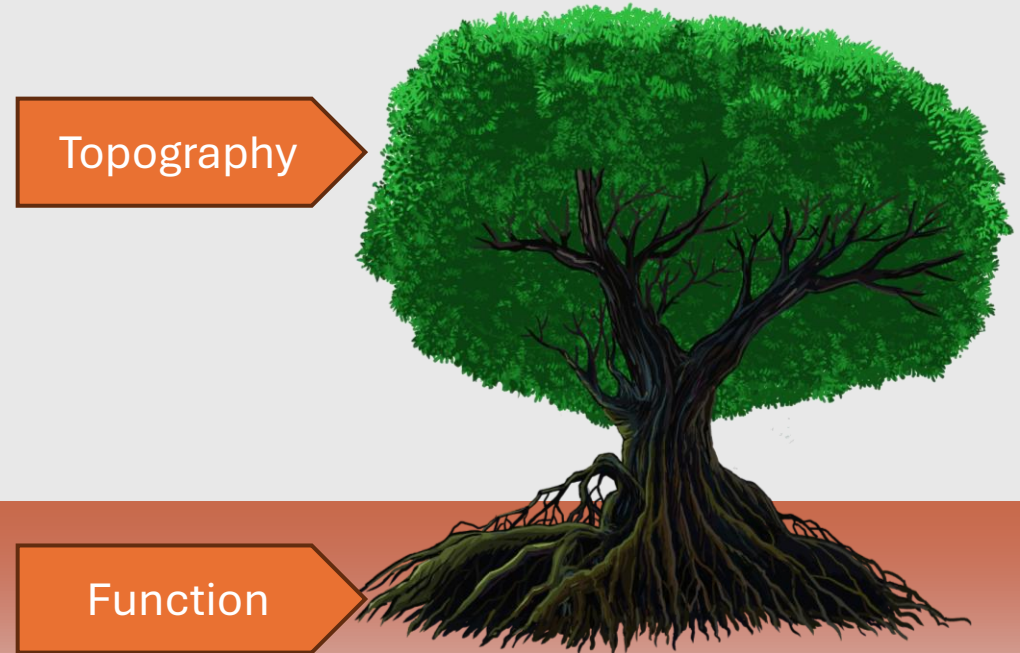
Why This Distinction Matters

Two children may both scream (same topography)
But:

Child A → escape work

Child B → gain attention

If we focus only on the topography, we miss the function or the skill .



Mentalism Vs Behaviourism

Scenario 1 – A child approached his parent while crying.

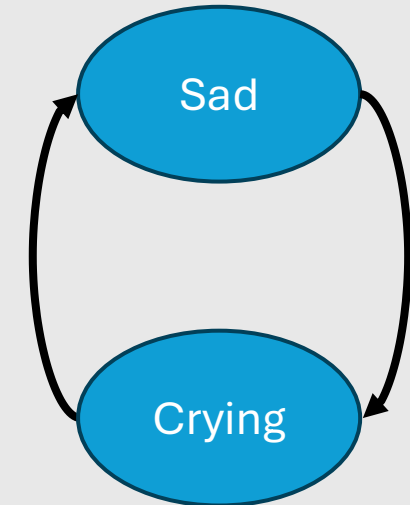
Mentalism view – Circular reasoning

The child is so sad.

How do you know: Because he is crying

Why is he crying: Because he is so sad

Why is he sad: Because he is crying



How can we help???

Mentalism Vs Behaviourism

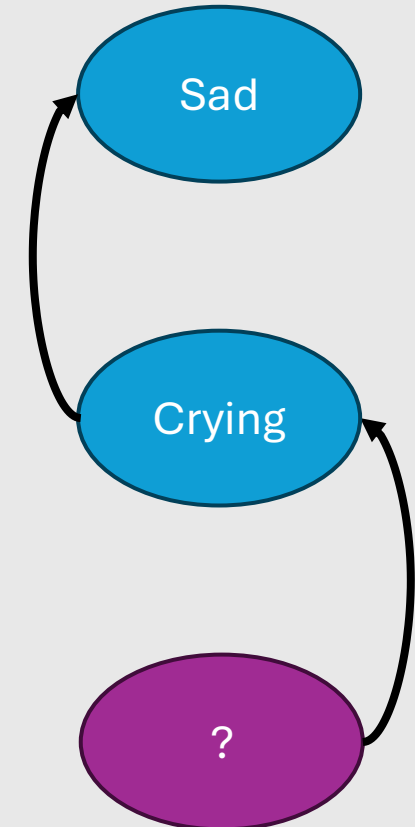
Scenario 1 – A child approached his parent while crying.

Behaviourism view - ABC

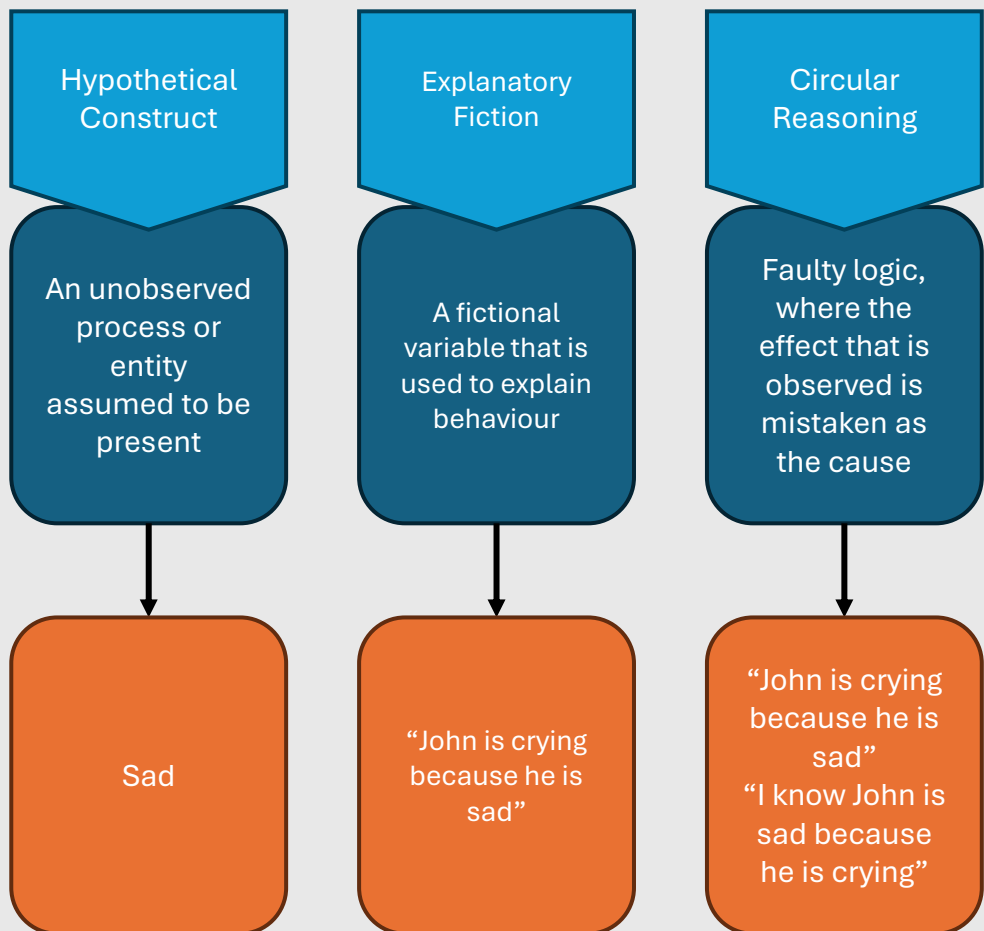
The child is so sad.

How do you know: Because he is crying

Why is he crying: Not sure. Let's explore

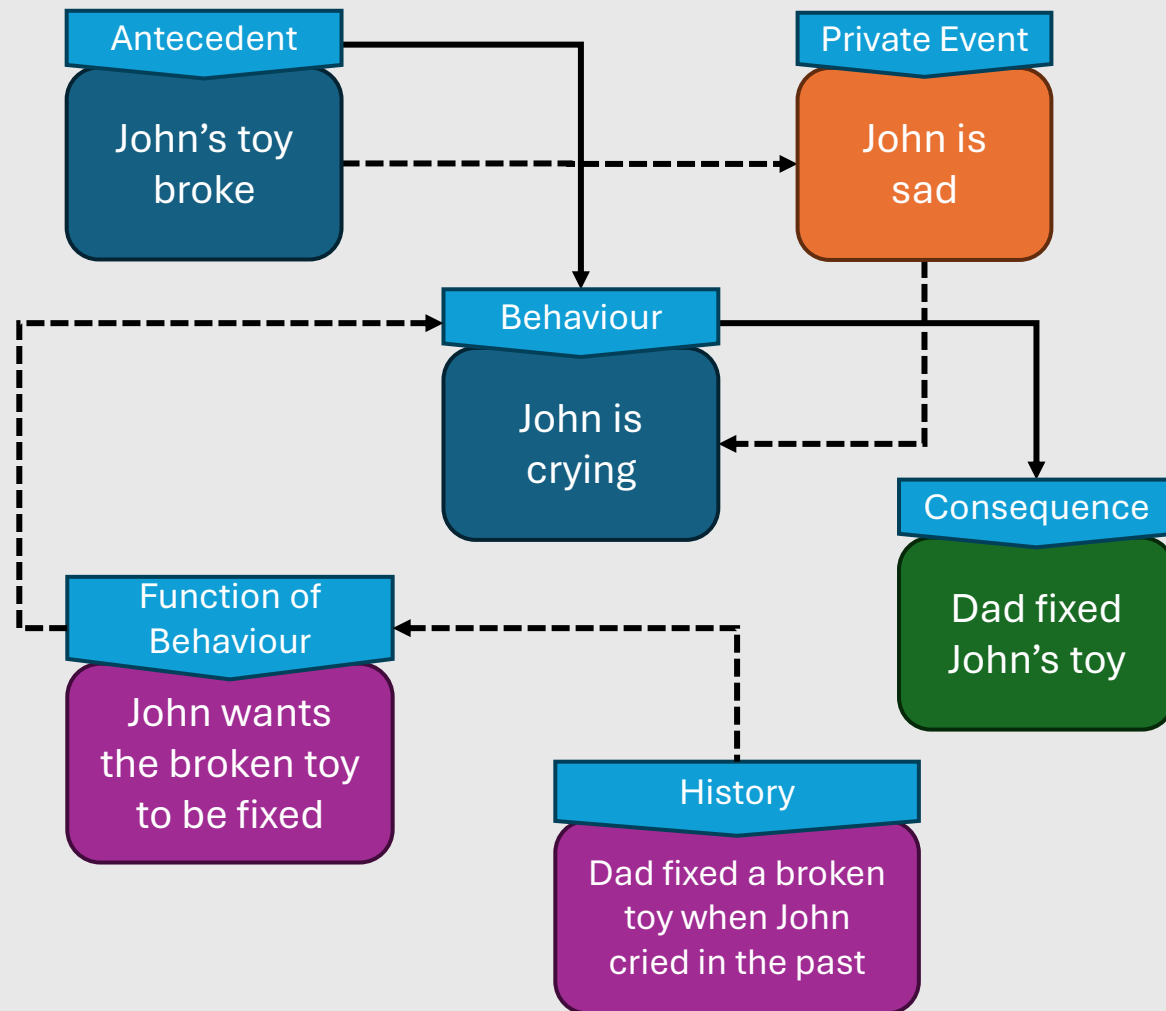


Mentalism Circular Reasoning



(Cooper et al., 2020, p. 27)

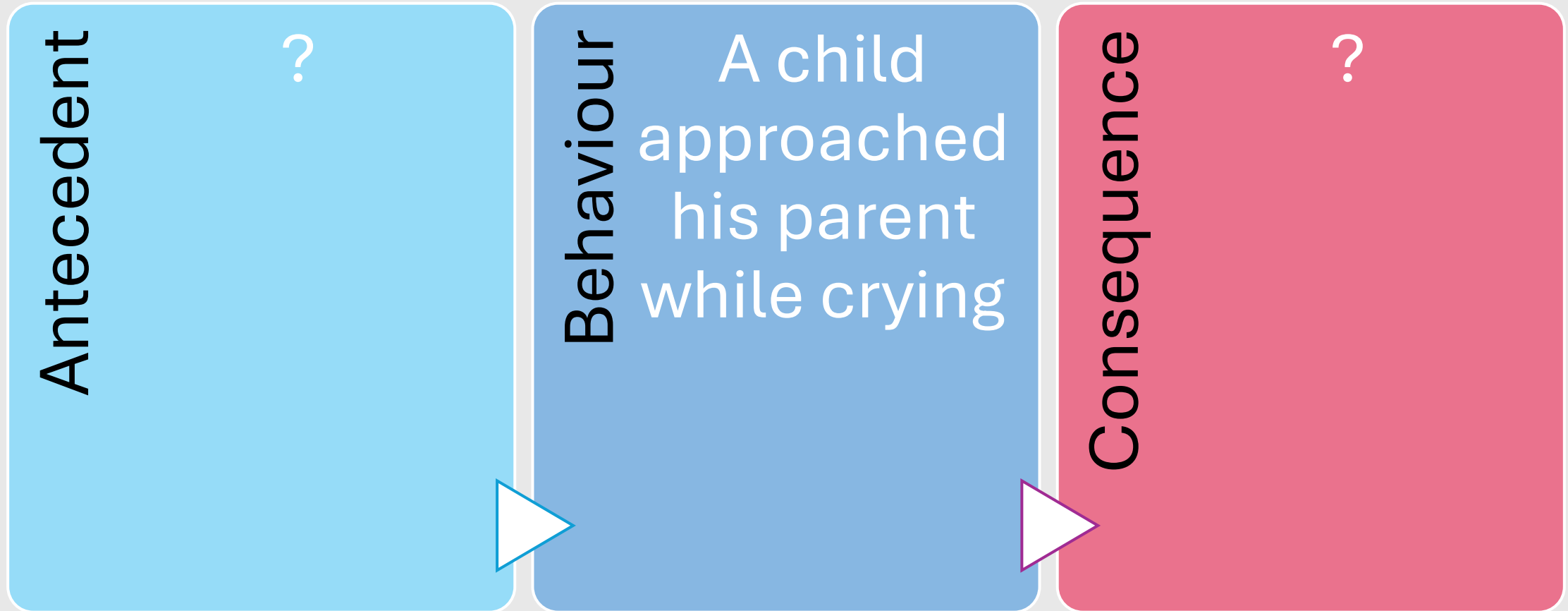
Radical Behaviourism



(Cooper et al., 2020, p. 28)



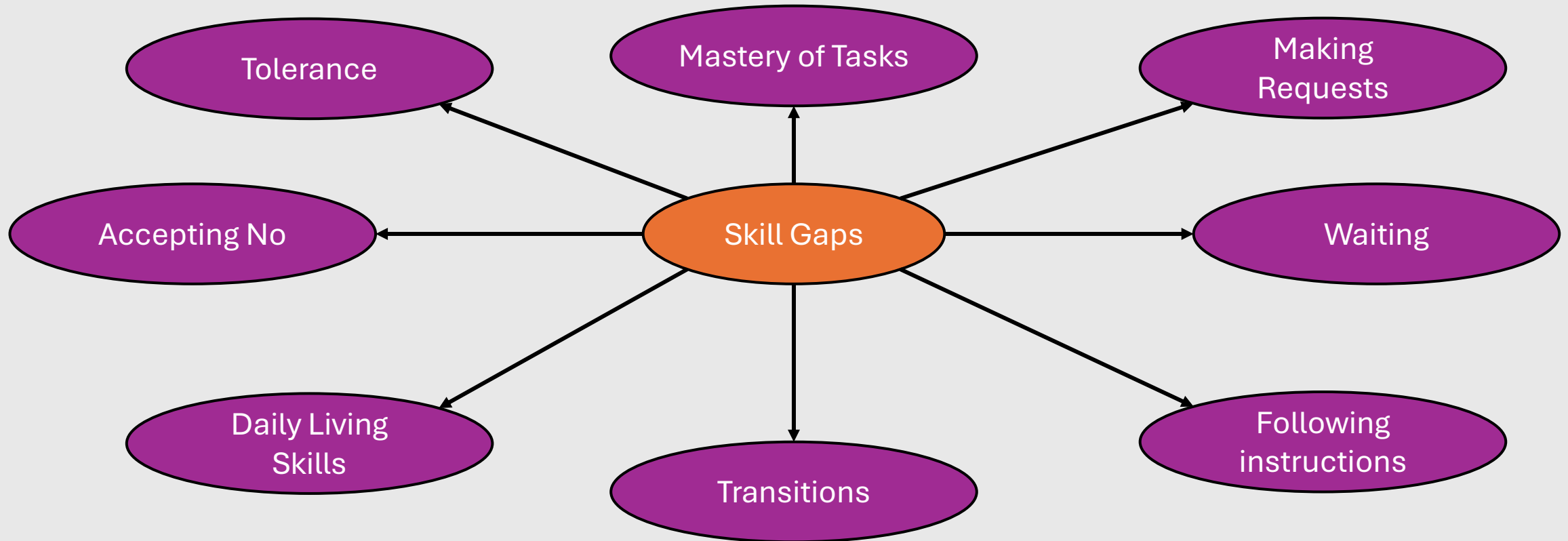
Scenario



Recognise the link between skill gaps and challenging behaviours

The Skill–Behaviour Link

When demands exceed skills → behaviour challenges increases



(Armstrong et al., 2024)

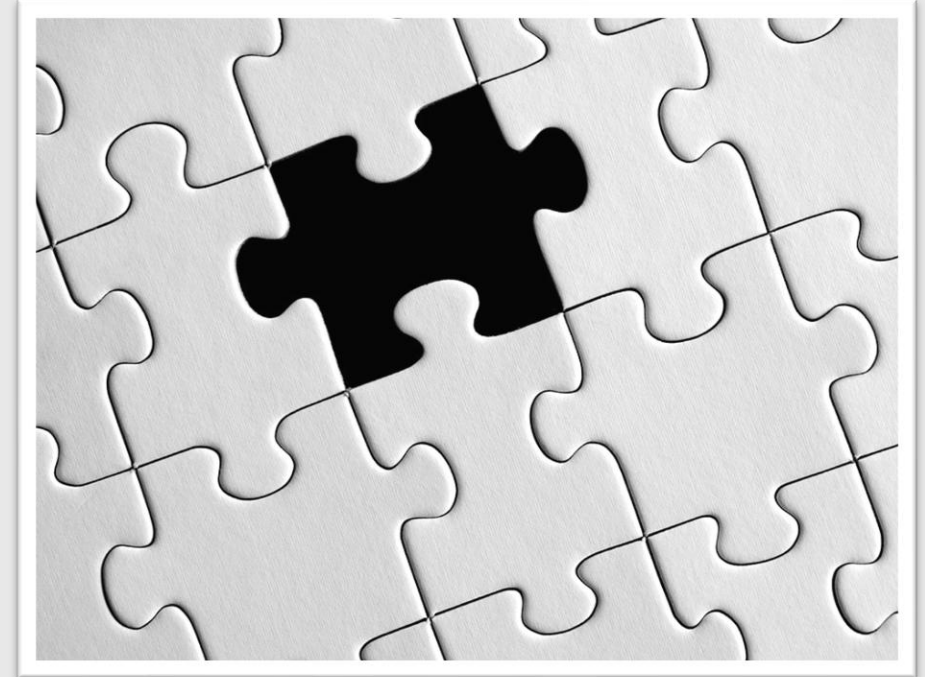
Shift in Thinking

Instead of asking:

- “How do we stop this behaviour?”

Ask:

- “What skill is missing?”



Skill gaps and challenging behaviour



Antecedent	Behaviour	Consequence
Child wants a toy another child is using	Child engages in hitting, grabbing, screaming	Child is being told "No hitting"

What do you think is the skill gap here?

Play Skills

Communication

Social Skills

Skill gaps and challenging behaviour

Antecedent	Behaviour	Consequence
Child wants a toy another child is using	Child engages in hitting, grabbing, screaming	Child is being told “No hitting”

What can we do differently?



Skill gaps and challenging behaviour



Antecedent	Behaviour	Consequence
Child is asked to play by himself so parent can complete household chores	Child engages in throwing, sibling fights, screaming	Child is being told “No throwing”, “No fighting”

What do you think is the skill gap here?

Communication

Play Skills

Social Skills

Emotional
Regulation

Waiting

Skill gaps and challenging behaviour

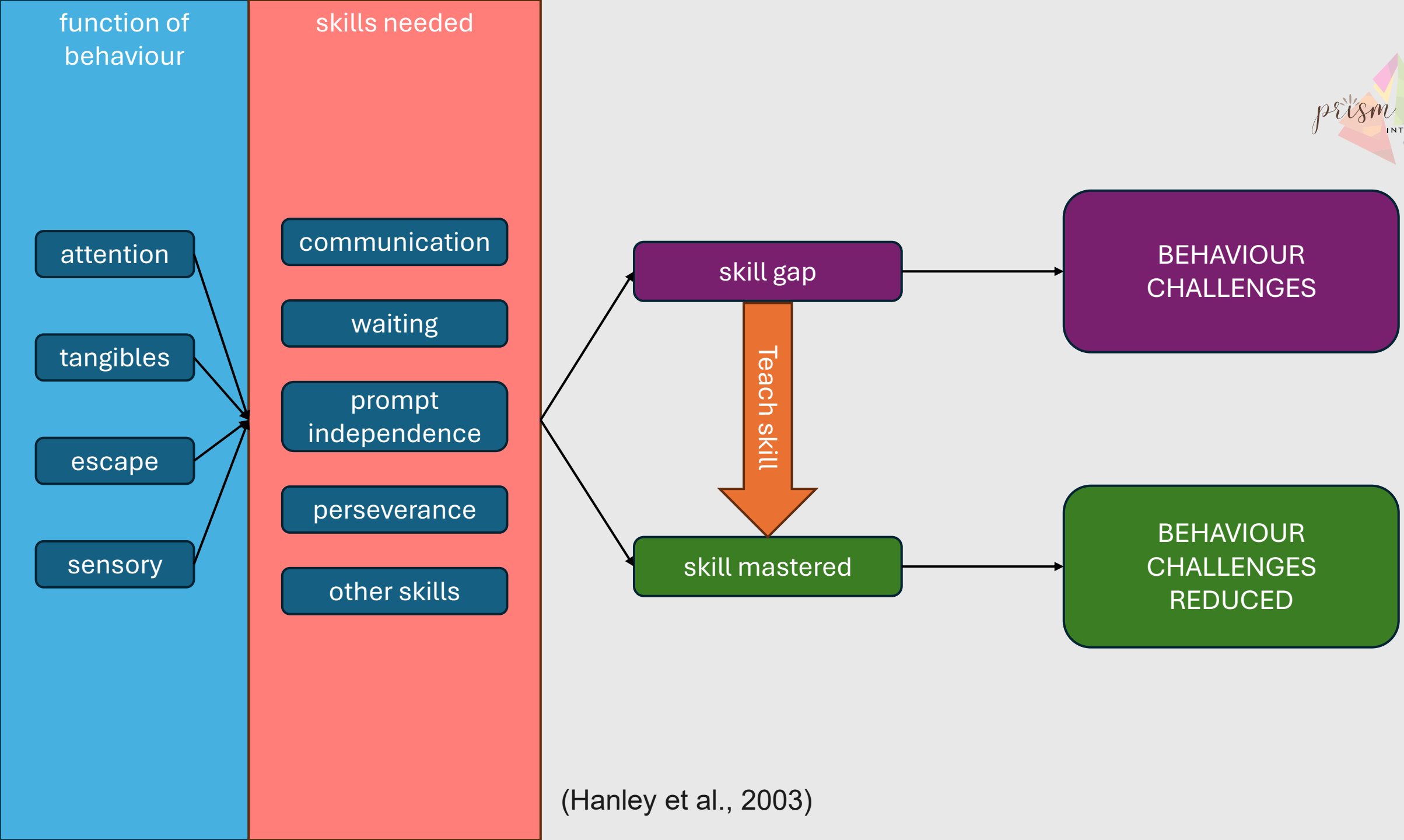
Antecedent	Behaviour	Consequence
Child is asked to play by himself so parent can complete household chores	Child engages in throwing, sibling fights, screaming	Child is being told “No throwing”, “No fighting”

What can we do differently?

Before asking them
to play by
themselves



After challenging
behaviours?



(Hanley et al., 2003)

Apply strategies using real-life
examples

Case study 1

Timmy is a 4-year-old child who attends childcare. He enjoys playing with cars and building blocks. Educators and parents notice that he **sometimes becomes upset when asked to move from playtime to other activities** such as group time or cleaning up.



Initial Assessment

Behaviour of Concern

During transitions, Timmy may cry, drop to the floor, scream, or refuse to follow instructions.

Function of Behaviour

The behaviour may help Timmy avoid transitions or gain more time with preferred activities.

Skill Gaps

- Can he ask for more time?
- Does he know what's next?
- Is the next activity too boring or hard for him?
- Does he have the skill to stop an ongoing preferred activity?

Strategies Recommended

First and Then

Let him know that what's the next activity instead of telling him to pack away. For instance, if it's group time, tell him that we will have a song or a book to read and then he can have his preferred item again.

Warnings

Tell him how many minutes he has left to play, before the bell.

Choices

Giving him choices if he wants to select a book or telling kids to race who will go first.

Communication

Telling him that he can have 5 more minutes if he asks nicely.

Strategies Recommended

Structured times

Creating some routines such as reading book, playing games

Practice transitions with warnings/alarms

Tell him how many minutes he has left to finish, before the transition. Such as transition from park, from swimming, from his play time.

Choices

Giving him choices how long he wants to stay 5 minutes or 3 minutes.

Communication

Telling him that he can have 5 more minutes if he asks nicely.

Outcome

First few days

He started asking for more time please and then transitioned.

After 2 – 3 weeks

He started choosing a book or a song he wanted.

After 1 month

He started telling his friend “I am going to race you there” and educator had to say “No running in the classroom 😊”

Reflect through an interactive activity

“No doesn’t help”



Activity 1

We need 2 volunteers to come to the stage.

Let's reflect

- Close your eyes or keep them open if preferred
- Think about the little one that made you attend this workshop
- Think what they can do, their skills.
- Let's think about the last challenging behaviour episode they had
- Let's reflect what they were trying to communicate or what's their skill gap was



Thank you



References

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- Hanley, G. P., Iwata, B. A., & McCord, B. E. (2003). Functional analysis of problem behavior: a review. *Journal of applied behavior analysis*, 36(2), 147–185. <https://doi.org/10.1901/jaba.2003.36-147>
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- Cipani, E., & Cipani, A. (2021). *The Cipani behavioral classification system for children and adolescents: Diagnostic manual* (3rd ed.). Cipani & Associates.