

Research Brief

Stakeholder Views on Challenging Behavior

Ruef, M.B., Turnbull, A.P., Turnbull, H.R., & Poston, D. (1999). Perspectives of five stakeholder groups: Challenging behavior of individuals with mental retardation and autism. Journal of Positive Behavior Interventions, 1, 43-58.

Why was it conducted?

This study was conducted to develop a better understanding of stakeholder perspectives and experiences regarding challenging behavior. The specific goals of the study were to identify barriers to effective support, practical solutions, and useful informational products.

Who participated?

Fifty-nine individuals from 5 stakeholder groups participated in the focus group sessions. The participants included 12 administrators, 13 family members, 12 friends, 9 people with disabilities and challenging behavior, and 13 teachers and practitioners. All participants had experience with aggressive and/or destructive behavior and met specific criteria for their stakeholder group.

How was it implemented?

Ten focus groups, involving 3-7 participants per session, were conducted by phone. In addition, follow-up interviews were done with the individuals with disabilities. A moderator facilitated the dialog using three questions (regarding barriers, solutions, and useful products) to guide responses. The focus group discussions were audio taped, and the five researchers in attendance maintained field notes and participated in debriefing sessions.

Focus group discussions were transcribed and analyzed. Two of the researchers reviewed the transcripts independently to identify themes, and then they met to discuss discrepancies and reach consensus. The researchers used three strategies to enhance the authenticity of the data: peer debriefing on the process, 2) feedback on summaries from the participants, and 3) outside expert review.

What were the results?

The study produced 1449 coded segments and resulted in the identification of 37 themes. This article presents themes identified by three or more stakeholder groups.

Barriers to Effective Support

- Impact of societal values – societal attitudes regarding people with disabilities and challenging behavior, and education
- Inadequate school and adult service programs - failure of agencies to provide individualized support due to lack of administrative support, inflexibility, use of aversive procedures, and program access
- Additional barriers faced by support persons – challenges specific to supporting a person with disabilities and challenging behavior (e.g., resources, single parents, emotional reactions, conflicts in child rearing, communication)

Practical Solutions

- Positive behavior support – solutions focused on the person with disabilities developing new skills and enhanced competence of support providers to address needs proactively
- Good people – differences individuals make when they take initiative (e.g., changes to programs/environments, access to less restrictive settings, enhancing quality of life)
- Friendships – relationships with a specific emphasis on shared activities, friendship development, and facilitation and impact of relationship

Useful Informational Products

- Type of information – topics identified differed across groups, but included personal information about people with disabilities, and intervention approaches (e.g., positive behavior support, alternative therapies)
- Form of information – a variety of methods of presentation (e.g., interactive media, knowledgeable mentors, user-friendly materials)

What are the implications?

This study demonstrates that different stakeholder groups may not understand or appreciate one another's needs. Interventions described by participants were commonly not based on current best practice and there was a lack of emphasis on self-determination and personal quality of life outcomes by direct practitioners. Family members and other direct support providers seem to prefer information shared through mentoring and brief, easily-digestible materials. The authors suggest areas for additional research including the role of societal values in mediating support efforts; identifying concrete, proactive solutions through individuals with disabilities and direct support providers; and finding ways to provide for the ongoing support needs of direct support providers.

References

Turnbull, A.P. & Ruef, M.B. (1997). Family perspectives on inclusive lifestyle issues for individuals with problem behavior. *Exceptional Children*, *63*, 221-227.

What research says: Understanding challenging behavior and teaching new skills. (1995). The University of Kansas, Beach Center on Families and Disability.