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IMPLEMENTATION MATERIAL

ABC BEHAVIOUR CHART

Understanding Behaviour in the Early Years · A printable and editable resource for adults

What is the ABC chart for?

The ABC chart helps you describe a difficult situation without rushing to judge the child.

It is not a diagnostic tool. It supports observation, team discussion, and choosing the first support strategy.

The key question is: what happened before the behaviour, what exactly did the child do, and what happened next?

Quick guide

Element	What do we record?	Example questions
A – Antecedent **What came before?**	The situation, instruction, transition or change, sensory input, people, place and time of day.	Was there a change of activity? Was it loud? Was the child given an instruction? Did they have to wait?
B – Behaviour **What did the child do?**	A specific, observable description of the behaviour. No labels such as “naughty” or “manipulative”.	What exactly did they do? Shout? Throw an object? Run off? Hit? Hide?
C – Consequence **What happened next?**	The adults’ response, the group’s response, and what changed for the child afterwards.	Was the task stopped? Did the child get a break? Did they get adult support, connection or attention? Was the demand reduced, delayed or removed?

Principle: in the ABC chart we are not looking for someone to blame. We are looking for a pattern. One situation is rarely enough – it is best to gather several observations and see what repeats.

ABC chart – to fill in

Field		Field	
Child’s name		Date	
Situation / activity		Observer	
Place		Time / duration	

A – what came before?	B – what did the child do?	C – what happened next?
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Possible function of the behaviour – tick a working hypothesis	Notes / what this might mean for this child
☐ escape or avoidance of a task, noise, crowding or change	
☐ access to something: an object, an activity, adult support, connection or attention	
☐ a sensory need or sensory overload	
☐ communication: the child cannot yet ask, say or show “no”, or communicate “stop”	
☐ difficulty with transitions between activities	
☐ tiredness, hunger, pain, illness or another physical factor	
☐ other:	
What will we do next time?	**Specific decision**
What will we do earlier, before tension rises?	
What short message will we use?	
What support will we use? A picture, a gesture, a visual plan, a “break” card, a choice?	
What alternative communication or regulation skill will we teach?	
How will we acknowledge and reinforce the child’s attempt to communicate or use the agreed strategy?	
When will we check whether the strategy seems to be helping?	

A completed example

A – what came before?	B – what did the child do?	C – what happened next?
The child was building with blocks. Suddenly, an instruction was given to the whole group: “Tidy-up time.” There was no advance warning.	The child started shouting, threw a block and tried to leave the table.	The adult paused the tidy-up for this child, moved the other children away and offered the calm-down corner. The tidy-up was delayed for this child.

Possible hypotheses	What to try next time
☐ difficulty with the sudden end of play ☐ no advance warning of the change ☐ a need to finish the activity ☐ no way to say “one more moment” or “break”	Give an advance warning: “Two more blocks, then we tidy up.” Use a “first–then” board. Offer a choice: “Will you tidy the blocks or the crayons?” Teach a “break” or “one more moment” card or gesture.

What not to write – and what to write instead

We do not write	We write specifically
“The child was naughty.”	The child threw three blocks on the floor and shouted for about two minutes.
“The child was manipulating the adult.”	After the tidy-up instruction, the child started crying; after going to the calm-down corner, the crying stopped.
“The child is always disruptive.”	During carpet time, the child stood up five times and went over to the shelf with the toy cars.
“The child refuses to cooperate.”	The child pushed the worksheet away and covered their ears after the instruction was given.

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Mini-plan after the ABC analysis

Question	Team / adult decision
What is the most common trigger?	
How will we warn the child in advance?	
What short message will we use?	
What visual or sensory support will we prepare?	
What alternative communication or regulation skill will we teach?	
How will we check whether the strategy seems to be helping?	

When to seek specialist support

- If the behaviour puts the safety of the child or others at risk, follow the setting's procedures and seek specialist support.
- If difficult situations keep recurring despite consistent action by the adults.
- If the team cannot see a pattern, or does not know how to choose a support strategy.
- If concerns continue, discuss observations with parents/carers and relevant staff, and consider advice from an appropriate specialist.

Final note

Store completed charts according to the setting's confidentiality and data protection procedures.

ABC chart – to fill in (additional copy)

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Place		Time / duration	

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