

Presentation and content created by Matt Mason, PhD, Applied Behavior Analyst, Licensed Psychologist, District of Columbia's Health Resources Partnership.

## Pre-Test: True or False

- 1. Staff members always agree about how care should be delivered to the individual.**
- 2. A “best practice” is any action which, by consensus, has the most desired impact on care.**
- 3. The best way to learn about best practices is to read the individual’s written record.**
- 4. Behavior is defined as anything a person does.**
- 5. Behavior is usually influenced by one or two things at a time.**

Serving individuals with intellectual disabilities often requires that complex and varied supports be provided, and produces substantial documentation as a result. The use of various decision-making and information summation tools is a recommended strategy for simplifying such complexities. The Best Practices Guide is an example of one such tool.

## Pre-Test: True or False

- 6. Best Practices Guides are a way of categorizing patterns of behavior.**
- 7. Only psychologists or social workers should create Best Practices Guides.**
- 8. Best Practices Guides categorized behavior patterns as A-Okay, Unacceptable, or In Crisis.**
- 9. Recommended staff actions are linked to the category of behavior that is observed.**
- 10. Once a Best Practice Guide is created, it does not need to be altered.**

Serving individuals with intellectual disabilities often requires that complex and varied supports be provided, and produces substantial documentation as a result. The use of various decision-making and information summation tools is a recommended strategy for simplifying such complexities. The Best Practices Guide is an example of one such tool.

## Purpose

- ◆ **To identify strategies for creating effective supports for individuals with intellectual disabilities.**
- ◆ **To define what is a “best practice.”**
- ◆ **To describe the process for creating a Best Practices Guide.**

Serving individuals with intellectual disabilities often requires that complex and varied supports be provided, and produces substantial documentation as a result. The use of various decision-making and information summation tools is a recommended strategy for simplifying such complexities. The Best Practices Guide is an example of one such tool.

## Overall Goal

- ◆ **To create effective supports for each individual we serve.**
- ◆ **To capture information from people who know and care about the individual being served.**
- ◆ **To use this information to improve the quality of care and hence the quality of living of the individuals we serve.**

Capturing important information about the individual being served is known as “key informant” interviewing, and direct support staff members are a common example of a key informant.

# What Is Behavior?

**Any  
Action  
by a Person**

**Can  
Be  
Observed**

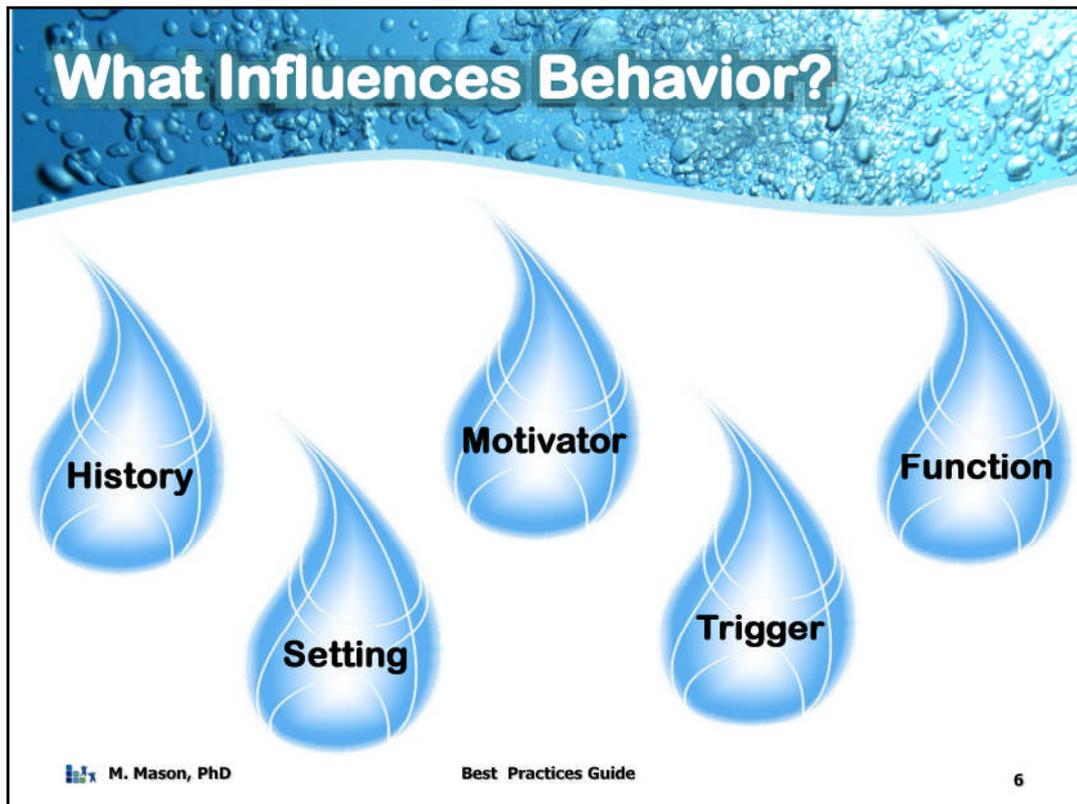
**Can  
Be  
Measured**

 M. Mason, PhD

Best Practices Guide

5

A common understanding of defining “behavior” is a necessary starting point to the development of Best Practices Guides. The emphasis is on describing actions in objective and measurable ways. The challenge is to avoid making assumptions about the individual, often because as direct care providers our focus is on avoiding or stopping behavior that is considered ‘undesirable.’ Be careful about ascribing a negative value to the term “behavior,” since most behaviors are “desirable.”



It is important to recognize that behavior is influenced by multiple factors that occur simultaneously. A person's history refers to their genetics, their family upbringing, their cultural practices, their learned behaviors, and their learning abilities. A motivator refers to a condition that influences the value of certain outcomes; for example, when hungry, we are motivated to get food. Setting refers to environmental conditions that set the stage for the occurrence of certain behaviors; for example, when we go to work, we are more likely to engage in occupation-related behaviors than leisure-related behaviors. Setting conditions are often fixed or relatively permanent. Trigger refers to specific events or conditions that immediately precede the behavior, and are often very transient; for example, when the telephone rings, we reach to answer the call. Function refers to the purpose of the behavior, which is based on the outcome of the behavior. There are only four functions of behavior, including (1) getting what we want (reinforcement), (2) stopping or preventing what we don't want (escape or avoidance), (3) reducing the experience of pain (pain attenuation), and (4) producing sensory experiences (self stimulation).

# What Are Best Practices?

**Common  
Actions  
By Staff**

**Promote  
Desired  
Behavior**

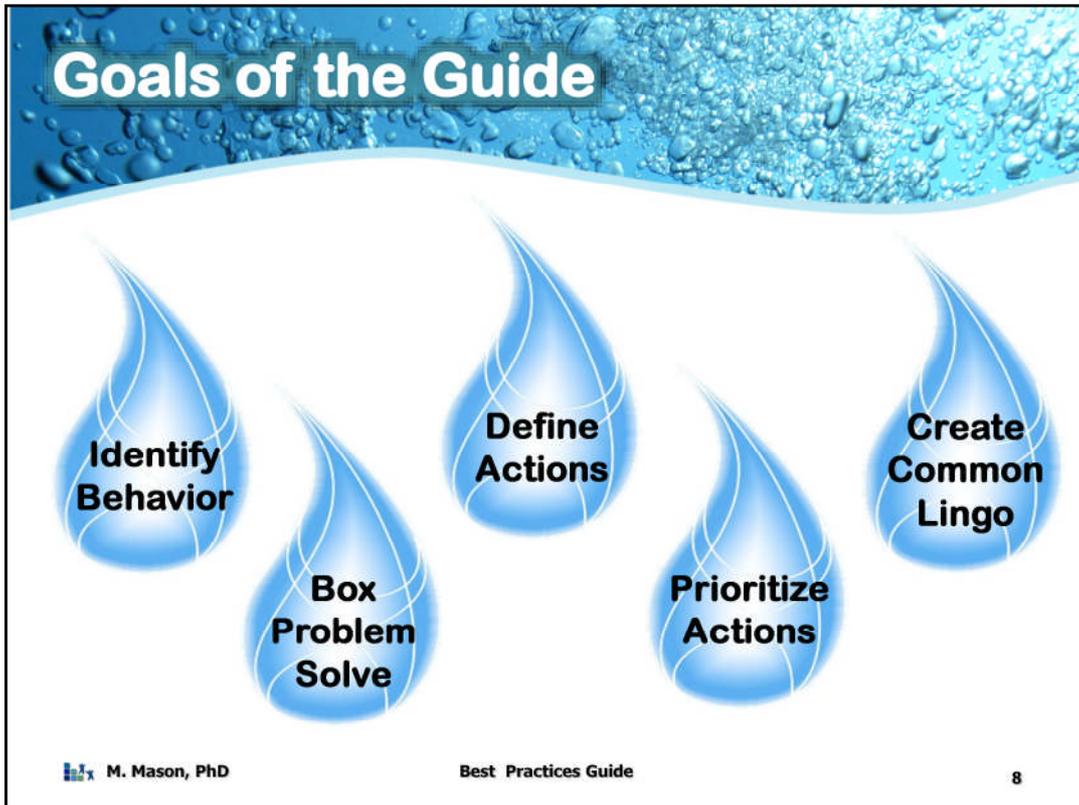
**Manage  
Undesired  
Behavior**

 M. Mason, PhD

Best Practices Guide

7

Best practices is a general term used to describe actions which, by consensus, have the most desired impact. In the scope of supporting individuals with intellectual disabilities, this means identifying practices or actions by staff members which promoted desired behavior of the individuals we serve and which also prevent, minimize or otherwise manage undesired behaviors. Note that the terms “desired” and “undesired” are socially defined, not absolute.



The purpose of a Best Practices Guide is to provide a quick reference to specific successful strategies used to support the individual. The Best Practices Guide can be read or reviewed in minutes, giving staff members valuable information about how to interact with the individual. The Best Practices Guide identifies target behaviors, creates a problem solving matrix (box analysis), lists effective staff actions, prioritizes supports, and creates a common or shared language among staff members that promotes consistency of supports.



All members of the individual's support team should have input into the content of the Best Practices Guide. However, it is crucial that the Best Practices Guide be prepared with the participation from direct care staff members or other key informants. The individual under discussion should be included in the planning whenever possible and in a way that is meaningful for the individual. Any manager can lead the development of a Best Practices Guide, but it is important that the manager facilitate the discussion by asking questions and helping team members reach consensus about identifying successful approaches to care, not create its content.

# Components

<b>Target Behaviors</b>	<b>A-Okay</b>	<b>Simmering</b>	<b>In Crisis</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Head butts others</li> <li>▶ Slaps or bangs head</li> <li>▶ Refuses medications</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Body is relaxed</li> <li>▶ Follows 1-step directions</li> <li>▶ Smiles, laughs</li> <li>▶ Follows routine</li> <li>▶ Seeks head rubs</li> <li>▶ Lightly taps head with hand</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Intense rocking</li> <li>▶ Makes loud frequent vocal noises</li> <li>▶ Slaps head hard</li> <li>▶ Bites hand</li> <li>▶ Bangs head on wall</li> <li>▶ Looks at you out of the corner of his eye</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Head butts</li> <li>▶ Screams or yells</li> <li>▶ Slaps or punches head with high intensity</li> <li>▶ Ignores directions</li> </ul>
<b>Triggers</b>	<b>What To Do</b>	<b>What To Do</b>	<b>What To Do</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Loud noises</li> <li>▶ Illness or injury</li> <li>▶ Unwanted social contact</li> <li>▶ Unplanned changes in routine</li> <li>▶ Ignoring requests for attention</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Keep person occupied</li> <li>▶ Offer activity choices</li> <li>▶ Provide brief breaks</li> <li>▶ Avoid downtime</li> <li>▶ Offer movies, TV time</li> <li>▶ Ignore self-stimulation</li> <li>▶ Give lots of positives</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Redirect to quiet area</li> <li>▶ Give additional space</li> <li>▶ Give comfort blanket</li> <li>▶ Use non-verbal prompts</li> <li>▶ Reassure person</li> <li>▶ Inform other staff</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Remove others from area</li> <li>▶ Shield self from injury</li> <li>▶ Enhance supervision</li> <li>▶ Ask other staff for help</li> <li>▶ Distract and look for opportunity to engage</li> </ul>

M. Mason, PhD
Best Practices Guide
10

Best Practices Guides should not be more than one page: This format makes it easier to learn and remember, and requires that team members prioritize information and describe it in a very brief (but memorable) manner. The individual's level or type of functioning is categorized into three types: (1) A-Okay, (2) Simmering and (3) In Crisis. Specific staff member supports are linked to each of these categories.

# Components: Target Behaviors

## Target Behaviors

- ▶ Head butts others
- ▶ Slaps or bangs head
- ▶ Refuses medications

- ◆ **Target behaviors can be both a desired behavior that needs to be taught or undesired that needs to be prevented or managed.**
- ◆ **Targets are specific to the individual, so carefully describe the topography or nature of the target.**
- ◆ **The individual does not need to have a behavior support plan to benefit from a Best Practices Guide.**

Use objective, observable words to describe each target behavior. A target behavior can be either a desired behavior that needs to be taught or undesired behavior that needs to be prevented, reduced in frequency or otherwise managed.

# Components: Triggers

## Triggers

- ▶ Loud noises
- ▶ Illness or injury
- ▶ Unwanted social contact
- ▶ Unplanned changes in routine
- ▶ Ignoring requests for attention

- ▶ **Triggers are conditions that, when present, are more likely to result in the undesired target behavior occurring.**
- ▶ **Controlling or managing triggers is the key to preventing target behaviors from occurring.**
- ▶ **Many times, triggers are subtle and are best identified or known by direct care staff.**

Often staff members will say that target behaviors occur with no warning (or triggers). This is actually quite rare; facilitating a discussion about identifying triggers is often an important step in creating an effective guide. Triggers are conditions that, when present, are more likely to result in the undesired target behavior occurring. Controlling or managing triggers is the key to preventing target behaviors from occurring. Many times, triggers are subtle and are best identified or known by key informants.

# Components: A-Okay

## A-Okay

- ▶ Body is relaxed
- ▶ Follows 1-step directions
- ▶ Smiles, laughs
- ▶ Follows routine
- ▶ Seeks head rubs
- ▶ Lightly taps head with hand

## What To Do

- ▶ Keep person occupied
- ▶ Offer activity choices
- ▶ Provide brief breaks
- ▶ Avoid downtime
- ▶ Offer movies, TV time
- ▶ Ignore self-stimulation
- ▶ Give lots of positives

- ◆ **A-Okay is a term used to describe when the individual is functioning well.**
- ◆ **Describe observable behaviors the individual engages when A-Okay.**
- ◆ **Describe mood, facial expression, body language, communication style, ability to follow directions, level of participation, and activities.**
- ◆ **Staff can choose what to do depending on the situation.**
- ◆ **The goal of the support team is to help the individual remain A-Okay.**

Emphasis is placed on getting key informants to agree what observable characteristics of the individual describe that person as “A-Okay.” In the section “What To Do,” this lists actions like a menu ... staff members can choose what to do depending on the situation, but not necessarily in order. Staff can pick and choose which strategy they believe will be most successful.

# Components: Simmering

## Simmering

- ▶ Intense rocking
- ▶ Makes loud frequent vocal noises
- ▶ Slaps head hard
- ▶ Bites hand
- ▶ Bangs head on wall
- ▶ Looks at you out of the corner of his eye

## What To Do

- ▶ Redirect to quiet area
- ▶ Don't turn your back
- ▶ Give comfort blanket
- ▶ Use non-verbal prompts
- ▶ Reassure person
- ▶ Inform other staff

- ◆ **Simmering refers to behaviors that suggest an individual is unstable, and may lead to a crisis.**
- ◆ **Describe how Simmering behaviors are different from A-Okay behaviors.**
- ◆ **When simmering behaviors are observed, support staff should provide different kinds of supports.**
- ◆ **The goal is to help the individual return to A-Okay and to prevent a crisis.**

Being able to identify when an individual has moved from “A-Okay” to “Simmering” is crucial to helping staff members choose a different type of support.

# Components: In Crisis

## In Crisis

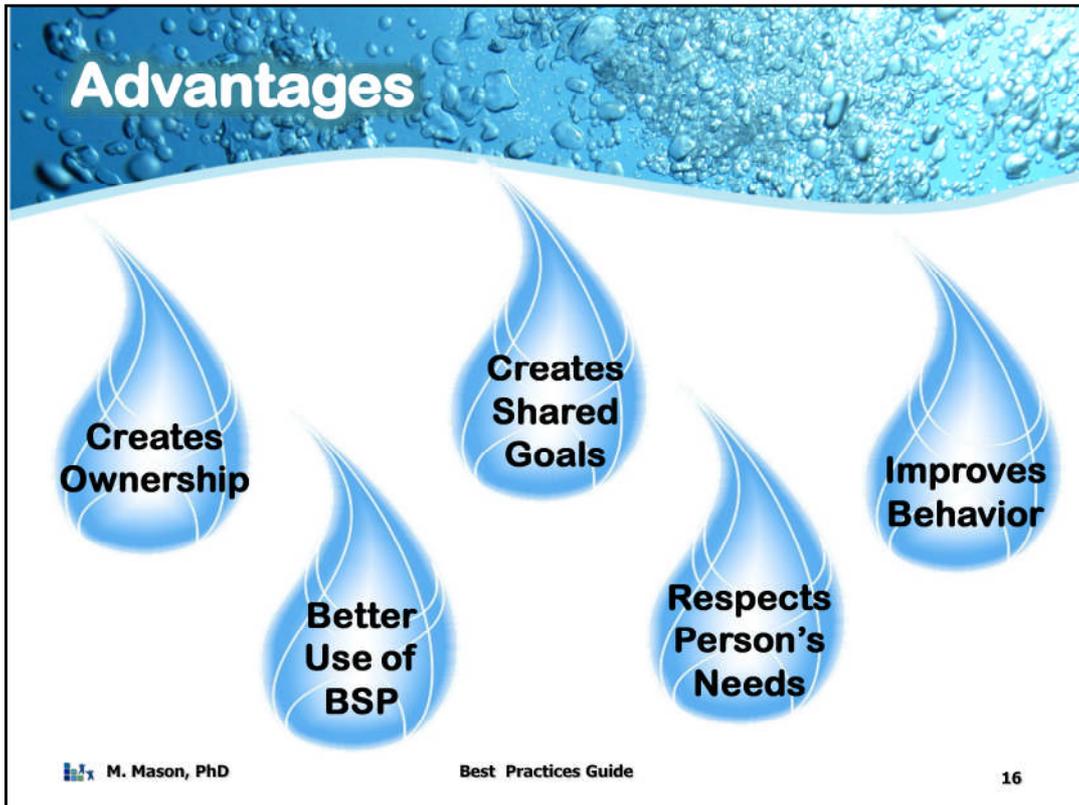
- ▶ Head butts
- ▶ Screams or yells
- ▶ Slaps or punches head with high intensity
- ▶ Ignores directions

## What To Do

- ▶ Remove others from area
- ▶ Shield self from injury
- ▶ Enhance supervision
- ▶ Ask other staff for help
- ▶ Distract and look for opportunity to engage

- ◆ **When an individual is In Crisis, he or she engages in behaviors that may pose a risk of harm to their selves or others.**
- ◆ **Describe how In Crisis behaviors appear different from A-Okay and Simmering.**
- ◆ **In some instances, specific strategies must be followed in the specific order provided.**
- ◆ **The goal is to shorten or end the crisis and return the individual to A-Okay.**

Not every individual will engage in behaviors that result in a crisis. When they do, it is especially important that staff know what their options are. Immediate reactive responses by the support team may be required.



A well-developed Best Practices Guide creates a sense of shared ownership and responsibility for how support is delivered to the individual. It emphasizes shared goals or outcomes, generally decreases undesired behavior while increasing desired behavior, improves the implementation of behavior support plans (BSPs), and is an important support for person centered planning. Through the process of developing a Best Practice Guide, staff are reinforced for making careful observations, and are empowered by the actions they can take to maintain someone in an A-OK mood, and prevent a crisis from developing.

## Cautions

- ◆ **Any manager can facilitate the development of a Best Practices Guide. However, it must be an impartial facilitation.**
- ◆ **Never complete a Best Practices Guide without the primary input from direct support staff members and other key informants.**
- ◆ **Use terms that are familiar to staff.**
- ◆ **Do not exceed ONE page.**

Best Practices Guides should not be more than one page: This format makes it easier to learn and remember, and requires that team members prioritize information and describe it in a very brief (but memorable) manner.

## Closing Comments

- ◆ **Best Practices Guide can be read or reviewed in minutes, giving staff valuable info about how to interact with the individual.**
- ◆ **The content of the Best Practices Guide should be updated regularly, especially when an individual's targets, triggers or patterns of behavior change.**

The Best Practices Guide is not a substitute for source documents, such as the Individual Support Plan (ISP) or the Behavior Support Plan (BSP) but can be a bridge to such documents.

## Post-Test: True or False

- 1. Staff members always agree about how care should be delivered to the individual.**
- 2. A “best practice” is any action which, by consensus, has the most desired impact on care.**
- 3. The best way to learn about best practices is to read the individual’s written record.**
- 4. Behavior is defined as anything a person does.**
- 5. Behavior is usually influenced by one or two things at a time.**

Serving individuals with intellectual disabilities often requires that complex and varied supports be provided, and produces substantial documentation as a result. The use of various decision-making and information summation tools is a recommended strategy for simplifying such complexities. The Best Practices Guide is an example of one such tool.

## Post-Test: True or False

- 6. Best Practices Guides are a way of categorizing patterns of behavior.**
- 7. Only psychologists or social workers should create Best Practices Guides.**
- 8. Best Practices Guides categorized behavior patterns as A-Okay, Unacceptable, or In Crisis.**
- 9. Recommended staff actions are linked to the category of behavior that is observed.**
- 10. Once a Best Practice Guide is created, it does not need to be altered.**

Serving individuals with intellectual disabilities often requires that complex and varied supports be provided, and produces substantial documentation as a result. The use of various decision-making and information summation tools is a recommended strategy for simplifying such complexities. The Best Practices Guide is an example of one such tool.