Behavior management can be a very challenging topic for everyone. There are many contributing factors that determine if a behavior is maintained, escalated, de-escalated, or replaced. Behavior is a form of communication. Often it is used to express a need or a want or as a way to avoid or escape a person, place, or thing. You have to examine why you think the behavior occurs. Without understanding the function of the behavior it is difficult to teach a replacement behavior or provide the communication tools needed for a child to obtain what he wants or avoid what he doesn’t want. This is not to say that the child gets everything he wants, but you have to understand the root cause to work through the situation.

Important questions to understand the function of the behavior are:
- What happens before the behavior?
- How do you respond to the behavior?
- Does the child obtain what is desired even if the method is unacceptable?
- Have you taught the child an alternative?
- Does it always happen with just one person, in one setting, or at a certain time of the day?

If you have a behavior that you are struggling with, I would be happy to problem-solve with you. No one has all the answers. You have to have a solution that works for you and your family.

I have worked for over 20 years with a wide variety of students in all types of settings. I began as a general education high school teacher, then spent 9 years in a middle school Functional Academic Classroom before becoming a district support person for Functional Academic classrooms from elementary through high school and transition. My final years in education were spent helping teachers manage behavior in all settings at all grade levels. Kids teach you a lot if you let them.

Some behaviors are more challenging to analyze than others. Input from a variety of sources is helpful. Everyone sees different strengths and weaknesses in children. This helps develop a plan for improvement. If you would like to discuss a problem, please email me several times and days that work best for you. I want to be available when it is the best time for you to be able to discuss what is happening. Plan to visit for 30 minutes in order to obtain a good plan for your needs. It does not matter if the behavior is small or more challenging. At a time when you are with your kids 24/7 for months on end, behaviors that were not a problem may now seem huge to you. Helping you and your child is all that matters. We have all struggled with some type of behavior with all children. It is one of the many areas that does not come with training prior to being a parent. Behavior management provides a great opportunity for growth!

If you would like some additional information, here are some resources:
Dr. David Stein, one of the leading specialists in the country, talks about behavior to the Down Syndrome Research Foundation in this Optimizing Neurodevelopment in Individuals with Down Syndrome YouTube video.

Dr. David Stein, is a psychologist who published a very popular book: Supportive Positive Behaviors in Children and Teens with Down Syndrome - The Respond but Don’t React Method, shares information on a podcast dealing with Behavior Issues with Down Syndrome.

Using Visual Supports to Help Individuals can really help children who are visual learners with expectations, choices, and understanding their world. Visuals provide information that does not disappear as soon as it is presented - instead, it remains available for the child to process what was presented. There are all kinds of visual supports that all people use every day, such as calendars, checklists, recipes, and instructions. Although the presentation linked above is for people with autism, it applies in the same way to people with Down syndrome.

Improving Behaviors was presented by behavior analyst Sam Towers, for the National Down Syndrome Congress (NDSC).

Video modeling can be a very useful visual support for children. You can take videos of peers or siblings demonstrating the behavior you desire, the child can model the desired behavior, or you can look for the many examples on YouTube. Children enjoy videos and again it is very visual for them to see what the expectation is. It can be viewed multiple times to absorb the information. Videos can be used before a certain situation to remind children of expectations.

The DSACT Education Page has several articles on behavior that includes general information about what you need to consider when addressing problems, using visuals, fading prompts, avoiding power struggles, and video modeling. Look for the ‘Behavior’ heading under ‘Topics of Interest and Notable Websites.’

To schedule an individualized consultation with me or for additional information and support, please contact me at Peggy.Wolf@dsact.org.