

Access to Higher Education Unit

This unit forms part of an Access to HE Diploma. If delivering the graded version of this unit, please refer to the Provider Handbook for details on grading descriptors and the application of these across units within your programme.

Unit Title: Understanding and Responding to Challenging Behaviour

Graded Unit Reference Number: GA33HEA18

Ungraded Unit Reference Number: UA33HEA18

Module: Health Studies

Level: Three (3)

Credit Value: Three (3)

Minimum Guided Learning Hours: 30

Learning Outcome (The Learner will):	Assessment Criterion (The Learner can):
1. Understand how mental health conditions can influence behaviour	1.1 Describe how stress, depression and anxiety can affect an individual's behaviour.
	1.2 Explain how a specific mental health condition or situation may impact behaviour.
	1.3 Explain the relationship between mental health conditions and the development or escalation of behaviour that challenges.
2. Understand the effects of alcohol and drugs on behaviour	2.1 Describe the potential behavioural impact of alcohol intoxication across differing levels of impairment.
	2.2 Describe the behavioural effects of at least two psychoactive drugs.
	2.3 Explain how substance-related changes in cognition, mood or perception may contribute to behaviour that challenges.
3. Analyse approaches for managing aggressive, hostile or distressed behaviour	3.1 Analyse strategies for preventing and de-escalating aggressive or hostile behaviour.
	3.2 Analyse effective communication methods when supporting an individual experiencing high levels of stress or anxiety.

		3.3 Explain ethical considerations when responding to aggressive or challenging behaviour.
4. Understand how to support individuals with reduced mental capacity who display behaviour that challenges	4.1	Explain how reduced mental capacity or learning disabilities can influence behaviour and communication.
	4.2	Describe a range of therapeutic or supportive interventions that may help reduce challenging behaviour and evaluate their effectiveness.
	4.3	Analyse approaches used to support individuals with reduced mental capacity who display behaviour that challenges.

Indicative Content

Learners could cover the following:

(The information below is provided for guidance only and is not mandatory)

LO1	AC1.1 – 1.3 Definitions of mental health and mental ill-health: Mental health as a continuum; common mental health conditions; factors influencing mental health (biological, social, environmental). Stress, depression and anxiety: Signs and symptoms; behavioural manifestations such as irritability, withdrawal, poor concentration, agitation, disrupted sleep or appetite; links between prolonged stress and anxiety; emotional and behavioural consequences. Impact of specific conditions or situations: Schizophrenia: hallucinations, delusions, disorganised behaviour. Psychosis: altered perception, impaired reality testing. Dementia: memory impairment, confusion, aggression, disorientation. Trauma or traumatic events: hypervigilance, avoidance, emotional dysregulation. Relationship between mental health and challenging behaviour: Primary/secondary/consequential links; cycles of behaviour; escalation patterns; how symptoms can be expressed as behavioural distress.
LO2	AC2.1 – 2.3 Alcohol intoxication: Effects on the central nervous system (e.g. slowed processing, impaired judgment, emotional lability); stages of intoxication; increased risk of aggression; altered social inhibitions; cognitive disruption. Psychoactive substances: <i>Stimulants:</i> heightened alertness, agitation, impulsivity. <i>Depressants:</i> slowed reactions, drowsiness, impaired coordination. <i>Opioids:</i> reduced pain perception, euphoria, drowsiness. <i>Hallucinogens:</i> altered perception, sensory distortion, unpredictable behaviour. Drug-specific behavioural impacts:

	Ecstasy (MDMA): emotional warmth, sensory distortion, dehydration risks. Heroin: sedation, dependency, withdrawal-related irritability. LSD: hallucinations, altered thought patterns, impaired reality perception. Ketamine: dissociation, confusion, potential immobility. Cannabis: altered perception, paranoia or anxiety, reduced concentration. Interaction between substance use and challenging behaviour: Disinhibition; increased aggression; impaired decision-making; cognitive distortions; heightened emotional responses; long-term behavioural changes.
LO3	AC3.1 – 3.3 Aggressive and hostile behaviours: Physical aggression: hitting, kicking, pushing, damaging property. Verbal aggression: shouting, insults, threats, intimidation. Prevention and early intervention: Environmental considerations (lighting, noise, room layout). Identifying triggers: sensory overload, unmet needs, personal stressors. Recognising early warning signs: pacing, rising tone of voice, agitation. De-escalation strategies: Calm vocal tone; non-threatening body language; providing personal space; redirecting focus; offering choices; stepping back from confrontation. Communication approaches: Active listening; validating feelings; using simple and clear language; avoiding overload; culturally sensitive communication; pace and tone adjustments. Ethical and safety considerations: Trauma-informed practice; consent and dignity; proportionality; when/if physical intervention is appropriate and by whom; safeguarding considerations.
LO4	AC4.1 – 4.3 Reduced mental capacity and learning disabilities Definitions; mild/moderate/severe learning disabilities; cognitive limitations; communication difficulties; co-occurring conditions; common behavioural indicators. Impact on behaviour Links with anxiety, low confidence, communication frustration; behavioural manifestations such as impulsivity, defiance, mood swings, withdrawal or 'acting out' due to misunderstanding. Support strategies Coping strategies: enjoyable activities, environmental adjustments, predictable routines, involvement of family/significant carers. Communication adaptations: simplified language, visual prompts, alternative communication methods, checking understanding. Positive Behaviour Support (PBS) Planning and reviewing support; understanding function of behaviour; replacing challenging behaviour with appropriate alternatives; structured routines; sensory considerations; personalised approaches. Therapeutic and wellbeing interventions Creative therapies (art, music, dance); occupational therapy; physical exercise; relaxation methods such as breathing techniques, sensory aids, calming activities.

	Promoting independence and empowerment
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	Involving individuals in decisions; recognising strengths; ensuring support is respectful and person-centred.
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