

## Getting started

### Context – understanding the diverse range of learners' backgrounds and experiences

Students today are coming from more diverse backgrounds and with a variety of different experiences and this makes managing their behaviour in FE establishments more challenging. Teaching in what was a post-compulsory sector now involves working with compulsory school-aged students either in a college setting or in a school setting (Wolf Report, 2011). Students arriving direct from school at the age of 16 bring with them a range of challenges. Many learners find it difficult to handle the expectations of FE and have difficulty in studying independently having been spoon-fed in schools. The proportion of learners arriving with Special or Additional Needs is also increasing. Recent government findings (DfE, 2010a) stated that 21 per cent of pupils in schools had Special Needs which was nearly double the figure given in 1990. Behaviour and speech problems represent the fastest growing categories. Ten per cent of pupils with Special Needs have statements.

Many older learners will be returning to learning for a variety of reasons. Some will have been encouraged by employers to take a range of courses to improve their qualifications and in a number of cases these learners can be somewhat reluctant. High levels of unemployment have led to adults attending courses to improve their qualifications, skill levels and employability. Some of these older learners will have a range of learning and behavioural difficulties. Many lecturers are teaching on courses with mixed age and experience groups – very young students together with older learners – which can pose a significant challenge as well. In addition, working with young offenders and in prison education can present various problems where there are clearly different expectations. Land-based study and work in practical areas will also often create challenges.

### Causes of challenging behaviour

- *Poor previous learning experiences*
  - Many learners have incredibly low self-esteem because of the many negative experiences they have had.

- 'Factory farming' – testing from the age of 5 has led to some learners dis-engaging from the learning process and displaying challenging behaviour as a way of gaining recognition.
- Lack of differentiation with tasks that lack challenge.
- Poor relationships with staff.
- *Adapting to college life*
  - Unable to cope with size of college and large number of students.
  - Inability to manage unsupervised time.
  - Frightened of being challenged and being taken out of comfort zone and away from former peer group.
- *Home background*
  - Many parents do not have the necessary parenting skills and so will not have provided appropriate levels of nurturing in the early years or effective support mechanisms.
  - The breakdown of the family unit has meant that many students do not have appropriate role models and sometimes have aggressive role models.
  - Some students turn to gangs for support as they offer safety and a sense of identity. Many are also under immense pressure from their peer group. Anti-social behaviour for some groups is seen as 'a badge of honour': for example, drinking, using abusive and threatening behaviour, or damaging/graffitiing property. This can be further extended to drug taking and promiscuous/sexual activity. Many students feel pressurised – they must join in or become a victim.
- *Mental health issues*
  - Mental health issues are a real concern. The *Good Childhood Inquiry* (The Children's Society, 2008) stated that mental health problems were on the increase and described the situation as a mental health epidemic, with severe emotional and psychological distress common.
- *Crime*
  - Vizard (2009: 4) stated that those in gangs 'are enmeshed in crime and that over 70% of offenders in London are under the age of 18 ... crime means little – it is an unexceptional event'.
- *Substance abuse*
  - One piece of research by Greenfield (2007) illustrated the extent of drug use where 12 per cent of 11- to 15-year-olds had used cannabis and 4 per cent had used Class A drugs such as heroin.

- *Television/media/internet*
  - Students come to college disrupted because of the images they see on television in news bulletins and the violent themes in some 'soaps'. Some of the topics on radio can also be quite disturbing, as can the lyrics to certain songs.
  - Easy access to films on DVD can lead to students seeing disturbing and aggressive content.
  - Some video games are quite violent and can have a desensitising effect on people which will limit their capacity for empathy – thereby causing people to become unnaturally violent when faced with challenges.
  - Easy access to very disturbing images on the internet can be distressing.
- *Food for thought*
  - Some students do not re-hydrate sufficiently: each of us should drink approximately 1.2 litres of water per day (Food Standards Agency, 2006). In addition students who consume coffee and other drinks with a high caffeine content can experience a diuretic effect. As the brain is made up of more than 80 per cent water (Blakemore and Frith, 2005: 18), and uses 30 per cent of all the water a person consumes (Vizard, 2004a: 6), dehydration can have a severe impact on behaviour and the ability to learn.
  - Many of the fast foods and ready prepared food items that some students consume are full of additives which can severely affect their behaviour. With the recession, more processed foods which can contain high levels of additives are now being consumed.
  - Increasing students' intake of fish oil supplements can improve their behaviour and learning (see further Blakemore and Frith, 2005: 186).
  - Increasing students' zinc and iron intake has also been shown to improve their behaviour (see further Northern, 2004).

## Reflection on practice



A number of causes for challenging behaviour have been given above. For any two of these look at a couple of interventions you could provide to overcome the negative impact of these areas. Then discuss these with a partner.

### Cause 1

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*(Continued)***Cause 2**

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## Research on brain reconfiguration in adolescence and its effect on learning and behaviour

Prior to birth and throughout our lives our brain cells will undergo pruning. Giedd (2004, cited in Wallis, 2004) suggested that at the age of 11 in girls and 12 ½ years in boys a key period of massive pruning takes place which will then continue until around the age of 25. During this time the adolescent pre-frontal cortex will be smaller than that found in younger children. Some brain areas will shrink back to allow others maximum resources whilst they develop. During this phase adolescents will be unable to show empathy and will often give inappropriate responses. Because of this pruning and change in configuration, adolescents:

- are very impulsive
- love risk taking because this generates rushes of the hormone dopamine
- cannot easily assess the causes and effects of their actions
- are less able to assess threats
- are ruled by their emotions more than logic
- are unable to recover from trauma easily.

The area of the brain that reconfigures first is the part that controls sensory preference – the visual, auditory, kinaesthetic, olfactory and gustatory. As the brain reconfigures the more rational regions of the upper cortex we see the following:

- The development of attributes associated with maturity.
- A calmer outlook.
- Stable moods.
- A decrease in risk taking.
- The ability to reason and think things through.

When the pre-frontal cortex is reconfigured students will be more able to do the following:

- Plan.
- Set priorities.
- Organise their thoughts.
- Suppress their impulses.
- Weigh up the consequences of their actions.

There is a later maturation of the frontal lobes in Western society because of a longer period of dependency upon parents and the associated abdication of adult responsibilities. Many students will have 'helicopter parents', those who will hover over their children doing everything for them. Young people are now staying at home longer because of higher living costs and the scarcity of jobs, and due to the increases in tuition fees, many will attend local Higher Education Institutions to save on accommodation costs. However, we can see an early maturation of the frontal lobes in young adults in other societies due to their having to assume adult responsibilities at a much earlier age.

### Reflection on practice



With a partner discuss the following:

- 1 How could you adapt your teaching strategies to take account of the information on brain reconfiguration in adolescence?

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- 2 How would you manage the behaviour of learners given the information above relating to their impulsivity and lack of empathy?

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## Academic versus vocational groups and issues of teaching combined groups

The range of abilities across and within groups can cause a real challenge to most lecturers. Often you have to meet combined groups made up of students on vocational and academic courses. Making

an appropriate differentiation can be a problem and also the types of behaviour displayed can be different. More able students can often undermine others in the group. In addition, some of the students on vocational courses, who are there because they have been told to enrol on a course, can often behave in an inappropriate manner by using bad language and making extremely negative comments to other learners. Managing these groups effectively is a real challenge. Sessions will often need to be fast-paced and students will have to be re-grouped using a number of co-operative learning techniques. A clear understanding of expectations and boundaries will also need to be established.

With some vocational groups it can be difficult to keep students onside due to boredom on their part. Many will be accustomed to fast-paced environments. Some will be taking courses because it is an employer requirement that they gain certain qualifications. Often there will be a reluctance on their part as they do not want to be in college. If such students are proving to be a challenge then a letter to their employer or using peer pressure can help to halt this.

Students on academic courses can often present challenges of a different kind. Within groups students' understanding of the work can vary dramatically making any differentiation between learners extremely difficult. Some may find the work difficult: for example, on an accountancy course the technical dimension of this subject means that some students will struggle and as a result they may display behaviour which is untypical – their attendance deteriorates, they will use distraction techniques, or they will become quiet and withdrawn. Meanwhile other learners may display arrogance because they have an inflated opinion about their ability. As a result of this, students in these groups will test a lecturer's knowledge of the subject and be very demanding. Being vigilant and checking students' progress are key here. Early intervention is necessary if we notice any change in students: we must be able to offer support or set up a buddying system, for example. With students who frequently challenge our knowledge it is best not to over-react and defer their queries to the end of the session when these can be fully discussed. If we do over-react to frequent queries and challenges this can act as an accelerant to their behaviour. Often when a student frequently interrupts the peer group will often act together to modify their behaviour.

## How to understand and engage Additional Needs learners

A number of learners will suffer from several conditions and syndromes and indeed it is not unusual for some students to have three or four conditions. The age of onset and duration will vary from condition to condition. The government's Green Paper on Special Educational Needs and Disabilities in March 2010 re-affirmed the need to support learners in Further Education. Statements of Special Educational Needs are being replaced by Education, Health and Care Plans which aim to help education and health professionals to work together. These plans will be required from birth to the age of 25 for all individuals with Additional Needs.

### Characteristics of conditions and strategies to use

#### Autism

##### *Characteristics*

Autistic students spend their time engaged in puzzling and disturbing behaviours. Three areas have been identified:

- Impairment in social interaction.
- Impairment in communication.
- Restricted and repetitive patterns of behaviour.

Diprose and Burge (2003) listed the following characteristics:

- Difficulty in relating to people, events or even objects – isolation is preferred.
- Delays in language and cognitive development – limited intellectual ability.
- Impaired social interaction.
- Unconventional use of toys.
- Avoidance of eye contact.
- Insistence on routine and environment remaining unchanged.
- Repetitive movements – rocking, spinning, head banging.
- Unusual sleep patterns – can stay up all night.

#### *Treatment/strategies*

- *Developing communication/language* – this involves helping students to learn various ways to communicate, initially by using sign language and pictures rather than verbal language. Using visual cues/cards is important. Using speech and drama to help with conversation and not keeping thoughts to themselves encourages thinking, teaches students opening comments for conversations, and gets them to ask for help.
- *Social skills* – this involves teaching students to play and share, helping them with their emotional literacy, using co-operative learning, and helping them to understand and express their emotions. Reassurance and praise are also important.
- *Behaviour management* – this involves making the environment structured and predictable. Unstructured time is when problems can arise – so having a structure to the day is needed, time out strategies can also prove useful. When poor behaviour is displayed refer to the rules and insist these are kept. Remain calm and keep the volume down.
- *Motor co-ordination* – this involves exercises and games being developed to help with clumsiness. Writing can also be supported through using keyboards.

#### *Further reading*

[www.autism.org](http://www.autism.org)

[www.paains.org.uk](http://www.paains.org.uk)

[www.wikipedia.org/wiki/Autism](http://www.wikipedia.org/wiki/Autism)

## **Asperger Syndrome (AS)**

### *Characteristics*

Students with AS often have the following characteristics:

- Experience difficulty with social relationships:
  - want to be sociable and enjoy human contact
  - have difficulty in understanding how others feel
  - find it hard to read non-verbal communication including facial expressions
  - find it hard to maintain eye contact
- Find communication difficult:
  - find it difficult to have a two-way conversation, taking all the time to speak without wanting to listen, and they do not check listeners' reactions
  - have difficulty communicating their feelings and reactions to others
  - when faced with a challenge they may run away and hide or vent their frustration through temper or tantrums
  - they can be over-precise and over-literal, with turns of phrase and metaphors causing alarm, and jokes and exaggerated language also creating a problem
- Emotionally fragile:
  - can be self-critical and easily become stressed; some will also have difficulties coping with everyday life; changes in routines and transitions can also be challenging
- Special interests:
  - may develop an almost obsessive interest in a hobby or interest, which involves them arranging or memorising facts about a special subject such as train timetables or football results
- Verbal IQ is lower than performance IQ.

### *Treatment/strategies*

- *There is no specific treatment* – it is however possible for a student with AS to acquire social skills.
- *Teach relaxation techniques using breathing exercises, stress balls* – the demands of adolescence mean a student with AS is likely to be under considerable stress.



- *Establish a clear achievable routine* – use posters to provide visual information.
- *Provide a structured, consistent and predictable environment.*
- *Inform them about changes of teachers and rooms in advance.*
- *Give positive feedback whenever possible.*
- *Use clear language and instructions* – avoid using ambiguity, humour or irony.
- *Build self-esteem* – give positive feedback whenever possible.
- *Encourage use of co-operative learning techniques.*

## **Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)**

### *Characteristics*

Students with ADHD cannot block out the stimuli that constantly surround us (noise, smells and texture). They are continually distracted by them and therefore find it difficult to focus on one task only.

ADHD manifests itself in three main ways:

- Hyperactivity.
- Impulsiveness.
- Inattention.

### *Treatment/strategies*

- *Create a structured, predictable environment* – use consistent seating arrangements, rules, expectations and logical consequences (the consequences of a student's behaviour have to be instant: see Jensen, 2005).
- *Make instructions about behaviour as clear as possible* – give precise instructions starting with the student's name and ensure eye contact. Repeat, using the 'broken record' technique if necessary.
- *Position students in class where they are least likely to be distracted* – sit them away from known distractions.
- *Try to keep the noise level low and prevent distractions.*
- *Break up tasks into attainable steps.*
- *Keep these tasks varied.*

- *Repeat the rules if necessary.*
- *Use short sentences and establish eye contact.*
- *If a student misreads a situation, help them to understand what has happened and give them strategies to use in the future – in relation to impulsivity, ask them to write down their thoughts and ideas and discuss these later.*
- *Utilise behaviour systems – these need to reflect positive and negative performance.*
- *Create boundaries for acceptable and unacceptable behaviour – make these clear to students and reward/sanction as required.*
- *Develop study skills – for example, typing, use of laptops and calculators.*
- *Provide frequent one-to-one feedback and personal contact.*
- *Avoid trying to single out a student with ADHD – giving them too much attention is not advisable as they will not want to look needy.*
- *If students fidget – give them a stress ball or doodle pad.*
- *Give them brain break activities.*

#### *Further reading*

O'Regan, F. (2002) *How to Teach and Manage Children with ADHD*. Wisbech: LDA

[www.ADDERS.org](http://www.ADDERS.org) – run by a parent with a child with ADHD

[www.CHADD.org](http://www.CHADD.org) – USA ADHD support group

### **Oppositional Defiant Disorder (ODD)**

#### *Characteristics*

Students with ODD will often exhibit the following characteristics:

- Frequent temper tantrums.
- Arguing excessively with adults.
- Active defiance and refusing to comply with adult requests and rules.
- Deliberately annoying people.
- Spite and vindictiveness.
- Seeking revenge.

### *Treatment/strategies*

- *Develop a Behaviour Plan* – when doing this we must remember that the basic drive of a student with ODD is to resist any adult control and manipulation. The more controlling an adult appears to be, the more oppositional a student will become.
- *Create a structured environment* – ODD students need structure, rules, rewards, guidance and a sense of safety. Such an environment will remind them repeatedly of acceptable behaviour limits and expectations.
- *Use behaviour modification techniques* – these should include anger management.
- *Use rewards* – these need to be tangible and given to a student immediately following correct behaviour on their part.
- *Utilise group work* – this may help to enhance students' self-esteem.
- *Remain calm* – try not to show any emotion when reacting to behaviours shown by a student with ODD.

## **Conduct Disorder (CD)**

### *Characteristics*

Conduct Disorder is shown in a repetitive and persistent pattern of behaviour in which the basic rights of others are violated. The following characteristics are based on the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of the American Psychiatric Association* (cited in O'Regan, 2002):

- Aggression:
  - bullies, threatens or intimidates others
  - initiates fights
  - uses weapons that could harm others
  - steals from a victim whilst confronting them
- Destruction of property.
- Deceitfulness, lying or stealing.
- Serious violations of rules.

### *Treatment/strategies*

As with ODD, the basic drive of a student with CD is to resist control and manipulation from any adult. The more controlling an adult appears to be, the more oppositional a student will become.

- *Create structure* – use rules, rewards, guidance and a sense of included safety.
- *Model appropriate behaviour* – show what is expected in different situations.
- *Use clear and consistent rewards* – these can help break the cycle of negative behaviour.
- *Provide a person that a student can speak to* – talking through their behaviour with someone is important.
- *Provide therapy* – this may help a student to control different aspects of their behaviour.
- *Reflect on their use of computer games and television* – examining the affect of these on a student's behaviour can prove very worthwhile.

#### *Further reading*

[www.aacap.org](http://www.aacap.org) – American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry

## **Tourette Syndrome**

### *Characteristics*

The symptoms of Tourette Syndrome can be divided into the following:

- **Motor** – as a neurological disorder it is characterised by tics which are involuntary, and rapid and sudden movements that occur repeatedly in the same way.
- **Vocal** – involuntary noises or vocalisations.
- **Behavioural** – self-destructive behaviours may occur.

### *Treatment/strategies*

- *Most people with Tourette Syndrome do not require medication* – medication can help in severe cases, suppressing tics and making life more manageable. These drugs increase the amount of dopamine in the body but can have side effects.
- *Use behaviour therapies and techniques* – for example, encouraging students to practise a common tic may allow them to have a tic-free episode afterwards (as people with Tourette Syndrome have to make a certain number of tics each day).
- *Help students to adopt exercise and relaxation techniques.*
- *Help students to concentrate on an absorbing task* – this can also prove helpful.

- *Some students seem to be helped by removing additives from their diet – herbal medicines, vitamin and mineral supplements can also sometimes be of assistance.*
- *Be consistent with rewards and sanctions.*
- *Enable students to sit near a door – this enables them to make an easy exit when necessary because of their condition.*
- *Attempt to avoid confrontational situations with students.*

### Further reading

[www.tourettes-action.org.uk](http://www.tourettes-action.org.uk)

## Reflection on practice



### Support strategies to use with students in diverse environments

How would you support a learner with Conduct Disorder and Tourette Syndrome in a classroom and practical area?

Put your responses into the spaces on the grid below.

**Table 1.1**

	Conduct Disorder	Tourette Syndrome
Support strategies you would use in classroom		
Support strategies you would use in a practical area. Specify area e.g., workshop, salon, catering facility		

How might a Learning Support Assistant (LSA) be used in each area to support those learners?

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When might you find time to discuss support strategies with the LSA?

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## Case Studies

Look at the two Case Studies below. Read through the characteristics of each student's behaviour and try to identify the predominant condition they have, then try to think of any suitable strategies that could be used with them.

### Student A

Naseem is a Level 3, 18-year-old student who displays the following behaviours:

- Frequently disrupts the rest of the class.
- Talks continuously and interrupts others.
- Constantly fiddles with objects including his mobile phone.
- Doesn't pay attention and finds it difficult to concentrate.
- Produces very little work.
- Is disrespectful of others.
- Enjoys distracting other students who are trying to work.
- Ignores his lecturers and talks over them when they are trying to teach.
- Is forgetful and loses materials.

### Condition

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List any strategies you think might be appropriate to use with this learner.

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Now check your list with the list of recommended strategies below.

### Strategies to use with a learner with ADHD

- Position them in class where they are least likely to be distracted.
- Develop predictable environments, clear rules, boundaries and seating.

- Make the behaviour expectations really clear.
- If they misread a situation help them to understand and give them strategies to use in the future.
- Reward and sanction immediately.
- Intervene early – remind them of rules and consequences.
- Give clear and precise instructions – say their name, maintain firm eye contact, and use short sentences; repeat instructions where necessary; use silence where necessary.
- Give distraction objects to the student to fiddle with e.g. a stress ball.
- Break the session up into clear segments and introduce some opportunities for physical activity e.g. brain breaks.

## Student B

Andy is a 45-year-old student who has recently joined college. He has profound learning and behavioural difficulties. He displays the following behaviours:

- Inflexibility – hates changes to his routine and often finds it difficult to concentrate when this occurs.
- Finds it extremely difficult to adjust to unfamiliar situations.
- When things go wrong he exhibits extreme inappropriate behaviours.
- Has limited use of non-verbal communication – there is a lack of eye contact and facial expressions.
- Uses repetitive language – often his words and phrases are repeated.
- Can be very gifted in certain areas but can also become pre-occupied with certain areas of interest.
- Is reluctant to receive help and support as education was not fully available to him when young and derogatory remarks were made when he was younger about his inability to learn. These have meant that he is very insecure about learning.

## Condition

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List any strategies you think might be appropriate to use with this learner.

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Now check your list with the list of recommended strategies below.

### **Strategies to use with someone with High Level Autistic Spectrum Disorder**

- Develop a structured and predictable environment.
- Focus on their strengths and areas of interest: remember they can be gifted in certain areas; tailor individual learning strategies towards utilising these strengths.
- Build their self-esteem.
- Develop co-operative learning strategies to improve their interactions.
- Ensure they know the overall structure that every lesson will adhere to, e.g. the beginnings and endings will be the same: this will help to avoid any behavioural problems that may arise when they are not able to cope with changes to routine.
- Talk to the learner within the confidentiality conventions to identify any triggers and what you can do to help them with their learning experience.
- Ensure you research the condition.
- Enlist the support of a Learning Support Assistant (LSA) if one is available: team working with an LSA can be of real benefit both to you and the learner.

### **Key points**



- Students will come from a diverse range of backgrounds and have varied prior experiences. This means we need to develop a range of skills to manage the behavioural challenges that may arise.
- More students are arriving with additional needs and statements.
- The causes of challenging behaviour are varied:
  - poor previous learning experiences
  - difficulties in adapting to college life



- home background
- mental health issues
- involvement in crime
- substance abuse
- effects of the media
- effects of food
- Brain re-configuration in adolescence and its effect on learning and behaviour are important. There are many changes to the brain in adolescence that will lead to learners being:
  - impulsive
  - risk taking
  - unable to assess causes and effects
  - less able to assess threats
  - ruled by their emotions
  - unable to recover easily from trauma

Only when the pre-frontal cortex is fully developed are learners able to plan, set priorities, organise their thoughts, suppress their impulses, and weigh up the consequences of their actions.

- There are a number of issues relating to academic versus vocational groups and teaching combined groups.
- Understanding and supporting additional needs learners involves the following:
  - individual students can suffer from a number of conditions
  - Autism, Asperger Syndrome, ADHD, ODD, CD and Tourette Syndrome have key symptoms/ characteristics and various strategies can be adopted to deal with these
- The challenges of managing students in diverse environments will include practical areas and classrooms.
- Case studies looking at supporting learners with conditions should include older learners with learning and behavioural difficulties.