

Formal Definitions of Challenging Behaviour: Two of the most widely used definitions of 'Challenging behaviour' are:

'Culturally abnormal behaviour(s) of such an intensity, frequency or duration that the physical safety of the person or others is likely to be placed in serious jeopardy, or behaviour which is likely to seriously limit use of, or result in the person being denied access to, ordinary community facilities.'

Source: Emerson, E (1995), cited in Emerson, E (2001, 2nd edition): Challenging Behaviour: Analysis and intervention in people with learning disabilities. Cambridge University Press

'Behaviour can be described as challenging when it is of such an intensity, frequency, or duration as to threaten the quality of life and/or the physical safety of the individual or others and it is likely to lead to responses that are restrictive, aversive or result in exclusion.'

Source: Royal College of Psychiatrists, British Psychological Society, Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists, (2007), Challenging behaviour – a unified approach.

The term 'Challenging Behaviour' was introduced to replace a variety of terms which suggested that the problem was located within the person. The term 'challenging behaviour' was introduced to move away from this by describing the behaviour as challenging to services ("this person presents us with a challenge in how to support him/her" as opposed to "this person is being very difficult"). The emphasis was to encourage carers and professionals to find effective ways of understanding a person's behaviour and its underlying causes.

Overtime the term 'challenging behaviour' has become misused; now it is often used as a diagnostic label leading to stigmatisation and exclusion ("this person has challenging behaviour"). This means that children and adults who are given this label are often denied the right to live an ordinary life in their local community, and are placed in institutional settings far away from their homes and families, due to lack of local support and services that meet their needs.

The Challenging Behaviour Foundation wants to see the term 'challenging behaviour' used in its original sense to encourage carers and professionals to find effective ways of understanding a person's behaviour and its underlying causes and to get good local support.

To learn more visit the [Information section](#) of our website. Here you can find information on understanding challenging behaviour and policy and best practice.