



# Wyomissing Behavior Analysts, Ltd.

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## PERSON-CENTERED BEHAVIOR SUPPORT

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In the past 10+ years we have made tremendous strides in moving to a more person-centered approach to supporting people to make changes in their own lives. We have recognized that we do not always know better (Paternalism) and that some level of self determination (Autonomy) is critical → even for people with limitations in capacity for independent decision making.

This movement has been most evident in the development of behavior change programs which in some venues have gone from being called “Behavior Modification” to “Behavior Management” to “Behavior Supports”.

The hallmark of a truly person-centered approach is the ability to put yourself in the person’s shoes and see the world from their point of view -- to empathize, not necessarily sympathize. The key is to use your insight and judgment, while seeing things through their eyes with their personality and lifestyle preferences.

People can speak for themselves to varying degrees. When they can, they should. When they cannot, it falls on someone else to speak for them. It is a real challenge and responsibility to speak for someone else. It is tough to keep your own biases and preferences out of the equation. It is real easy to slip away from Autonomy and back to Paternalism. “Person-Centered” can easily become “Cause Centered” as we force our own vision and ideals into the equation.

In drafting more “Person-Centered Behavior Support Plans”, I have found it helpful to take this advocacy approach -- to get inside the person, see things from their point of view, and write down as best I can what they would say about how they would want to be treated and what they would want others to do (or not do) to help them.

At the least, this approach has helped me to tone down my language and get away from some of the fancy jargon. For sure, it increases my sensitivity to seeing things from the person’s perspective. It is analogous to a “Living Will” -- while they have capacity to do so (in this case with me as the agent for this capacity), they are identifying how they would like to be treated.

What follows is an extract from such a more “Person-Centered Behavior Support Plan”. What were programmatic guidelines for staff now becomes the person’s “Requests for Respect and Support”. Note how in this case the particular person is not choosing to do whatever s/he wanted all the time. I don’t think any of us really want that much freedom. Or am I bringing my preferences and values into this again? It’s not easy. The challenge remains!!!

## \_\_\_\_\_’s Requests for Respect and Support:

1. Please **treat me with dignity and respect** regardless of my momentary behavior (sometimes I can get an attitude). I do best when I am given some assurance and feel like I belong.
2. Like most people, I don’t like to do a whole bunch of things in a row that I don’t like. Help me to **spread things out**. Mix in some things I like.
3. If I agree to and do one thing, **don’t heap on** additional requests or requirements. I won’t believe you next time when you ask me to do “just one thing.” It is important that I can trust you.
4. Never make promises you can’t keep. **Be honest** with me.
5. I have trouble saying good things about myself. Assist and encourage me to make **positive statements about my own behavior**. If I seem to need it, give me a hint.
6. If you need to point out something I’m not doing quite right, be sure to **aim your comments at my behavior** and **not me** as a person. I would like to think I am a good guy who just makes a mistake now and again.
7. Give me choices whenever possible. Giving me **two choices** is a way you can tell me my limits, but still leave me with some feeling of control.
8. I usually have trouble dealing with change and new situations. Sometimes I just need time and space to work things out on my own. BUT don’t go too far! **Let me know you are available**, but then let me make the next move. Whatever you do, don’t nag me!!!
9. Every once in a while I can get so upset and carried away that I do something that endangers myself or someone else. Try to **give me time and space** to get control of myself on my own.
10. When I get upset, I have trouble controlling my feelings and behavior. Especially when I’m not in control, I need to know that you are in control!! **Be assertive with me and set clear and reasonable limits**.
11. If I start verbally threatening to do something, **acknowledge that I’m upset** so I know you care, and remind me of my limits.
12. If I get really dangerous and you think its an emergency and you have no other choice but to take a hold of me to keep me from hurting myself or someone else → then do it! **Just be careful!** Hopefully and if you do it right, I will find some comfort in being held and realize you are trying to help me.
13. If I don’t seem to be calming down, it may be helpful to suggest I **sit on the floor**. That is a safer place for me to be and will make it less likely you will need to hold on to me.
14. I would appreciate some **input into any Reports** that are written about things that happen with me. I may not be in good shape to do it right away, but maybe later after I calm down.

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