



Working together: skills teaching in a local authority special school



Central and North West London NHS Foundation Trust

INTRODUCTION: Behaviours of concern can be seen as a form of nonverbal communication (Carr & Durand, 1985), and functional communication skills teaching is considered an essential intervention to reduce behaviours of concern. As far as *preventative practices* are concerned, Alai-Roasales et al. (2018) argue that functional skills teaching is a key element to try to decrease the risk of young people developing behaviours of concern. Hedge Wood School identified that for some of their pupils 'teaching as usual' was not helping them to develop these skills. Essential for Living (EfL) offers a skills teaching curriculum for young people and adults with moderate to severe learning disabilities. A bespoke EfL curriculum was implemented for pupils who hadn't made the expected progress in relation to their functional skills prior to their move to the EfL class.

Arthur is a 10 year-old boy with a diagnosis of moderate LD and Autism. When he moved to the EfL class, he had some ability to request using speech. 'No' was a common antecedent of the behaviours of concern, and adults were avoiding the word no to prevent their occurrence. Playtime was a highly desired activity.

In the EfL class, staff introduced pictures to support Arthur to make requests when his speech wasn't comprehensible by others. Other visuals (incl. now-next and visual timetable) were removed, as following a schedule is a 'nice to have' and not an 'essential' or 'must have' skill. A reduction of the behaviours of concern was noted over time, while he also started to use more speech supported by pictures to request things.

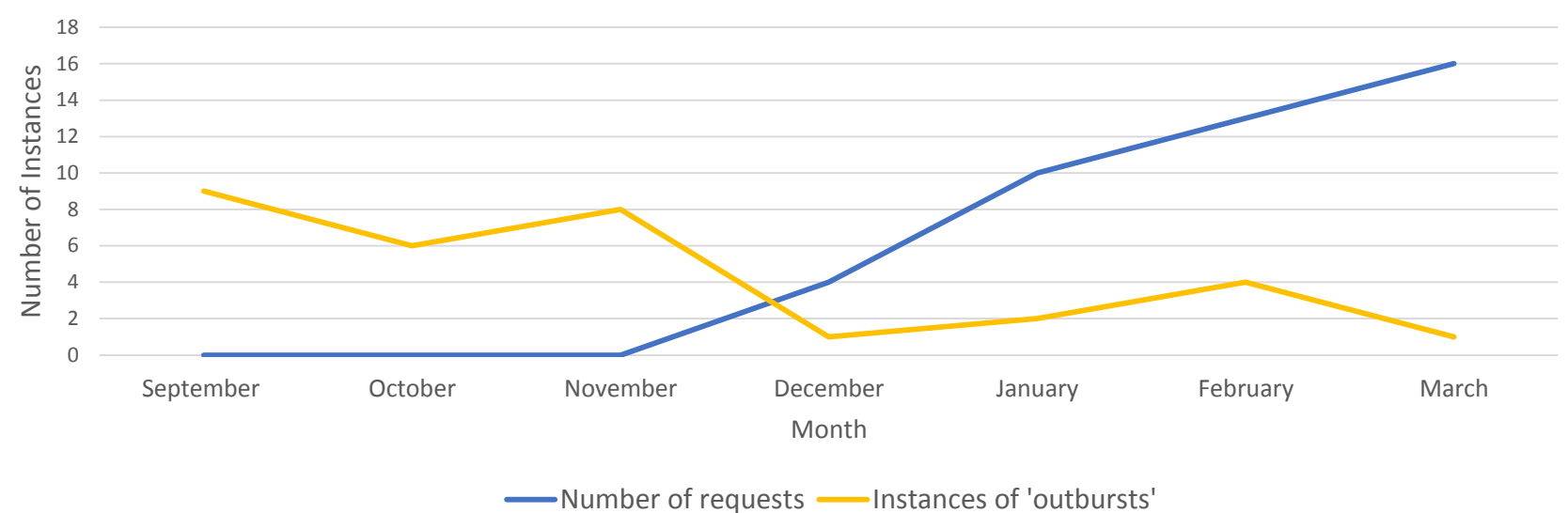
His mother reported:

*Since Arthur has been following the Essential for Living Curriculum, I have noticed at home considerable **changes and improvements in his behaviour, independence, happiness and wellbeing**. Arthur is certainly a more contented and less frustrated little boy than he has been in the past (...) At home Arthur is now continually trying **to use speech supported by visuals** to express his needs and wants rather than behaviours. As a result Arthur is also now progressing very well in his ability to understand the concept of waiting, accepting the word no, and things he can't have, without getting frustrated. All of these very important life skills have **a huge impact on family life, what we can do as a family, and how we see the future.***

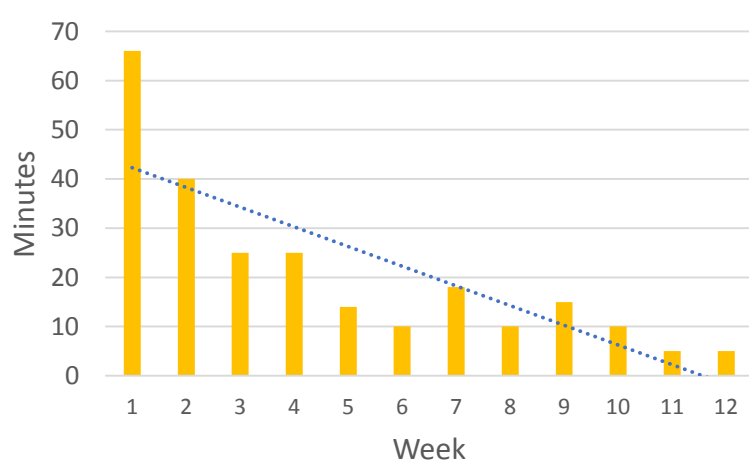
Vinc is in year 3 and has a diagnosis of Autism and severe LD. Before he moved to the EfL class, he had very limited symbolic understanding and didn't make the expected progress in his speech and language. He engaged in physical behaviours, including throwing his weight on others, squeezing and pushing.

Following intervention in the EfL class, the **number of requests he learnt increased** over time, and the **behaviour of concern reduced** in frequency. He is now using pictures to communicate which are attached on a belt he is wearing. He is now wearing his 'communication belt' throughout the day at home and school.

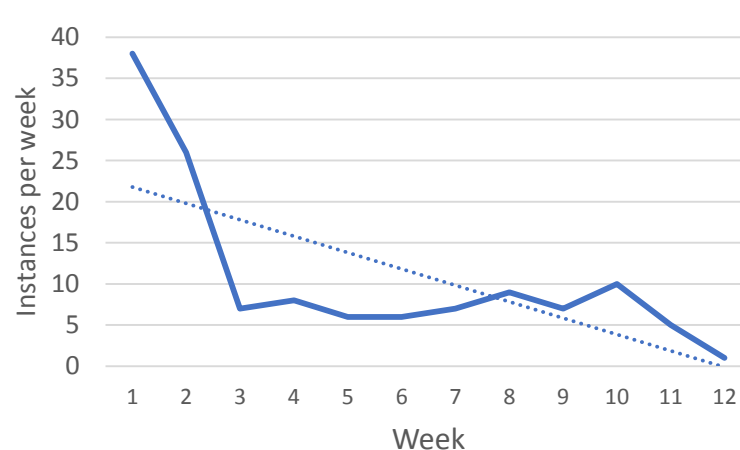
Rate of requests and the behaviour of concern per month



Duration of 'complaining' response to no playtime

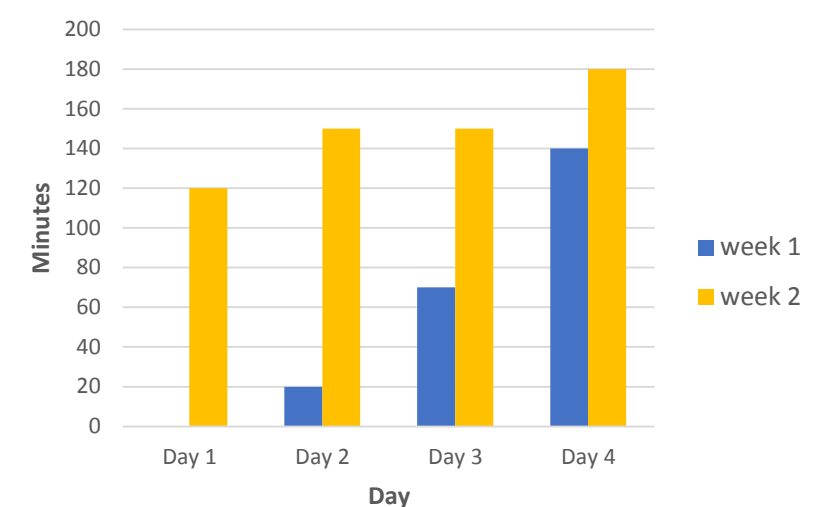


Instances of physical behaviours towards others



Wearing the communication belt

Duration of tolerating the belt



CONCLUSION: Young people who attend the EfL class have developed the skills necessary to access learning, and these skills may have the potential to prevent the onset of behaviours of concern all together (Hanley et al., 2007). We suggest that building the repertoires of functional communication and coping/tolerance skills early on, reduces the risk of behaviours of concern developing. This has an impact on young people and their families' quality of life, but also might reduce the need for a referral to specialist health services which are under the strain of increasing demand and financial constraints.

