

Multi-element Plan Components

Ecological adjustments and Antecedent Management

Ecological adjustments and antecedent management are proactive strategies grounded in the principles of Positive Behaviour Support (PBS) and are fundamental to effective practice. These strategies aim to prevent challenging behaviour by shaping the environment and anticipating student needs—rather than reacting after problems arise.

Definition

Ecological adjustments involve modifying physical, social, and instructional environments to better meet student needs and reduce the likelihood of behaviours of concern. The goal is to increase predictability, comfort, accessibility, and engagement in the setting.

Key Forms of Ecological Adjustments

Setting	Adjustment Types
	- Predictable routines and visual schedules
	- Low-clutter, sensory-sensitive spaces
Classrooms	- Flexible seating
	- Adjusted lighting and noise levels
	- Clear physical boundaries between areas
	- Display of student work to foster belonging
	- Safe, clearly zoned areas for different play types
	- Access to both active and quiet spaces
Playgrounds	- Adult proximity for support and engagement
	- Social scripts and visuals to guide peer interaction
	- Equipment adapted for physical or sensory needs
	- Structured job routines with task checklists
Work	- On-site mentors or aides to model and support
Experience	- Pre-teaching workplace behaviours and expectations
	- Scheduled breaks and access to calming strategies
	- Adjusted workload and roles matched to student strengths

Why Ecological Adjustments Matter

- Reduce environmental triggers (e.g., noise, transitions, unpredictability)
- Support emotional regulation and communication needs
- Increase engagement and reduce idle time, which is a common precursor to behaviour
- Promote independence, safety, and inclusion

Reference: Dunlap, G., & Carr, E. G. (2007). The role of choice in promoting self-determination and quality of life in individuals with disabilities. *Journal of Positive Behaviour Interventions*, 9(2), 102–115.

Antecedent Management: Preventing Behaviour Before It Occurs

Definition

Antecedent management refers to modifying the events, triggers, or conditions that precede a behaviour in order to prevent it from occurring. It is based on functional behaviour assessment (FBA) and involves identifying patterns in the ABC model:

- Antecedent → Behaviour → Consequence

The goal is to alter the "A" (antecedent), so the unwanted "B" (behaviour) does not occur.

Examples of Antecedent Strategies

Strategy	Application Example
Visual schedules	A student anxious about transitions sees what's coming next, reducing resistance or refusal.
Clear, concise instructions	Instead of "Clean up everything now!", say "Put your pencils in the box."
Choice-making	Offering "Do you want to work at the table or on the mat?" increases autonomy and reduces resistance.

Strategy	Application Example
Pre-correction	Before entering a noisy assembly, remind a student: "Remember to wear your headphones and sit with a buddy."
Task simplification	Reducing a 10-step task into three manageable steps prevents overwhelm.
Environmental priming	Using a short video or story before a new activity helps prepare students for what to expect.
Prompting coping strategies	Remind a student to use their break card or squeeze ball before a potentially stressful task.

Research Support

Antecedent interventions are evidence-based and widely endorsed in PBS literature. They are most effective when used proactively and systematically, particularly with students with autism, intellectual disability, and complex trauma.

References:

- Kern, L., Choutka, C. M., & Sokol, N. G. (2002). Assessment-based antecedent interventions used in natural settings to reduce challenging behaviour: A review of the literature. *Education and Treatment of Children*, 25(1), 113–130.
- Luiselli, J. K., et al. (2005). Antecedent interventions for challenging behaviour in children with autism. *Behavior Modification*, 29(2), 214–233.