

Multi-element Planning

Here is a teacher-friendly synopsis of Multi-Element Behaviour Support Planning as developed by LaVigna & Willis and the Institute for Applied Behaviour Analysis (IABA), with a focus on implementation in special school settings to support safe, positive outcomes for students with disabilities. Multi-Element Planning is a comprehensive approach to Positive Behaviour Support (PBS) developed by Dr. Gary LaVigna and Dr. Thomas Willis. It provides a holistic framework for reducing challenging behaviours and increasing quality of life for individuals with disabilities.

This planning model is rooted in Applied Behaviour Analysis (ABA) and emphasises:

- Proactive strategies
- Respect for human dignity
- Skill development
- Environmental change
- Crisis prevention and safety

It is designed to support, not control students with complex and challenging behaviours, and is most effective when implemented with fidelity—that is, consistently, thoroughly and with integrity by all staff.

Multi-element planning considers individual student strengths, interests, needs and goals to design and implement integrated support and strategies to maximize life quality, self-determination and learning outcomes.

The various components of a quality multi-element plan are provided below. Multi-element Behaviour Support Plans (MEBS) are the evidence-based positive behaviour support structures designed by teachers and used to support unified, evidence-based strategies and teaching for all students in all contexts at our school. These supports might be for behaviour, sensory factors, communication, coping and tolerance, physical issues, mobility issues, self-care, medication etc. Where only one issue applies and can be incorporated within the class plan, then that is the best option. Otherwise, individual plans are needed. Advice should be sought from the Leadership team, as needed.

A school MEBS template that incorporates all components of evidence-based PBS is embedded in school practice to guide planning and to inform PBS implemented with fidelity.

Core Components of Multi-Element Plans

A high-fidelity multi-element plan includes proactive, educational, and reactive strategies, implemented as a coordinated system.

Element	Description	Teacher Practice Example
1. Ecological Strategies	Modify the environment to reduce triggers	Adjust lighting, reduce noise, reduce transition times
2. Positive Programming	Teach functionally equivalent and socially appropriate replacement behaviours	Teach a student to request a break instead of running away
3. Focused Support Strategies	Use short-term strategies to reduce problem behaviour	Provide prompts, visual schedules, or choice boards during high-risk times
4. Reactive Strategies	Respond to behaviour safely and respectfully to prevent escalation	Use low arousal responses, redirect, or offer a calm space
5. Crisis Management	Have a clear, agreed safety response plan for dangerous behaviours	Follow school-approved restrictive practices with documentation and debriefing
6. Data Collection and Evaluation	Ongoing review of behaviour and plan effectiveness	ABC data, frequency charts, staff communication logs

Fidelity in Teacher Implementation: Key Expectations

To implement multi-element behaviour support with fidelity, teachers must ensure the following:

1. Team Consistency

All staff working with the student understand and apply the plan
Common language and consistent cues are used (e.g., same prompt words)

2. Embedded Strategies Across the Day

Proactive supports are not one-off—they're part of every routine (arrival, transitions, lessons)
Preferred activities and calm choices are built into daily structure

3. Skill-Building Focus

Teachers identify what the student needs to learn to reduce the need for the behaviour
Skills may include communication, emotional regulation, requesting help

4. Respect and Relationship

Plans must protect student dignity
Students are viewed as learners, not problems

5. Documentation and Feedback

Teachers use simple tracking tools (ABC charts, checklists)

Weekly review with leadership or support staff to adjust as needed

Why It Works

- Supports predictable, safe environments
- Reduces need for restrictive or punitive responses
- Improves student communication, emotional regulation, and independence
- Builds trust and teamwork among staff
- Improves student wellbeing and learning access

Practical Example

Student Profile: Year 4 student with autism and an ID, engages in frequent task avoidance (throwing materials, leaving class)

Element	Example
Ecological	Task materials are reduced to smaller steps; sensory breaks added before challenging work
Positive Programming	Student is explicitly taught to use a visual “I need a break” card
Focused Supports	Teacher uses countdown timer and “first–then” visuals before work starts
Reactive	Staff responds by lowering voice, removing demands briefly, offering calm zone
Crisis	Agreed safety plan involves blocking and clearing area; no punitive response used
Data/Evaluation	Staff track break card use and duration of out-of-seat time weekly

References

LaVigna, G.W., & Willis, T.J. (2012). *The Control of Human Behavior: From the Past to the Future of Positive Behavior Supports*. IABA.
LaVigna, G.W., & Willis, T.J. (2005). *A Positive Behavioural Support Model for Breaking the Barriers to Social and Community Inclusion*. *Tizard Learning Disability Review*.
Institute for Applied Behaviour Analysis (IABA). (2021). <https://www.iaba.com>



Multi-Element Behaviour Support Planning

The multi element model provides a holistic proactive approach to reducing behaviours of concern and creating safe positive outcomes for individuals with disabilities.

Core Elements of a High-Fidelity Plan



Ecological Strategies

Modify the environment to reduce triggers



Data Collection & Review

Ongoing review of the plans effectiveness



Focused Support Strategies

Use short-term strategies to reduce problem behaviour



Positive Programming

Teach equivalent and socially appropriate replacement behaviours



Reactive Strategies

Respond to behaviour safely and respectfully to prevent escalation



Crisis Management

Have a clear, agreed safety response plan for dangerous behaviours

Fidelity Expectations for Teachers



Team Consistency

All staff working with the student apply the plan



Respect and Relationship

Plans must protect student dignity



Embedded Strategies

Proactive supports are not one-off—they're part of every routine



Skill Building Focus

Identify what the student needs to learn to reduce the need for the behaviour



Documentation & Feedback

Weekly review with leadership or support staff to adjust as needed



Multielement Plan with prompts and notes

Always remember that the program that will teach and change behaviour is the three components: ecological management, positive programming and focused support. Emergency management is for achieving rapid, safe control of a situation, not for changing a behaviour. This means that the most important part of the plan are the three components to the left.

We use the non-linear planning structure because behaviour is not as simple as the traditional antecedent-behaviour-consequence way of thinking but has a wide range of contextual factors resulting in the behaviour that is observed. These factors are addressed through the plan components outlined below.

Ecological management Changes in the physical, programmatic and interpersonal environment to better fit the person's characteristics and needs.	Positive programming - Longitudinal instruction designed to teach skills and competencies to facilitate behavioural changes for social and community integration. - General skills - Developmental skills - Functional skills - Coping skills - Variations in the general instructive program functional, chronologically appropriate learning - Zero inference teaching - Functionally equivalent skills - communication skills - ringing a bell vs crying - word care vs hitting - communicating confusion - saying "no" - independence - Functionally related skills - discrimination - choice - predictability and control - rules - stimulus control - teaching coping skills - desensitisation - shaping - relaxation training	Focused support - Strategies and processes to assist the person to achieve life quality and have their needs and wants met through socially acceptable behaviour. - Daily schedule criteria - Density of preferred events - Alternative sequences - Stimulus control In the presence of certain stimuli, the behaviour is more likely to occur. Therefore, ensure that supportive stimuli are present. We want to maximise the opportunity for the desired behaviour so that it can be reinforced and habits changed. - Stimulus satiation If it's what he wants, give it to him and don't make him work for it! Then design a program to teach the person sharing and delaying gratification. We need to take responsibility to share, delay gratification - it takes two to compromise. If he learns this, we won't have the problem, but it will need sophisticated training. Others need to agree it's a good idea e.g. could tape the shows for others to watch later if another always aggressed if he couldn't watch his favourite show. The Million \$ question is what does he want? - Reinforcement - Reinforce according to a data-driven schedule or incentive scheme (schedule of Reinforcement) - DRO - DRL - DROP - ALT-R.	Non-aversive Emergency or Crisis Management Use non-aversive, non-restrictive strategies to gain rapid, safe control. Emergency management is never intended to teach or to change behaviour in the long term, only to resolve the crisis, at the time when a crisis or emergency has occurred. - Antecedent controls - Interrupt the behaviour chain using proximity control or by injecting humour - Active listening: The process of engaging the person's attention, giving them the idea that you are there to assist and that you want to know what the problem is so that the crisis or emergency can be resolved. - Strategic capitulation - Communication supports and facilitation - Relaxation - Stimulus change: The process to eliminate events likely to precipitate behaviour challenges - remove objects - remove people - remove unnecessary demands - change location and timing - rearrange environment - Instructional control - Problem solving facilitation - Counter-intuitive strategies - Geographical containment; inter-positioning but nothing restrictive - Emergency physical containment, physical, chemical or mechanical restraint are not used. If the agreed non-aversive, non-restrictive strategies fail, then at our School we use the intercom to say 'The Puzzle Piece is Missing' which means that the area where the student in crisis is, is evacuated and if necessary, other areas locked down. Leadership team will liaise with teacher managing and supporting the student and assist as needed.
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• Visual schedules • Tactile schedules • Precursor management • Interactional style • Transition supports • Environment matching • Positive niche construction • Universal Design for Learning • Physical factors, setting factors: setting, light, noise, crowding implications • Interpersonal factors: ○ people who assist, facilitate ○ people who trigger or foster the challenge? ○ peer issues ○ communication/culture ○ expectations ○ implications • Programmatic factors ○ learning goals ○ choice, predictability, control ○ motivational system ○ curriculum ○ goals and objectives ○ tasks and materials ○ task difficulty ○ instructional methods or style • Pollutants ○ physical ○ setting ○ sensory ○ people ○ learning activities or anniversaries			
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Multi-element Behaviour Support Plan Template

Ecological Management; Facilitators, Blockers	Positive Programming	Focussed Supports	Rapid, Safe Controls – non-aversive, non-restrictive practices for emergency support
Setting factors – physical, sensory, furniture, mobility, seating, access, participation	General Curriculum: HICP, DYL-P	Reinforcement schedules	Antecedent controls
Interactions	Developmental Curriculum – Personalised Learning Plans e.g., social skills, personal cares,	Stimulus control	Interruption
Instructional methods	Functionally equivalent skills	Instructional control	Instructional control
Instructional goals	Functionally related skills	Stimulus satiation	Active listening
Environmental pollutants	Coping skills	Diet	Strategic capitulation
People - helpers	Communication skills	Medical supports	Communication supports
People - hinderers			Relaxation
Topics of conversation			Stimulus change
Triggers including trauma triggers, antecedents			Counter-intuitive strategies

Generic Multi-element Behaviour Support Plan

The following provides minimum requirements for every class multi-element plan. Recognising that the entire suite of interventions and programs can seem daunting for a new PBS practitioner, the school designed the following generic multi-element plan, in partnership with Dr Gary LaVigna, as a way to maximise the most effective strategies and components for gradual incorporation in every teaching team's work. We remember to start small, move slow, as this way, quality practice can be designed, implemented and evaluated, before adding additional aspects.

Ecological Management; Facilitators, Blockers	Positive Programming	Focussed Supports	Rapid, Safe Controls – non-aversive, non-restrictive practices for emergency support
- Visual schedules - Rapport building - Interactional style including ways for giving an instruction - Staff breaks - Individual and generalised Instructional control - Transition management - Physical environment checklist - Sensory environment checklist - Communication system and supports	- General skills - Personal and social skills - Increasing repertoire of independent, fun skills - Making and communicating an informed choice - Saying 'no' - Accepting 'no' - Functional skills - Generalised instructional control - Coping and tolerance - Academic knowledge and skills - Determined through moderated	- Daily schedule criteria - High density of preferred events and activities - Interesting activities and lessons with sufficient challenge to mitigate against boredom and frustration - Alternative sequences including those that promote a sense of choice and personal power	- Active listening - Stimulus change - Redirection - Something else - Preferred activity or event - Obsessive / compulsive behaviours - Strategic capitulation.

Integrating Multi-Element Behaviour Support Plan Components

In PBS, multi-element plans include:

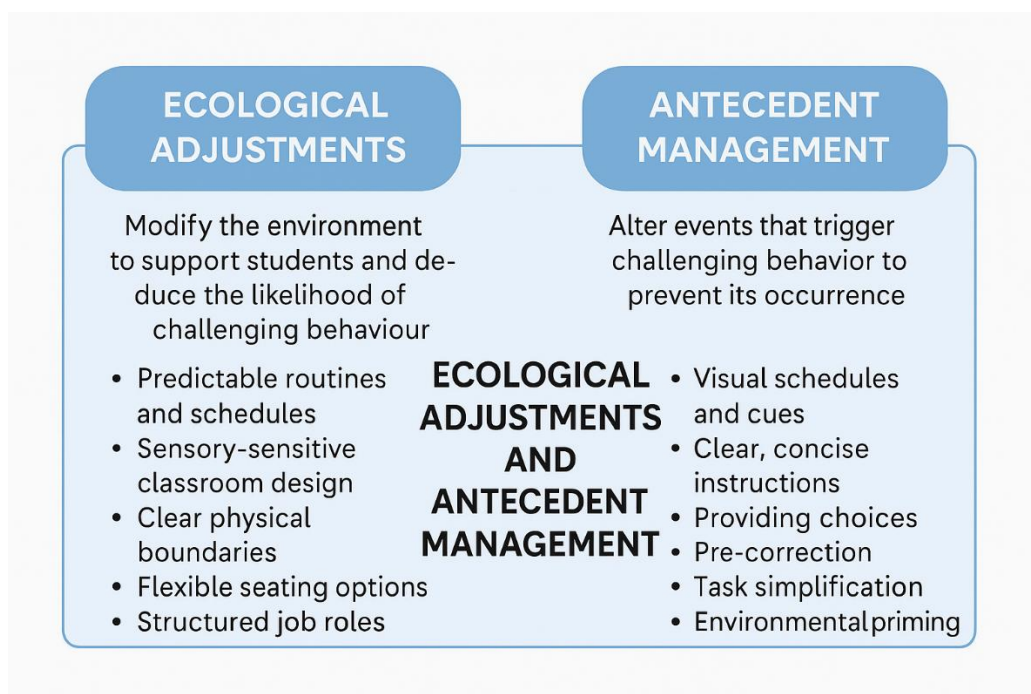
- Ecological Adjustments: Optimising the setting (e.g., classroom layout, visual cues, group structure)
- Antecedent Management: Avoiding or altering known triggers
- Skills Teaching: Teaching replacement behaviours or functional communication
- Reinforcement Strategies: Providing positive outcomes for appropriate behaviour
- Crisis Response: Plans for safe and respectful support if a behavioural incident occurs

Together, these elements form a comprehensive and preventative approach that is aligned with the Disability Standards for Education (2005) and the Nationally Consistent Collection of Data (NCCD).

Summary

Component	Purpose	Application in Special Schools
Ecological Adjustments	Shape the environment to support access and safety	Modify routines, sensory factors, physical layout, roles
Antecedent Management	Prevent behaviours by altering triggers	Visuals, pre-corrections, clear instructions, priming

Both strategies are core pillars of trauma-informed, student-centred practice in Queensland special schools and are vital to promoting engagement, self-regulation, and success.



101 Ways to Praise a Child

Wow · Way to go · You're special · Outstanding · Excellent · Great · Good · Neat · Well done · Remarkable · I knew you could do it · I'm proud of you · Super Star ★ · Nice work · Looking good · You're on top of it · You're catching on · Now you've got it 💡

How smart · Good job · That's incredible · Hot dog · Remarkable job · You're Beautiful · You're a winner · You make me happy · Hip, Hip Hooray · You're important · Magnificent · Beautiful · Fantastic · You're on target · You're on your way · How nice · You're Spectacular · You're Darling 💖 · Super · Super job · Beautiful work 🌸 · Good for you · Nothing can stop you now · Dynamite 💣 · You're fantastic · Awesome · You're precious · Fantastic job · You've discovered the secret · Bingo · Great discovery · You are responsible · You are exciting · You are fun 😄 · You're a real trooper · Marvelous · Terrific · You're growing up · Outstanding performance · You tried hard · You figured it out · What a good listener · You're a treasure · You mean a lot to me · You're a good friend ❤️ · That's correct · A big hug · What an imagination · You learned it right · You're incredible · Now you're flying · Bravo · Beautiful · I like you · I respect you · You're Sensational · Phenomenal · At job · Hooray for you · You're unique · You care · Creative job · You belong · You brighten my day · Super work · That's the best · You made my day · Say I love you! ❤️ · Beautiful sharing · You mean the world to me · You're important · You've got a friend · You're a joy · You make me laugh · You're A-OK-my buddy · I trust you · You're perfect · You're wonderful · A big kiss · Exceptional performance · p.s. Remember, a smile is worth 1000 Words!

Crisis Management Hints from the Los Angeles Police Service now integrated into educational practice

This table summarises the motivators of crisis behaviour, the symptoms to assist in root cause analysis, and strategies to assist in resolving the crisis. This information should be included in multi-element plans and used by us all.

FEAR An irrational need to escape, defend against or eliminate a perceived threat	FRUSTRATION An irrational need to express frustration in a physically destructive manner	MANIPULATION An impulsive attempt to obtain something in exchange for not losing emotional control or doing something dangerous	INTIMIDATION A calculated attempt to obtain something in exchange for physical safety or freedom from threat
IDENTIFICATION	IDENTIFICATION	IDENTIFICATION	IDENTIFICATION
SIGNS	SIGNS	SIGNS	SIGNS
POSTURE Tense Prepared to defend, hide, run away	POSTURE Tense Prepared to attack	POSTURE No clear signs	POSTURE Threatening
SKIN Pale, ashen	SKIN Red, purple	SKIN No clear signs	SKIN No clear signs
FACIAL EXPRESSION Wide eyed, fearful	FACIAL EXPRESSION Expressing a destructive urge	FACIAL EXPRESSION Neutral, unremarkable	FACIAL EXPRESSION Neutral, unremarkable
AUDITORY SIGNALS Whining voice Pleading voice	AUDITORY SIGNALS Menacing, aggressive voice	AUDITORY SIGNALS Whining voice Words and voice of a pitiable victim Confusing demands A series of marginally related accusations, comparisons, trivia, in increasingly more aggressive tones Threats and actions against property If all else fails, loss of control with assault	AUDITORY SIGNALS Menacing, threatening voice Clear, strongly worded demands A believable threat of physical injury with a reminder it can be avoided by complying Refusal to comply or delay in complying results in threat and then attempt to injure via assault
BREATHING Rapid Shallow Irregular	BREATHING Loud Deep Long	BREATHING Nothing remarkable	BREATHING Nothing remarkable
HISTORY Withdrawal and victimisation punctuated by assaultive outbursts	HISTORY Low frustration tolerance with impulsive assault	HISTORY Loss of control and physical attack when deprived of demands	HISTORY Bullying Extortion Assault
MANAGEMENT	MANAGEMENT	MANAGEMENT	MANAGEMENT
Use threat reduction	Use control	Use detachment	Use consequences
POSTURE Open Relaxed Hands in full view	POSTURE Commanding Imposing	POSTURE Closed Relaxed	POSTURE Poised Ready Not defensive
GESTURES Slow Palms up	GESTURES Forceful Commanding Palms out or down	GESTURES Idiosyncratic Gestures of disapproval and mild irritation	GESTURES Few
POSITION About 2 to 3 metres to the side At or below eye level	POSITION Directly in front Just out of striking range	POSITION 1.5 metres distant Turn slightly away	POSITION That of greater relative defensive advantage
EYE CONTACT Use freely if sought Do not force eye contact Remove eye contact is not sought	EYE CONTACT Direct Use facial expressions to indicate a final command is being given	EYE CONTACT Avoid	EYE CONTACT Sparing
PHYSICAL CONTACT Light Slow Use to show reassurance	PHYSICAL CONTACT Firm Forceful Controlled Not vindictive	PHYSICAL CONTACT Handle person by clothing Avoid contact with flesh	PHYSICAL CONTACT Quick Smooth Matter of fact
VOICE	VOICE	VOICE	VOICE

Firm Reassuring Confident	Quiet Forceful Commanding Low enough so that person must strain to hear	Detached Mechanical Slightly bored	Matter of fact Monotone Emotionless
SPEECH Logical Encourage calm reflection Promise to help if possible	SPEECH Repetitive Confident Commands without threat	SPEECH Quiet Repetitive commands	SPEECH Clear, direct statements of consequences Repeat as often as necessary