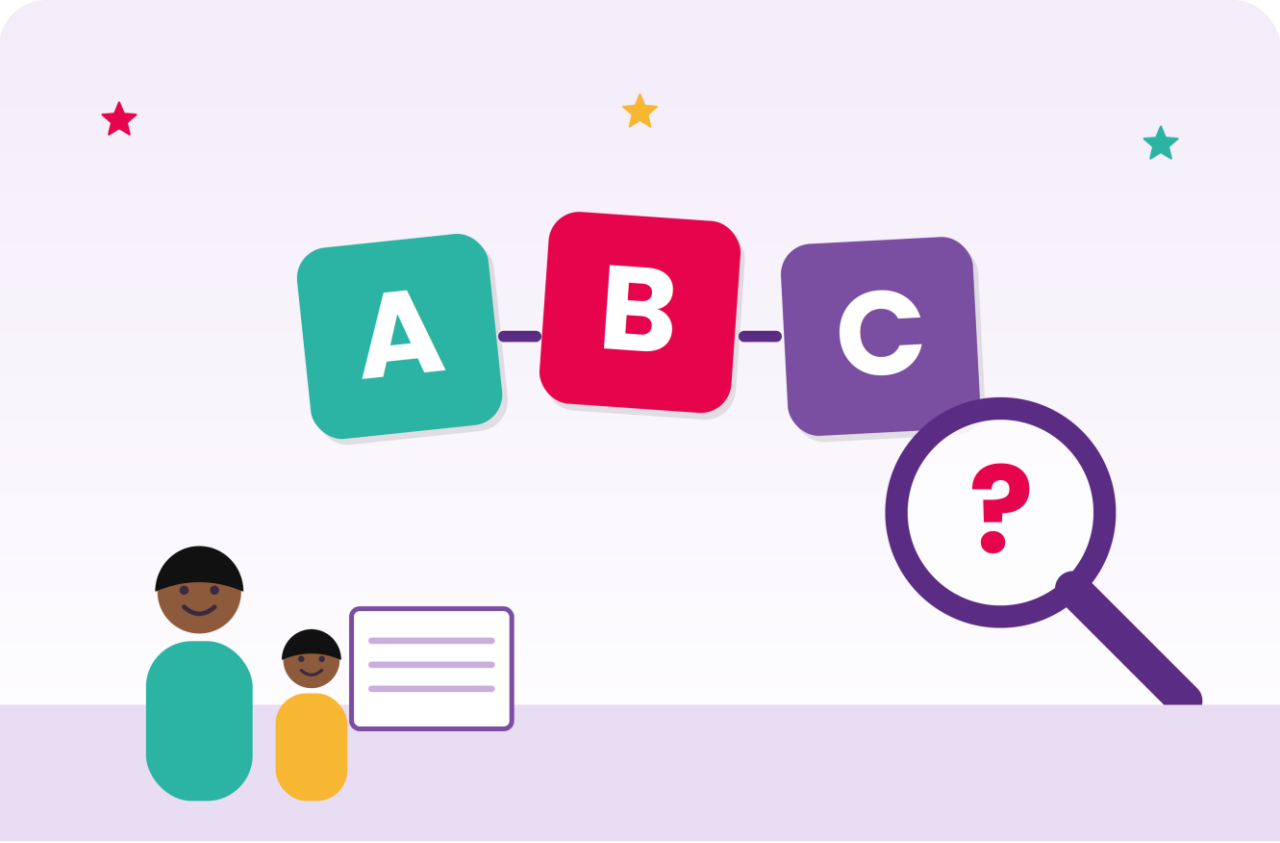
My Behaviour Diary

Being a detective: understanding what behaviour is telling us

ABC charts, mood trackers and pattern-spotting pages for families of neurodivergent children and young people



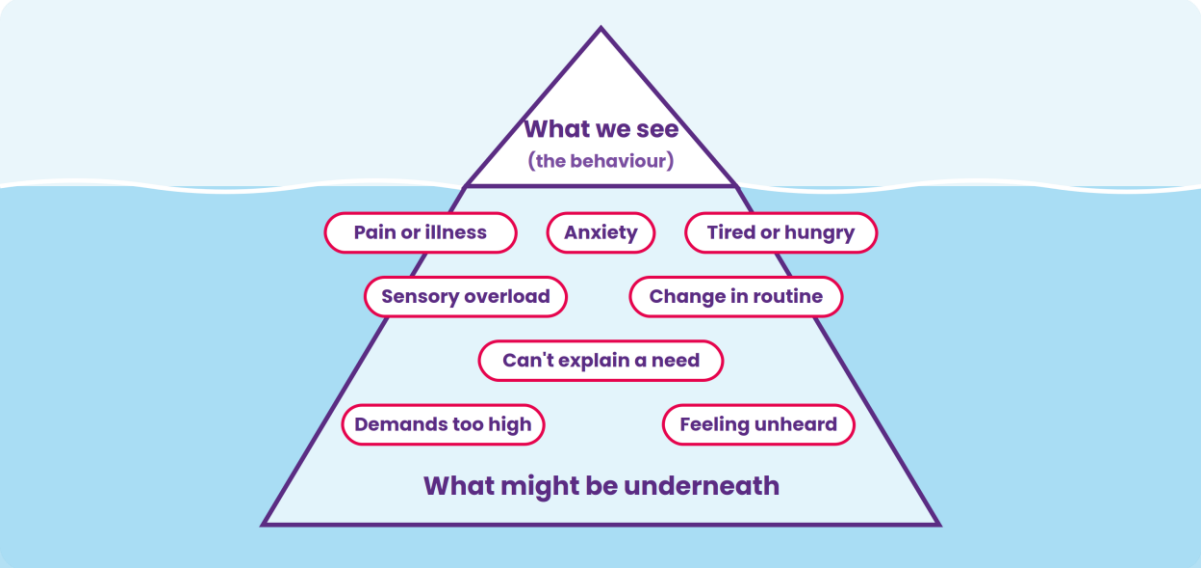
Name:	Start date:

Notice	Understand	Support

Behaviour is communication

Looking beneath the surface

All behaviour tells us something. When a child or young person is distressed, they may not be able to explain what is wrong in words. Behaviour can be their way of saying **“I am in pain”**, **“this is too much”**, **“I don't understand”** or **“I need help”**.



A behaviour diary helps you be a **detective**. By writing down what happens before and after, you can start to see patterns, understand the need underneath, and find ways to help.

Meltdown

An involuntary reaction to feeling completely overwhelmed. It is not a choice or “naughty” behaviour. The person needs safety, calm and less input, not punishment.

Shutdown

Another response to overwhelm. The person may go quiet, withdraw or stop responding. It can be easy to miss, so record shutdowns too.

Using an ABC chart

Antecedent, Behaviour, Consequence

	What to write	Questions to ask yourself
A – Before	What was happening just before? Where, when, who was there, what was asked?	Was it noisy or busy? Was there a change, a demand or a transition? Was the person tired, hungry or unwell?
B – Behaviour	What exactly did the person do or say? Describe it like a video camera would see it.	How long did it last? How intense was it (1–5)?
C – After	What happened straight afterwards? What did people do? What changed?	Did the person get away from something, get something, or calm down? What helped?

Worked example

Before (A)	Behaviour (B)	After (C)	What might it be telling us?
Supermarket after school, Friday 4:30pm. Busy and loud. Asked to wait in the queue.	Covered ears, dropped to the floor and screamed for about 10 minutes. Intensity 4.	Mum took him outside to the car. He calmed down with headphones on.	Too much noise after a tiring day. Needs a quieter time to shop, headphones and a Now and Next card.

Things that can affect behaviour (setting events)

Some things make distress more likely, even if they happened hours earlier. Look out for: poor sleep • hunger or thirst • pain, illness or constipation • medication changes • sensory overload • changes to routine or staff • a hard day at school • transitions • too many demands • big events coming up (holidays, birthdays).

ABC record 1

Fill in as soon as possible after the event

Date and time	Where / who was there	A – What happened before?	B – What did the person do?	C – What happened after?	How long? Intensity 1–5	What might it be telling us?

ABC record 2

Fill in as soon as possible after the event

Date and time	Where / who was there	A – What happened before?	B – What did the person do?	C – What happened after?	How long? Intensity 1–5	What might it be telling us?

Weekly mood tracker

1 = very calm • 5 = very distressed

Day	Sleep last night	Morning (1–5)	Afternoon (1–5)	Evening (1–5)	Triggers I noticed	What helped?
Monday						
Tuesday						
Wednesday						
Thursday						
Friday						
Saturday						
Sunday						

Good moments

What went well — and why?

It is just as important to notice the **good times**. When things go well, write down what was happening. This shows you what helps, so you can do more of it.

Date	What went well?	What was happening? Who was there?	Why do I think it went well?

Spotting patterns

Look back over 2–4 weeks

Question	My notes
Are there times of day when distress happens more often?	
Are there places, people or activities that come up a lot?	
Did poor sleep, hunger, illness or changes come before difficult days?	
What seems to be the need underneath? (e.g. a break, help, less noise, more predictability)	
What helps the person calm down?	
What will we try next?	
Questions for school or professionals	

Sharing the diary

Bring the diary to meetings with school, your GP, CAMHS, a paediatrician, social care or Sycamore Trust. It gives a clear picture and helps everyone agree a plan that meets the person's needs.

Where to find more help

Support for families

Organisation	How they can help	Website and contact
Challenging Behaviour Foundation	Information and a family support service for families of people with severe learning disabilities whose behaviour challenges.	challengingbehaviour.org.uk
National Autistic Society	Advice on distressed behaviour, meltdowns and shutdowns.	autism.org.uk
Contact	Advice and support for families with disabled children.	contact.org.uk
YoungMinds	Mental health information and support for young people and parents.	youngminds.org.uk
Sycamore Trust UK	Family Services support for autistic children, young people and their families. 020 8517 9317.	Home - Sycamore Trust

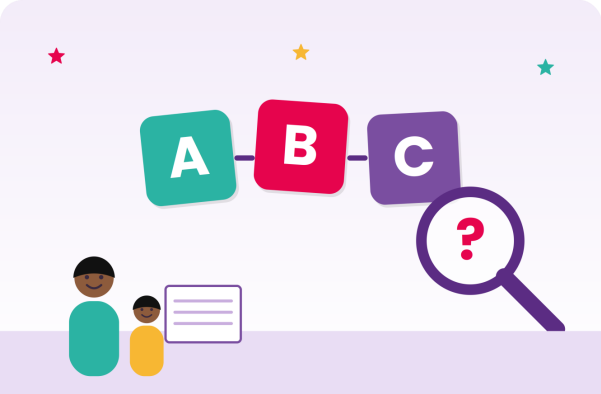
Staying safe

If anyone is at immediate risk of harm, call **999**. If you are worried about a child or young person's mental health, contact your GP, NHS 111 or your local CAMHS. You can also ask your local authority for a social care assessment.

Thank you for using this diary

Sycamore Trust UK is a registered charity supporting autistic children, young people, adults and their families across Barking & Dagenham, Havering and Redbridge.

Call us	Visit us	Find us online
020 8517 9317	27–29 Woodward Road, Dagenham RM9 4SJ	Home - Sycamore Trust



Disclaimer

This behaviour diary is a tool to help families notice patterns and understand what behaviour may be communicating. It gives **general information only**. It is not a behaviour support plan, a diagnosis or professional advice, and it does not replace support from a teacher, SENCo, educational psychologist, health professional or social care team.

Behaviour can sometimes be a sign of pain or illness. If behaviour changes suddenly, please speak to your GP. If anyone is at immediate risk of harm, call 999.

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