

Describing Behavior in Clear Terms

Written descriptions of behavior are based on a clear picture of the *observable* behavior. Best practice includes the following into the behavior description:

- Describe the observable action(s)
- How often (frequency)
- How long (duration- how long does the person engage in the behavior)
- Where, when, with whom
- The impact on the person or the environment (intensity/severity)

Complete information gives the reader a clear understanding of how the behavior looks and sounds.

An effective behavior description will not always use all elements, however, it will include enough information to give a clear description. This will most often include the observable action and the frequency of the behavior.

Examples of behavior descriptions

The following examples include all or some of the elements listed above.

1. When Bob is asked to brush his teeth, he will hit caregivers, one time, with a closed fist on an average of three times per week. This behavior only occurs if caregivers are within arm's reach of him when making this request.
2. When asked to perform daily hygiene tasks- bathing or brushing teeth, Jill refuses daily by yelling 2 to 4 times such words as, "I don't want to take a shower, why don't you go take a shower if you are so concerned about it."
3. Henry refuses his morning medication daily by throwing the cup on the ground.
4. In the last three months on two occasions, William has gotten up at night and walked out of his home. Both times caregivers located him within an hour. William was found walking down a dark road near his home.
5. Cynthia refuses to eat dinner by closing her lips together tightly and not opening her mouth. This behavior has occurred daily, but only at dinner, over the last 4 months. Cynthia has lost 20 lbs. and there is concern about weight.
6. Caregivers report that Greg isolates in his room for 2-3 days at a time. When Greg isolates himself, he refuses assistance with personal care by telling staff that they cannot enter his room. This has occurred twice in the last 6 months. He does leave his room for meals but immediately returns after hurriedly eating how food.

