Handout 12: Observing Behaviour

To gain an understanding of the reason someone is behaving in a way that is challenging you need to use observation and information gathering skills. The aim is to identify the function of the behaviour and develop some ideas about how to meet the person’s needs so they will not need to use that behaviour any more. So you will need to:

1. Identify the function of the behaviour or develop ideas about what its function may be – people may have a range of theories that may need to be tested.

2. Gather information by observing the person in the environment that the behaviours occur – or gather reports including incident reports from a number of people about this.

3. Test the theories by developing strategies to address the issue and see if it makes a difference.

This requires documentation such as data collection records. These generally record what happened before the behaviour was observed (the antecedents, what the behaviour was, what happened immediately afterwards (the consequences), and who was present.