

#1 Social Attention

A person may engage in certain behavior to gain some form of social attention or a reaction from other people. For example, a child might engage in behavior to get other people to look at them, laugh at them, play with them, hug them or scold them.

While it might seem strange that a person would engage in a behaviour to deliberately have someone scold them it can occur because for some people it's better to obtain "bad" attention than no attention at all (Cooper et al, 2007).

#2 Tangibles or Activities

Some behaviors occur so the person can obtain a tangible item or gain access to a desired activity. For example, someone might scream and shout until their parents buy them a new toy (tangible item) or bring them to the zoo (activity).

#3 Escape or Avoidance

Not all behaviors occur so the person can "obtain" something; many behaviors occur because the person wants to get away from something or avoid something altogether (Miltenberger, 2008).

For example, a child might engage in aggressive behaviour so his teachers stop running academic tasks with him or another child might engage in self-injury to avoid having to go outside to play with classmates.

#4 Sensory Stimulation

The functions of some behaviors do not rely on anything external to the person and instead are internally pleasing in some way – they are "self-stimulating" (O'Neill et al, 1997). They function only to give the person some form of internal sensation that is pleasing or to remove an internal sensation that is displeasing (e.g. pain).

For example, a child might rock back and forth because it is enjoyable for them while another child might rub their knee to sooth the pain after accidentally banging it off the corner of a table. In both cases, these children do not engage in either behaviour to obtain any attention, any tangible items or to escape any demands placed on them.