



Sharland Foundation Developmental
Disabilities Applied Behavioural
Research and Impact Network

The Behaviour Support Plan Content Appraisal Tool (BSP-CAT): User's Manual

Nick Gore, Peter Baker, Jill Chaplin,
Suzi Sapiets and Mark Murphy

November 2024

V1.2



The Behaviour Support Plan Content Appraisal Tool (BSP-CAT):

User's Manual

Contents

Overview	1
What is the BSP-CAT and who can use it?.....	1
Background and assumptions	1
Development of the BSP-CAT.....	3
Structure of the BSP-CAT.....	3
Using the BSP-CAT.....	4
Scoring logic and conventions.....	5
Calculating and interpreting scores.....	6
Tips and advice	7
Using the BSP-CAT to support practice and service development.....	8
Using the BSP-CAT in research	8
Final note from authors.....	9
References.....	9

Overview

This manual provides guidance for people with relevant training and experience to use the Behaviour Support Plan Content Appraisal Tool (BSP-CAT)¹ through self-instruction. It provides background on the theoretical assumptions that underpin the tool; highlights some of the ways in which the tool might be used; provides a description of scoring logic and structure; and outlines how to assess BSP quality, calculate and interpret scores using the BSP-CAT.

What is the BSP-CAT and who can use it?

The BSP-CAT has been designed to help rate the quality of Behaviour Support Plans (BSPs) created to support adults with learning disabilities in the context of behaviours that challenge in community settings. It is based on a UK-conception of Positive Behavioural Support (PBS) (Gore et al., 2013²; 2022³) but may also be applicable for use internationally.

Evaluating and shaping quality of BSPs is a key way to drive the implementation of PBS through practice, service design and research to ensure increased life quality for people with learning disabilities.

The BSP-CAT allows users to rate 14 aspects (components) of a BSP spanning 6 areas (strands). Ratings can be used to evaluate the quality of plans created by practitioners or services and to support professional and organisational development, audit and research.

The BSP-CAT can be used by those with appropriate levels of professional experience and training in PBS. Those using the BSP-CAT for more formal processes (i.e., research or inspection) should undertake additional training or preparations (see 'Using the BSP-CAT in research').

The BSP-CAT (in addition to this manual and any associated documents and resources) is freely available under Creative Commons Attribution Non-Commercial No Derivatives 4.0 International (CC BY-NC-ND 4.0)⁴. This means you can share it (i.e., copy and redistribute the material in any medium or format) as long as you follow the license terms:

1. **Attribution** – You must give [appropriate credit](#), provide a link to the license, and [indicate if changes were made](#). You may do so in any reasonable manner, but not in any way that suggests the licensor endorses you or your use.
2. **Non-Commercial** – You may not use the material for [commercial purposes](#).
3. **No Derivatives** – If you [remix, transform, or build upon](#) the material, you may not distribute the modified material.
4. **No additional restrictions** – You may not apply legal terms or [technological measures](#) that legally restrict others from doing anything the license permits.

Background and assumptions

Positive Behavioural Support (PBS) assumes that quality of support, quality of life, and behaviours that challenge are interlinked. In the context of poor-quality support, life quality is reduced and

¹ The BSP-CAT is available at <http://pbs-academy.com>

² <https://www.ingentaconnect.com/content/bild/ijpbs/2013/00000003/00000002/art00003>

³ <https://www.ingentaconnect.com/content/bild/ijpbs/2022/00000012/a00101s1/art00001>

⁴ Creative Commons license details are available at <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>

behaviours that challenge are more likely to occur. At the same time, behaviours that challenge, by definition, have significant negative impact on the person who displays them with respect to life quality and opportunity.

Behaviour Support Plans (BSPs) provide a core mechanism for ensuring life quality and reduced occurrence and impact of behaviours that challenge through enhanced service quality in PBS. They provide a practical and personalised means of guiding mediator (i.e., staff and family carers) behaviour to support a person in ways that synthesize and actualise the values and theoretical basis of PBS. In the UK, BSPs are conceptualised as a key procedural component of a PBS framework for people with learning disabilities (Gore et al 2013; 2022) that:

- Are grounded in person-centred goals and the findings of functional assessment that is bespoke, holistic and data-driven, together with other related assessments (that have conceptual coherence to assessment findings and person-centred processes).
- Are developed through partnership working with key people in a person's life, including wherever possible the person themselves.
- Are multi-component, including a variety of strategies that support life quality and reduce occurrence and impact of behaviours that challenge – addressing the full breadth of variables that influence life quality and behaviours that challenge for the focal person.
- Are predominantly proactive, with a primary focus on enhancing the quality of support, positive opportunities, skills development and related quality of life a person experiences. This includes strategies that help ensure a high-quality care and support environment (an enabling or capable environment) in general. It also includes antecedent strategies that relate to the particular functions of behaviours that challenge for the focal person and strategies to support the development of skills that are helpful for the focal person's life (i.e., to provide an alternative to behaviour that challenges, a coping method, or other general life skills).
- Include reactive strategies to reduce risk, escalation and impact of behaviours that challenge and keep the focal person and others safe at times when these behaviours have or are beginning to occur (i.e., secondary prevention and crisis management strategies).
- Are deliverable and practical by taking into account contextual factors and the needs of implementers/mediators. Provide sufficient detail, using clear and accessible language, and explicit instructions for mediators and systems for monitoring, and evaluation.

In some situations, a simpler plan, based on a briefer assessment, is adequate and most appropriate to support life quality and behaviours that challenge for a person with learning disabilities. The BSP-CAT is specifically designed to appraise the quality of BSPs in situations where this simpler plan is not deemed adequate and BSPs reflect all of the aforementioned properties where:

1. Factors relating to the risk and maintenance of the behaviour that challenges necessitate the completion of a full functional behavioural assessment (along with person-centred processes and other related assessments) and the development of a comprehensive multi-component support plan.
2. The behaviour(s) that challenge(s) is (are) of such intensity, frequency, duration and impact as to necessitate a crisis management plan as a component of the BSP.

Development of the BSP-CAT

The BSP-CAT was developed by the work of the Sharland Foundation Developmental Disabilities Applied Behavioural Research and Impact Network (a network of practice-focused researchers) led by Gore, Baker, Chaplin, Sapiets and Murphy. The first draft of the tool was created following a review of the literature and with close reference to the Gore et al (2013) definition of PBS and PBS resources developed in the UK by the PBS Academy (PBS Academy, 2015⁵). The tool was refined through multiple writing rounds, drawing on the refreshed definition of PBS in the UK (Gore et al, 2022), workshop discussions with stakeholders and feedback from researchers and practitioners. Initial psychometric testing of the tool (test-retest and interrater reliability) indicated acceptable reliability and led to further refinements and creation of the final version (see Baker, Gore, Sapiets, Chaplin, Murphy & Evans, in preparation⁶).

Structure of the BSP-CAT

The BSP-CAT is made up of 14 components, organised into 6 strands that map onto the major elements of a BSP (see figure 1).

STRAND	COMPONENT	DESCRIPTION
Foundations for Support	A1. Formulation A2. Contextual fit A3. Goals/aspirations	Information regarding assessment of the person and their environment in order to personalise interventions, supports and strategies.
Enabling Environments	B1. Communication B2. Choice B3. Physical and mental health B4. Relationships with friends, family and the wider community B5. Safe, consistent and predictable environment B6. High levels of participation in meaningful activity	Interventions and supports to create an enabling environment for the person, thus enhancing quality of life and creating positive life opportunities that mitigate risk of behaviours that challenge.
Antecedent Interventions	C1. Antecedent interventions	Antecedent interventions that proactively seek to enhance quality of life and reduce the likelihood of behaviours that challenge by altering aspects of the environment related to their occurrence.
Skills Development	D1. Skills development	Interventions and supports to increase the person's everyday life skills and quality of life, and reduce the likelihood of behaviours that challenge.
Reactive Strategies	E1. Secondary prevention E2. Crisis management	Secondary prevention strategies employed in response to early warning signs or known indicators to defuse the situation and prevent escalation. Crisis management strategies that keep the person and others safe in situations where there is a high risk of harm and when secondary prevention strategies have failed.
Implementation and Monitoring of the Plan	F1. Monitoring, implementation and evaluation of support	Guidance on how and by whom interventions, supports and strategies will be delivered, monitored and evaluated for the purpose of continued improvement.

Figure 1: Strands and components in the BSP-CAT

⁵ PBS Academy resources are available <http://pbs-academy.com>⁶ Manuscript currently in preparation.

The BSP-CAT includes a short description of each component and an account of why it is an important aspect of a BSP. The BSP-CAT also includes scoring examples and requirements for each component (see figure 2 for an example).

		Return to B2
ENABLING ENVIRONMENTS		B2. Choice.
Why is this important?		
It is important to provide options and support (or even teach) genuine choice making. This can be done through the creation of opportunities for choosing, and by providing experience and knowledge about options and consequences. Behaviours that challenge are less likely when a person is doing things they have chosen to do or with people they have chosen to be with. These strategies should be consistent with what is known from a prior assessment about the functions the behaviour that challenges serve for the individual or a person-centred assessment of needs and should routinely be included within a BSP.		
Scoring requirements and examples		
3: Requirement: BOTH details are provided regarding choice making opportunities and skills, with evidence this component of the BSP is informed by a prior assessment AND a comprehensive plan, based upon assessment, has been derived to support choice making.		
Example: Elaine's BSP lists many examples of choices she should be offered (for both day-to-day details and life-defining matters) and recognition about the types of choices that are important and possible for her to make based on prior assessments. There is emphasis on offering Elaine choices about food and drink, as this is linked in her BSP to the escape motivated function of her aggressive behaviour. Her choice-making skills are described and the plan states she will express her preference by either pointing to the item or using the Makaton sign for the item. There is information about how choices should be presented to Elaine and how to support her to choose. Further information is given about how to support her to make new and more complex choices, such as choosing where to live, by ensuring that she is provided with accessible information, given sufficient time to consider and opportunities to talk to other people, and providing opportunities to sample the options.		
2: Requirement: EITHER information relating to choice making opportunities and skills is missing, unclear or lacks detail; or evidence this component of the BSP is informed by a prior assessment is missing or unclear OR the plan for supporting the person's choice making is missing, inadequate, poorly defined, nonspecific or limited in scope and detail.		
Example: Ben is described as being able to choose between two physical items by pointing to the item, but it is unclear how this has been determined OR Ben's BSP lists examples of choices he should be offered. The plan states he will often display self-injury when he does not want to take part in an activity but does not describe how to provide choices within and between activities to prevent instances of self-injury. There is no recognition of how to support more complex choice making, and information about how others should present choices is vague.		
1: Requirement: BOTH information relating to choice making opportunities and skills is missing, unclear or lacks detail; or evidence this component of the BSP is informed by a prior assessment is missing or unclear AND the plan for supporting the person's choice making is missing, inadequate, poorly defined, nonspecific or limited in scope and detail		
Example: Mimi's plan states only that she should be offered choices throughout her day-to-day activities but with no information about her choice-making skills or how she expresses her preference AND there is no information about how to support her to make choices or to increase choice-making opportunities.		
0: Requirement: NO details are provided relating to choice making. There is no reference to an assessment of choice making assessment. There is no plan to support the individual's choice making.		
Example: Choice is not referred to in any of Simon's supporting documentation.		

Figure 2: Scoring examples and requirements for component B2 (choice)

Using the BSP-CAT

To support ease of completion, the BSP-CAT is presented as an interactive PDF. To use the automated features of the BSP-CAT, make sure to open the form in Adobe Acrobat Reader. If you do not have Adobe Acrobat Reader, you can download it for free at get.adobe.com. Before using the automated form, download and save a copy of the BSP-CAT to your computer's hard drive, rather than opening it directly in your web browser.

To complete the BSP-CAT by hand, go to "File" and select "Print". On the printed form, the dropdown score boxes will be replaced with black boxes where you can write in the scores.

When working through each component, you are first presented with the name of the component and a brief description, along with space to record comments and a drop-down menu to record the score for the component in the BSP being appraised (see figure 3).

B2. Choice. <p>There should be opportunities for the person to make choices, from small day-to-day details to large life-defining matters. The person's way of expressing what they want/like should be described, along with a record of the person's likes and dislikes about a range of areas.</p> <p>Information should be recorded about how to support the person to make choices. Information about supporting choices should be linked to the identified function(s) of the person's behaviour that challenges. Plans for developing the person's choice-making skills should be present.</p>	Score: <input style="border: 1px solid #ccc; padding: 2px 5px;" type="button" value="Select"/> Notes
<input style="border: 1px solid #ccc; padding: 2px 10px;" type="button" value="Why this is important + scoring criteria"/>	

Figure 3: Brief description, comments and scoring menu for component B2 (choice)

The more detailed information concerning scoring requirements and examples for the component can be accessed by clicking the 'why this is important + scoring criteria' button in the bottom left corner. In the interactive PDF you can navigate back by clicking 'return' in the top left corner (see figure 2). If using a paper version of the BSP-CAT, all information relevant to a component is placed together.

Scoring logic and conventions

Each component of the BSP-CAT is scored on a scale of 0-3, whereby a higher score relates to higher quality evidence of the respective component in the BSP being appraised (see figure 4).

SCORING¹

A score of 3 should be given if there is evidence the component has adequately addressed BOTH of the following:	
3	<p><input type="checkbox"/> There is a clear statement and linked evidence to prior assessment.</p> <p>AND</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> All aspects of the scoring requirements for the component are adequately addressed, properly defined, specific, and with appropriate scope and detail.</p>
A score of 2 should be given if EITHER of the following apply:	
2	<p><input type="checkbox"/> There is unclear or missing statements and linked evidence to prior assessment.</p> <p>OR</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Important aspects of the scoring requirements for the component are missing, inadequate, poorly defined, nonspecific or limited in scope and detail.</p>
A score of 1 should be given if BOTH of the following apply:	
1	<p><input type="checkbox"/> There is unclear or missing statements and linked evidence to prior assessment.</p> <p>AND</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Important aspects of the scoring requirements for the component are missing, inadequate, poorly defined, nonspecific or limited in scope and detail.</p>
0	A score of 0 should be given there is NO evidence of any consideration of the scoring requirements for the component.

¹ A variant on this scoring convention is applied to component F1: Monitoring, implementation and evaluation of support.

Figure 4: Scoring logic

Scores are based on the extent to which two aspects of the component have been addressed: 1) statements and linking to prior assessment; and 2) the scope, detail, clarity and adequacy of strategies provided.

For a score of 3, both of these aspects need to be adequately addressed in the BSP for the respective component. For a score of 2, there will be limitations with one of these aspects in the BSP. A score of

1 is given when there are limitations with both aspects in the BSP. If there is no evidence of the component within the BSP being appraised, a score of 0 will be given.

It is important to note that there is a variant on the scoring logic for component F1 (Monitoring, implementation and evaluation of support), as scoring for this component is less dependent upon prior assessment. For component F1, scores relate to 1) clear descriptions of each element of the BSP and who is responsible for its implementation; and 2) the quality of plans for ensuring regular monitoring, evaluation and review of the BSP with associated standards.

Calculating and interpreting scores

In addition to scores for the 14 components in the BSP-CAT (each with a possible range of 0-3), an overall total score (with a possible range of 0-42) and strand total scores (with a possible range dependent on the number of components within the respective strand) can be calculated (see table 1).

Table 1: Calculation of overall total and strand total scores in the BSP-CAT

Scoring area	Calculation	Possible range of scores
BSP-CAT total	Sum of each component	0-42
Strand A total	Sum of 3 components in strand A	0-9
Strand B total	Sum of 6 components in strand B	0-18
Strand C total	Score of 1 component in strand C	0-3
Strand D total	Score of 1 component in strand D	0-3
Strand E total	Sum of 2 components in strand F	0-6
Strand F total	Score of 1 component in strand F	0-3

The electronic (interactive PDF) version of the BSP-CAT automatically calculates and provides a summary of scores (see figure 5). Component scores (grouped within strands) are graphed to visually represent the overall profile of scores.

If using a paper version scoring needs to be done by hand by summing the individual component scores within each strand and the BSP-CAT overall.

In all cases, higher scores indicate higher levels of BSP quality. Currently there are no quality bandings for the BSP-CAT scores. This may be determined through ongoing research.

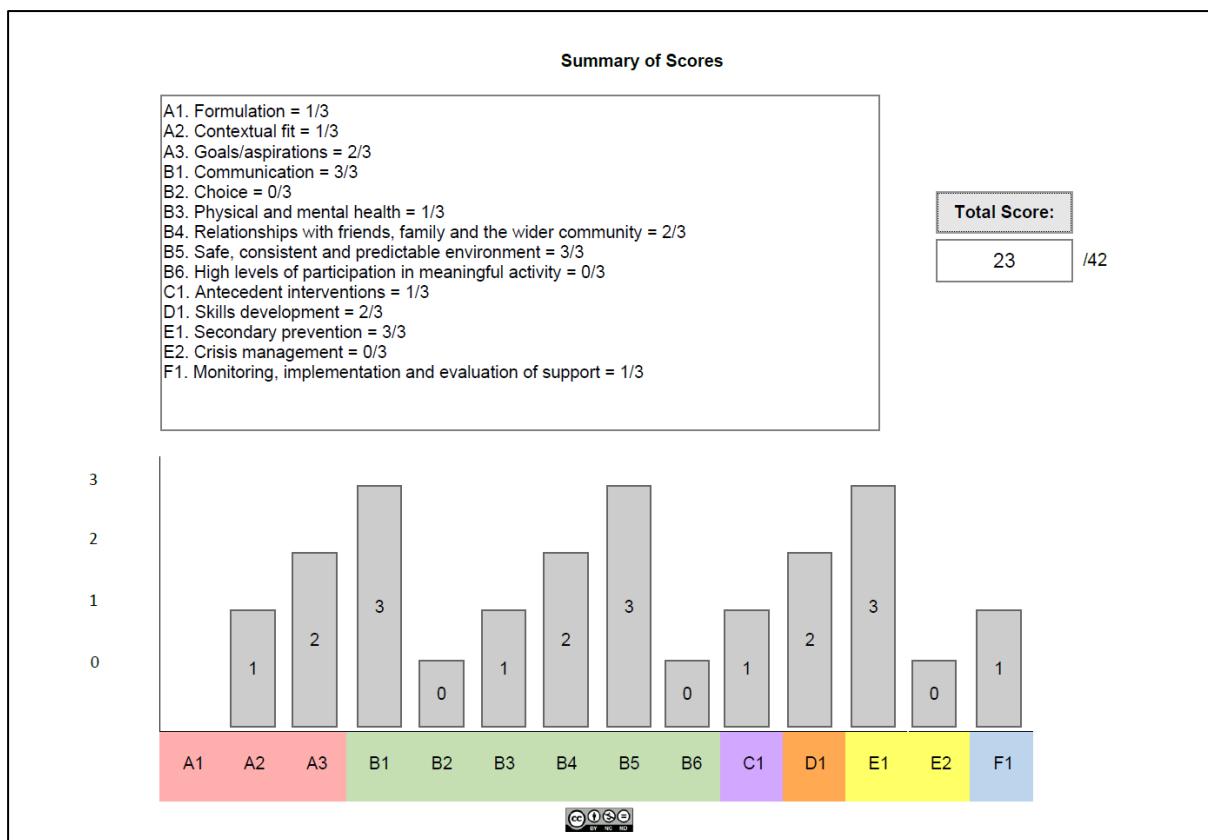


Figure 5: Example summary of scores on the interactive BSP-CAT

Tips and advice

The following tips will help you use the BSP-CAT in the most effective ways:

1. Spend time becoming familiar with all aspects of the BSP-CAT. Carefully read all the component descriptions, scoring requirements and examples several times.
2. When you are familiar and practiced at using the BSP-CAT, you should be able to appraise and score a BSP in 40-60 minutes. Some BSPs are more complex and will take longer to evaluate. It will also take you longer to evaluate the first few BSPs using the tool until you become fluent in the BSP-CAT.
3. BSPs sometimes exist as a single document. Sometimes a variety of inter-related documents make-up a BSP. Make sure you have all relevant documents to hand and appraise across these when using the BSP-CAT.
4. The BSP-CAT is designed and intended to be completed by a single person, so it is best to work on your own when determining scores. It can be very helpful however, to later compare and discuss scores between different people and to establish inter-rater reliability (see '*Using the BSP-CAT to support practice and service development*').
5. When evaluating a BSP read everything through at least once before making any scores. It might be helpful to make notes when doing this.
6. The information you need to score a component might be dispersed across the BSP. It may not appear under a single, easily identified heading. You therefore typically need to look across the BSP as a whole to score each component.
7. Information in the BSP should be clear enough for you to make your score without the need for over interpretation or 'reading between the lines'. The information may, however, be

phrased in ways that do not reference technical terms (but are appropriately phrased to increase accessibility to mediators) and this also needs to be taken into consideration.

8. Recognise that the scoring examples in the BSP-CAT are just examples and that it is not possible to depict every possible scenario in the tool. Where the BSP you are rating resonates less well with the example, focus on the scoring logic to make your judgement.
9. Be conservative in your scoring. You should have solid, objective evidence to back up the scores that is readily apparent within the BSP. Where you feel uncertain, go with the lower score as a rule of thumb (mid-point scores are not possible).

Using the BSP-CAT to support practice and service development

When using the BSP-CAT to support practice and service development it is advisable to first establish scoring reliability. The following steps will be helpful to do this:

Rate re-rate reliability (ensuring people are able to use the BSP-CAT to make consistent scores over time)

1. Members of a team/service with appropriate experience and training rate a BSP independently (i.e., they do not discuss scores to give the BSP with others while they rate it)
2. Members of a team/service each re-rate the same BSP approximately 1 month later (ensure it is the same version of the BSP that was initially rated and that they rate it independently)
3. Compare the scores from both time points for each team/service member
4. Note any discrepancies in scoring, discuss as a team to consolidate learning and repeat the exercise until agreement is reached.

Inter-rater reliability (ensuring different members of a team/service can use the BSP-CAT to make the same scoring decisions)

1. Members of a team/service with appropriate experience and training each rate the same BSP independently (i.e., when they are rating the BSP they do not discuss it with others)
2. Compare the scores from team/service members
3. Note any discrepancies in scoring, discuss and reflect as a team to consolidate learning and repeat the exercise until reliability is reached.

Reliable scores obtained from the BSP-CAT can be used to prompt practitioner and service development through regular and ongoing use of the tool. Where strengths are identified in BSPs, it is helpful to maintain and continue to build on these. Where limitations are identified it is helpful to explore the reasons for this and set goals of increasing quality in these areas going forward. Targeted staff training, supervision, mentorship and systems level changes may all be needed to improve quality of BSPs. Repeating appraisal or audit of BSPs periodically will allow for an exploration of whether these actions are supporting enhanced quality of BSPs and inform refined plans for practitioner and service development.

Using the BSP-CAT in research

The BSP-CAT will likely have multiple applications within research to help further the evidence-base for PBS. Being able to rate the quality of BSPs allows researchers to determine the extent to which a key component of PBS has been implemented in intervention studies (i.e., to determine fidelity of

PBS and/or as an outcome for service development interventions). It also allows researchers to explore how particular outcomes relevant to PBS vary in accordance with BSP quality (in terms of both overall quality of BSP and quality of particular stands of the BSP-CAT). The conceptual coherence of the BSP-CAT and the psychometric properties identified to date make it a viable option for researchers in the field of PBS and we welcome and encourage its use within research. Robust procedures to ensure reliability, that go beyond those use in clinical practice, will typically be required in such contexts.

Final note from authors

We hope you find the BSP-CAT and this manual helpful for the work you do using PBS to support people with learning disabilities.

Nick Gore, Peter Baker, Jill Chaplin, Suzi Sapiets and Mark Murphy, November 2024

References

- ¹ Baker, P., Gore, N. Chaplin, J. Murphy, M., Sapiets, S. & Evans, C. (November 2024). *The Behaviour Support Plan Content Appraisal Tool (BSP-CAT)*. PBS Academy. <http://pbs-academy.com>
- ² Gore et al. (2013). Definition and scope for positive behavioural support. *International Journal of Positive Behavioural Support*, 3(2), 14-23.
<https://www.ingentaconnect.com/content/bild/ijpbs/2013/00000003/00000002/art00003>
- ³ Gore et al. (2022). Positive behavioural support in the UK: A state of the nation report. *International Journal of Positive Behavioural Support*, 12(1), 1-46.
<https://www.ingentaconnect.com/content/bild/ijpbs/2022/00000012/a00101s1/art00001>
- ⁴ Creative Commons (2024). CC BY-NC-ND 4.0. <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>
- ⁵ PBS Academy. (2015). *PBS Academy resources*. <http://pbs-academy.com>
- ⁶ Baker, P., Gore, N., Sapiets, S., Chaplin, J., Murphy, M., & Evans, C. (2025). The behaviour support plan content appraisal tool (BSP-CAT): A new tool for assessing and improving the quality of behavioural support plans. *Journal of Applied Research in Intellectual Disabilities*, 38(6), e70153. <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1111/jar.70153>