**Behavior Support Checklist**

**Supporting Well-being for People with Disabilities**  
Behavior is communication. It can be hard for people with disabilities to say when their needs aren’t being met. Sometimes, unmet needs show up through behavior. Sometimes, behavior is a symptom of a medical problem (like a seizure or a urinary tract infection). **Supporting well-being for a person with a disability means working to understand what the person’s actions and non-verbal cues are telling us they need.**

**A Checklist to Help**

**Key for all people:**

* Independence/autonomy
  + Does the person have as much say as possible over their own life? Are they given meaningful choice whenever possible? Are they getting support to understand and make decisions?
  + Are supporters and caregivers speaking directly TO the person? Are they paying attention to the person’s responses (verbal or non-verbal) and wishes?
  + Does the person have space to take reasonable risks and make mistakes?
  + Does the person have time to be alone/do their own thing without direct supervision (as developmentally appropriate)?
  + Need help in this area? Visit the [TN Center for Decision-Making Support](https://www.tndecisionmaking.org/) for information and tools.

**Medical needs:**

* Mental health
  + Does the person have professional support for mental health? Do other family members/supporters?
  + Are there mindfulness or other mental wellness tools that could be helpful?
  + Are there signs that a more complete mental health evaluation is needed?
* Physical health
  + Is it possible the person is not feeling well?
  + Are they experiencing pain they can’t explain (for example, a urinary tract infection or dental pain)?
  + Are they getting recommended preventive, medical, and dental care?
* Medication
  + Is medication being taken as prescribed?
  + Have medication dosages been checked recently?
  + Has a doctor checked for possible interactions between different medications the person is taking?
  + Do any of the person’s medications have possible negative side effects? Are there other alternatives to try?

**General needs:**

* Food/water
  + Is the person hungry/dehydrated? Do they have access to good nutrition?
* Rest
  + Does the person need a physical or mental break? Is there a sensory-friendly space for a break?
  + Are they sleeping well? Do they go to bed on time and seem rested in the mornings? Have they been checked for a medical issue affecting sleep?
* Sensory input
  + Is the person sensitive to noise, bright or flickering lights, textures, smells?
  + Is the person seeking greater sensory input (pressure, repetitive motion, etc.)?
  + How can the environment be made more comfortable for the person?
* Communication
  + Does the person have support to communicate their thoughts, feelings, and desires? What tools could make this easier (for example, an assistive communication device)?
  + Is information presented to the person in accessible ways – with familiar terms, and with plenty of time to process and respond?
  + Are supporters trained in the person’s preferred communication methods?
  + Is the person getting help to grow their communication skills (for example, speech therapy)?
* Physical activity/outdoor time
  + Does the person get regular physical activity that is accessible and enjoyable for them?
  + Do they have regular access to fresh air, sunshine, and the outdoors?
* Routine/structure/predictability
  + Does the person have an easy way to see plans for the moment/day/week?
  + Are the person’s preferences for routine honored as much as possible?
  + Are changes to the schedule/routine discussed in advance with the person?
  + Does the person have access to concrete information about what to expect for new/out of the routine experiences (e.g. visiting or looking at photos of a new place ahead of time, talking through what will happen at an event, etc.)?
  + What other tools might help the person’s schedule and routines feel predictable?
* Stress management
  + Is there a particular place or time behavior is happening?
  + Have there been any significant changes in the person’s life (for example, changes to aids/support staff, home environment, or schedule/routine)?
  + Have there been any losses the person might be grieving?
  + Are there stressors in the person’s family or close social circles (e.g. tense/turbulent relationships, divorce, arguments, job loss, financial strain)?
  + Is the person being included in discussions about family events or potentially stressful situations? Are changes being explained in accessible ways?
* Recreation/social engagement/connection
  + Is the person participating in a range of activities they enjoy?
  + Do they choose how they spend their free time?
  + Do they have opportunities to learn new hobbies/skills? Do they have a regular creative outlet?
  + Do they have regular, meaningful social opportunities? Do they have support to develop healthy relationships? (If local opportunities are limited, have they explored virtual groups or activities?)
  + Does the person have a friend or peer group with whom they can share their thoughts and feelings?
* Purpose
  + Is the person getting support for meaningful education or employment?
  + Does the person have opportunities to volunteer/contribute to causes that are meaningful to them (church, nonprofit organizations, etc.)?
  + Does the person have daily responsibilities to the full extent of their ability in the family or home?
* Safety
  + Have there been any sudden changes in behavior or physical markers that could be signs of abuse? (Please seek immediate professional advice if you have any concerns on this point.)
  + Are the person’s boundaries about their own body or physical space being respected? Are they being taught how to respect others’ boundaries?
  + Are there technologies or other tools to help the person stay safe while maximizing independence?

**Need More Help?**If someone you support needs more behavioral support, there are resources to help. [**TN Disability Pathfinder**](https://www.tnpathfinder.org/) **is our state’s one-stop shop for finding disability-related information and services.** You can search the website, or you can call for one-on-one help to find programs or services for your needs. **In case of a mental health crisis:** Call the [988 Crisis Hotline](https://www.tn.gov/behavioral-health/need-help/crisis-services/988-suicide-crisis-lifeline.html).