



THE CONSTRUCTIONAL APPROACH TO CHALLENGING BEHAVIOR

Stephanie H. Jones, Ph.D., BCBA-D, LBA

Salve Regina University, Newport, RI



OUTLINE

- What is challenging behavior?
- How has challenging behavior been historically addressed?
- What are the limitations to historical methods of addressing challenging behavior?
- What is the alternative (constructional approach)?
- How would the constructional approach look in practice?

CHALLENGING BEHAVIOR

- Unsafe
- Problematic in a specific context or culture
- Limits access to meaningful opportunities

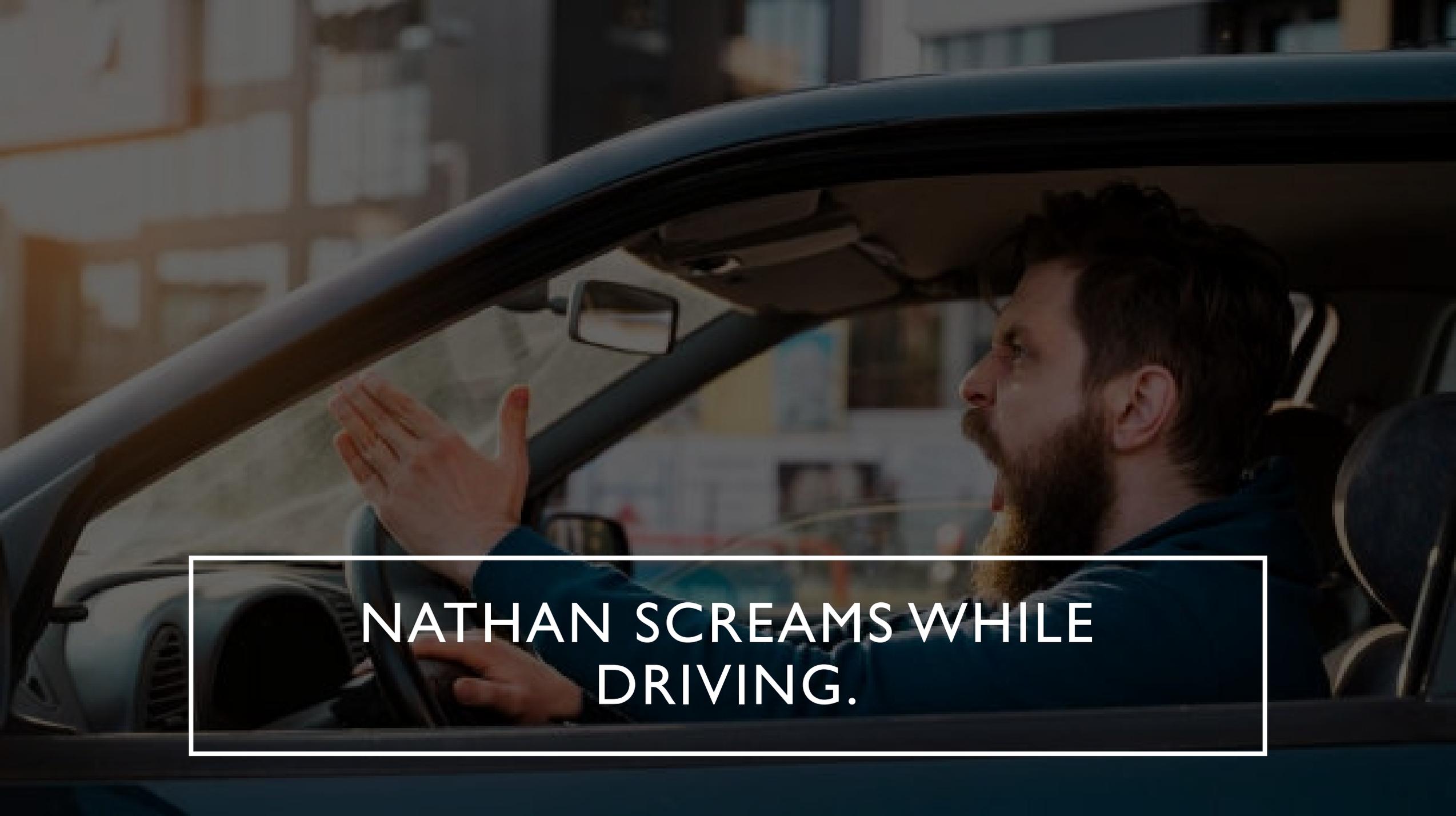


...but I have a job
help me figure this out!

U/A/E
TRYING

COLIN THROWS HIS BOOKS
DURING INSTRUCTION.



A man with a beard and dark hair is driving a car. He is looking out the window with a stressed expression, his mouth slightly open. His hands are on the steering wheel. The car's interior, including the dashboard and side mirror, is visible. The background shows a blurred city street.

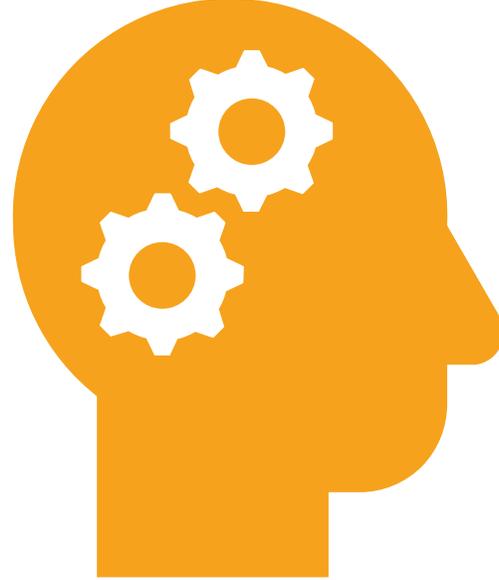
**NATHAN SCREAMS WHILE
DRIVING.**

A close-up photograph of a person's hands on a steering wheel, taken from a driver's perspective. The person's right hand is on the top of the wheel, and their left hand is on the bottom. The background is slightly blurred, showing the interior of the car and a view through the windshield. A white rectangular box is superimposed over the center of the image, containing the text "YOU SCREAM WHILE DRIVING." in white, uppercase, sans-serif font.

YOU SCREAM WHILE DRIVING.

FUNDAMENTAL ATTRIBUTION ERROR

- When we do something bad, we attribute the behavior to an external reason.
 - That car cut me off!
 - My boss was unfair to me at work, so I lashed out.
 - You weren't listening, so I yelled.
- When others do something bad, we attribute behavior to an internal reason.
 - They are mean.
 - They are lazy.
 - They are manipulative.



APPROACHES TO CHALLENGING BEHAVIOR

PATHOLOGICAL APPROACH



Idea that something is wrong with the person who engages in challenging behavior



Approaches for addressing challenging behavior focused on “fixing” the person or punishing the person

PHYSICAL
PUNISHMENT



49% OF PARENTS
REPORT
SPANKING THEIR
CHILDREN

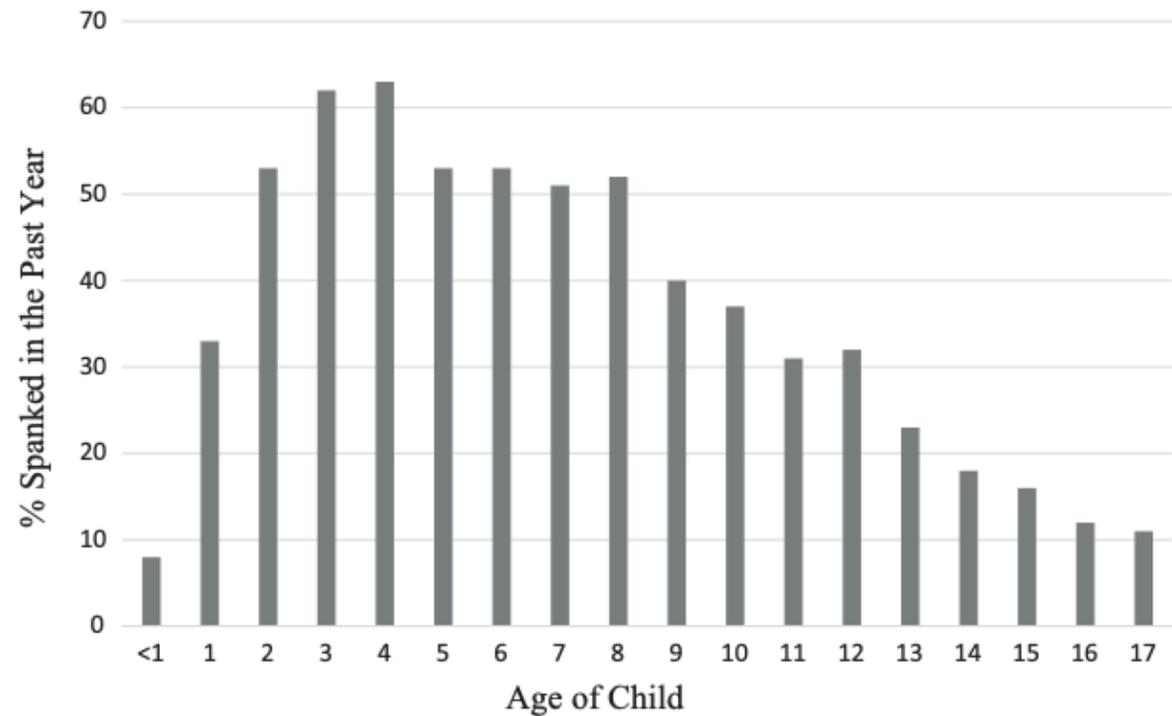


Fig. 1 Spanked in past year by age of child



A magnifying glass with a black handle and a silver frame. The lens is clear and contains the text "THEY NEED TO STOP CURSING" in a simple, black, sans-serif font. The magnifying glass is positioned diagonally, with the handle pointing towards the bottom right and the lens towards the top left. The background is a plain, light gray gradient.

THEY NEED TO STOP CURSING



CURSING

They cut me off!

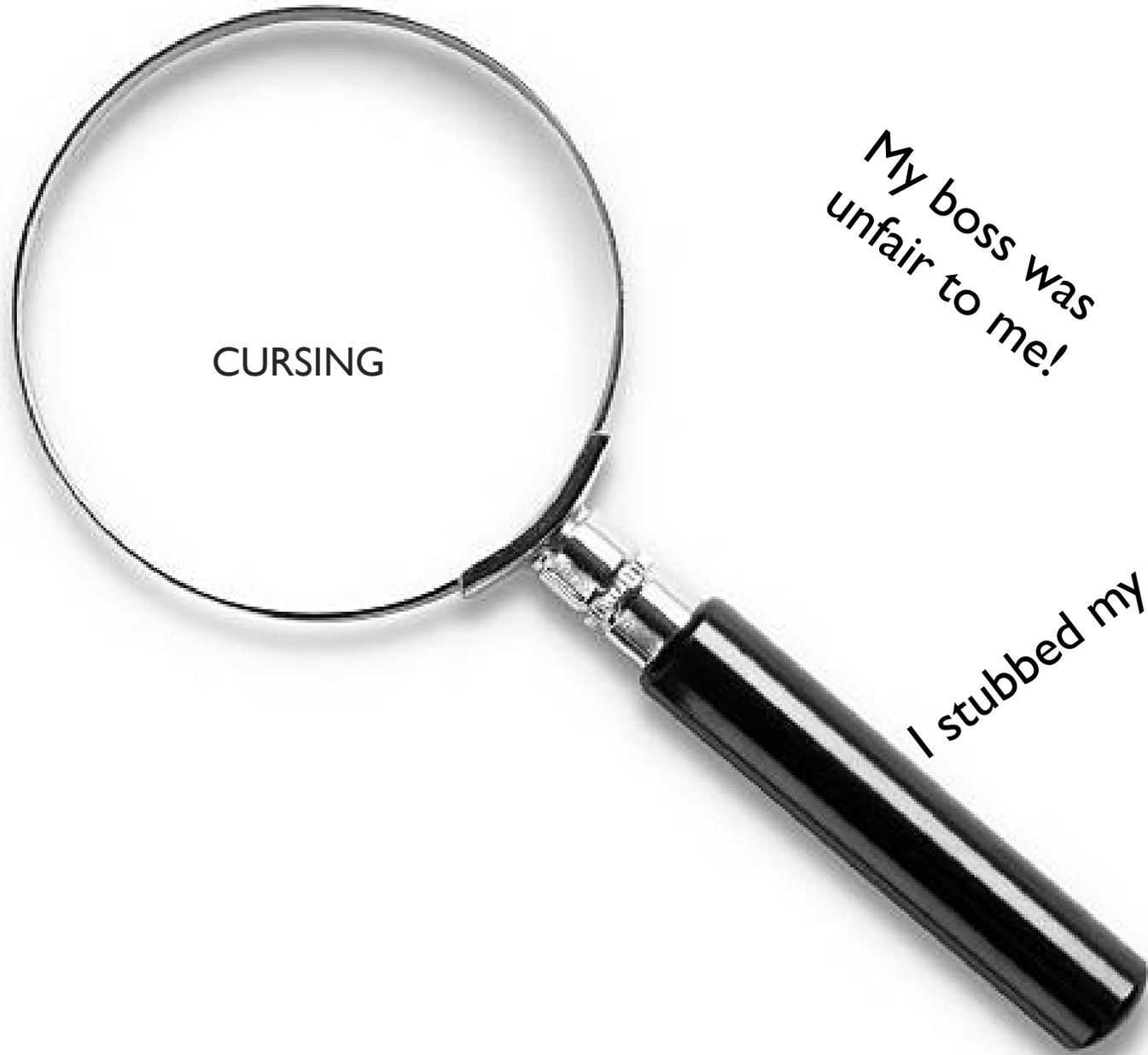


They cut me off!



*My boss was
unfair to me!*

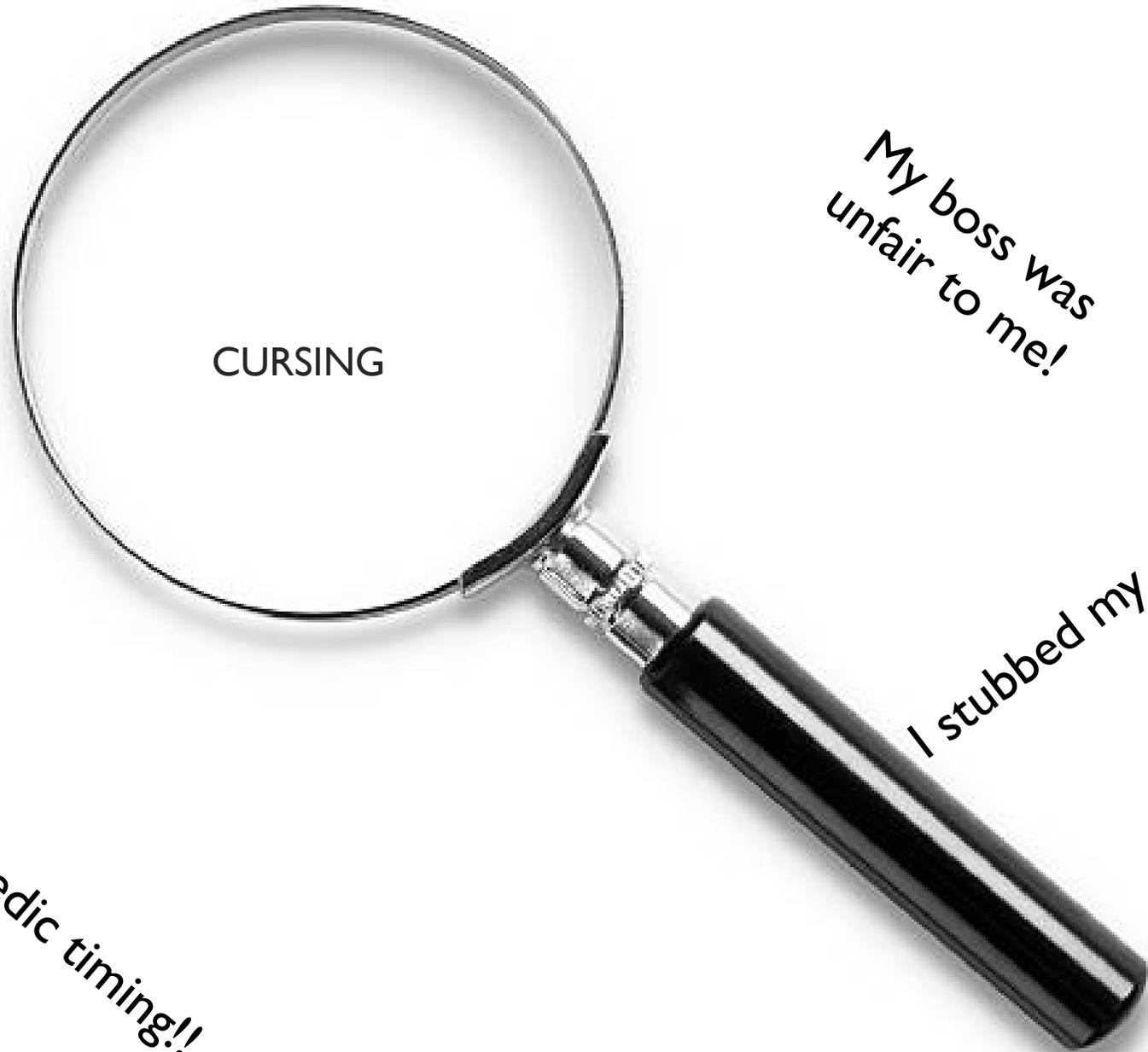
They cut me off!



*My boss was
unfair to me!*

I stubbed my toe!

They cut me off!



*My boss was
unfair to me!*

I stubbed my toe!

It's about comedic timing!!

**WHEN WE FOCUS ON
ELIMINATING BEHAVIOR, WE
MAY MISS OTHER
IMPORTANT ELEMENTS.**

LIMITATIONS TO HISTORICAL APPROACHES TO CHALLENGING BEHAVIOR

Behavior happens for a reason



When we focus on elimination of the behavior only, it may stop, but is the problem solved?

REFLECT



ELIMINATION
FOCUS SIDE
EFFECTS

- Increases of other challenging behavior
- Avoidance of implementer
- Challenging behavior likely to persist or return when implementer is not present
- Needs may go unmet



...but I have a idea
help me figure this out!

U/A/E
TRYING

COLIN THROWS HIS BOOKS
DURING INSTRUCTION.



FOCUS ON ELIMINATION

Colin's teacher reliably sent him to the principal's office when he threw books and he ended up with in-school suspension. He stopped throwing books in that teacher's classroom.



FOCUS ON ELIMINATION

Colin's teacher reliably sent him to the principal's office when he threw books and he ended up with in-school suspension. He stopped throwing books in that teacher's classroom.

He moved classrooms at the start of the next year and immediately started throwing books again.



FOCUS ON ELIMINATION

- Punitive consequence for throwing books during instruction
- May not learn why he is throwing books during instruction
- Behavior recurs in new setting



WHEN WE DON'T CONSIDER AND ADDRESS
UNMET NEEDS, BEHAVIOR CHANGE IS NOT
SUSTAINABLE.



An aerial, top-down view of a construction site. The ground is dark and cluttered with various construction materials, including wooden planks, metal sheets, and debris. A prominent yellow excavator is positioned in the upper-middle section of the frame. The overall scene is dimly lit, with a dark, moody atmosphere. A white rectangular border frames the central text.

THE CONSTRUCTION APPROACH

A meaningful alternative

THE CONSTRUCTIONAL APPROACH



Focus is on construction of adaptive repertoires in relevant contexts



Root of challenging behavior in skill deficit



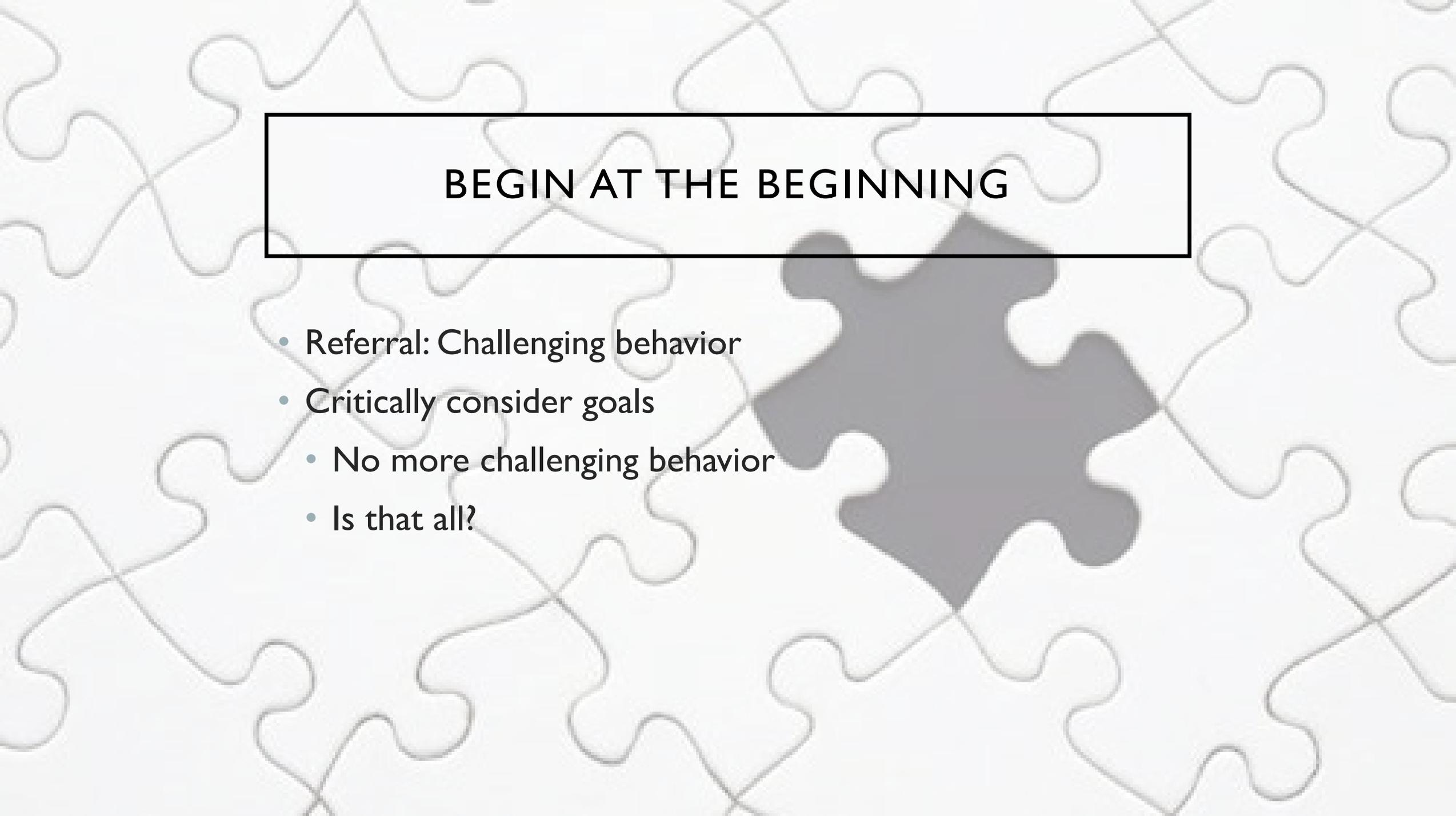
Referral still may be because of distress caused by challenging behavior

IT'S ABOUT
FOCUS

Are we trying to build or
reduce behavior?

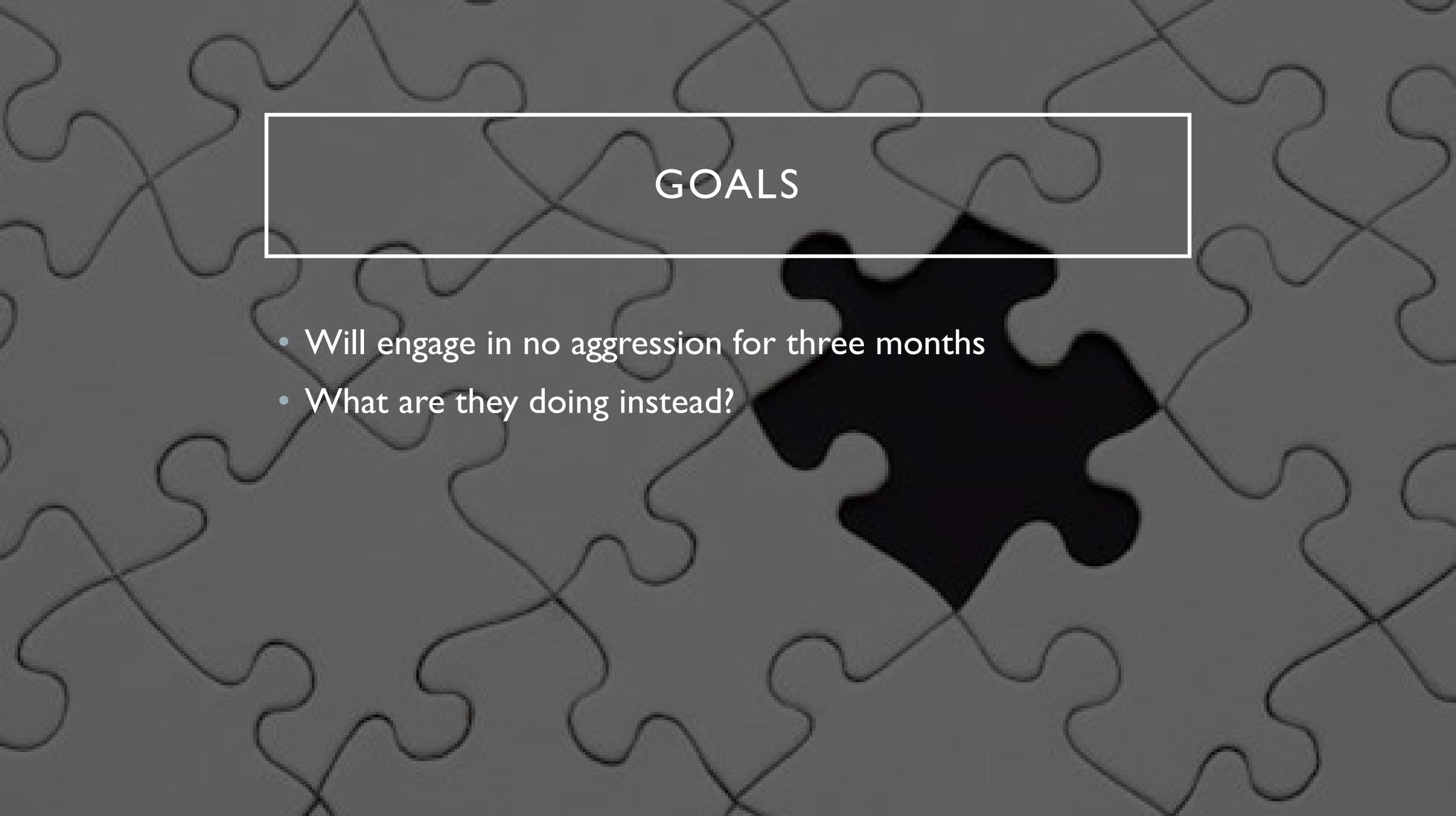


Trying to change outcomes
based on elimination or
expansion of repertoires?



BEGIN AT THE BEGINNING

- Referral: Challenging behavior
- Critically consider goals
 - No more challenging behavior
 - Is that all?



GOALS

- Will engage in no aggression for three months
- What are they doing instead?

DIVERGING PATHS

PATHOLOGICAL APPROACH

- Distress = challenging behavior
- Focus & Goals – reduction of challenging behavior
- Data collection and analysis – challenging behavior
- Discussion – challenging behavior



DIVERGING PATHS

PATHOLOGICAL APPROACH

- Distress = challenging behavior
- Focus & Goals – reduction of challenging behavior
- Data collection and analysis – challenging behavior
- Discussion – challenging behavior

CONSTRUCTIONAL APPROACH

- Distress = challenging behavior
- Focus & goals – building meaningful skill repertoires & reduction of challenging behavior
- Data collection and analysis – skills in development & challenging behavior
- Discussion – skills in development and challenging behavior





MEET JACK

Kindergarten student

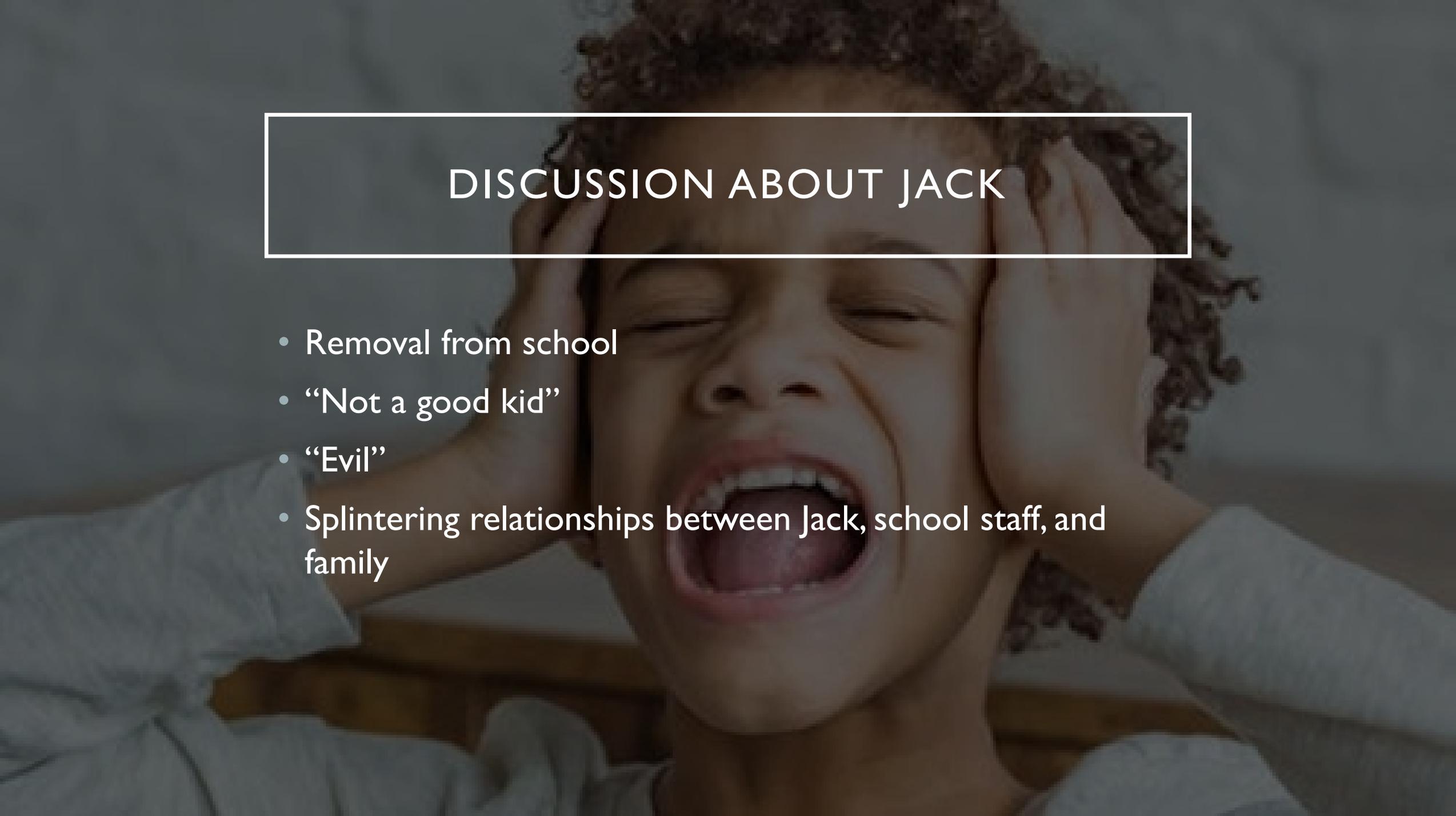
Autism Spectrum Disorder and
Attention Deficit Hyperactivity
Disorder diagnoses

Runs away from class, aggresses
toward teachers, and disrupts
class often



HISTORICAL APPROACHES

- Suspension (in and out of school)
- Time out
- Loss of recess
- Give the iPad to calm down

A young boy with curly hair is shown from the chest up, covering his ears with both hands and screaming with his mouth wide open. He has a pained or distressed expression. The background is a plain, light-colored wall. The image is overlaid with a semi-transparent dark grey box containing white text.

DISCUSSION ABOUT JACK

- Removal from school
- “Not a good kid”
- “Evil”
- Splintering relationships between Jack, school staff, and family



Challenging Behavior



MEET JACK

Kindergarten student

Autism Spectrum Disorder and Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder diagnoses

Speaks in sentences and has successful social interactions with peers

Runs away from class, aggresses toward teachers, and disrupts class often



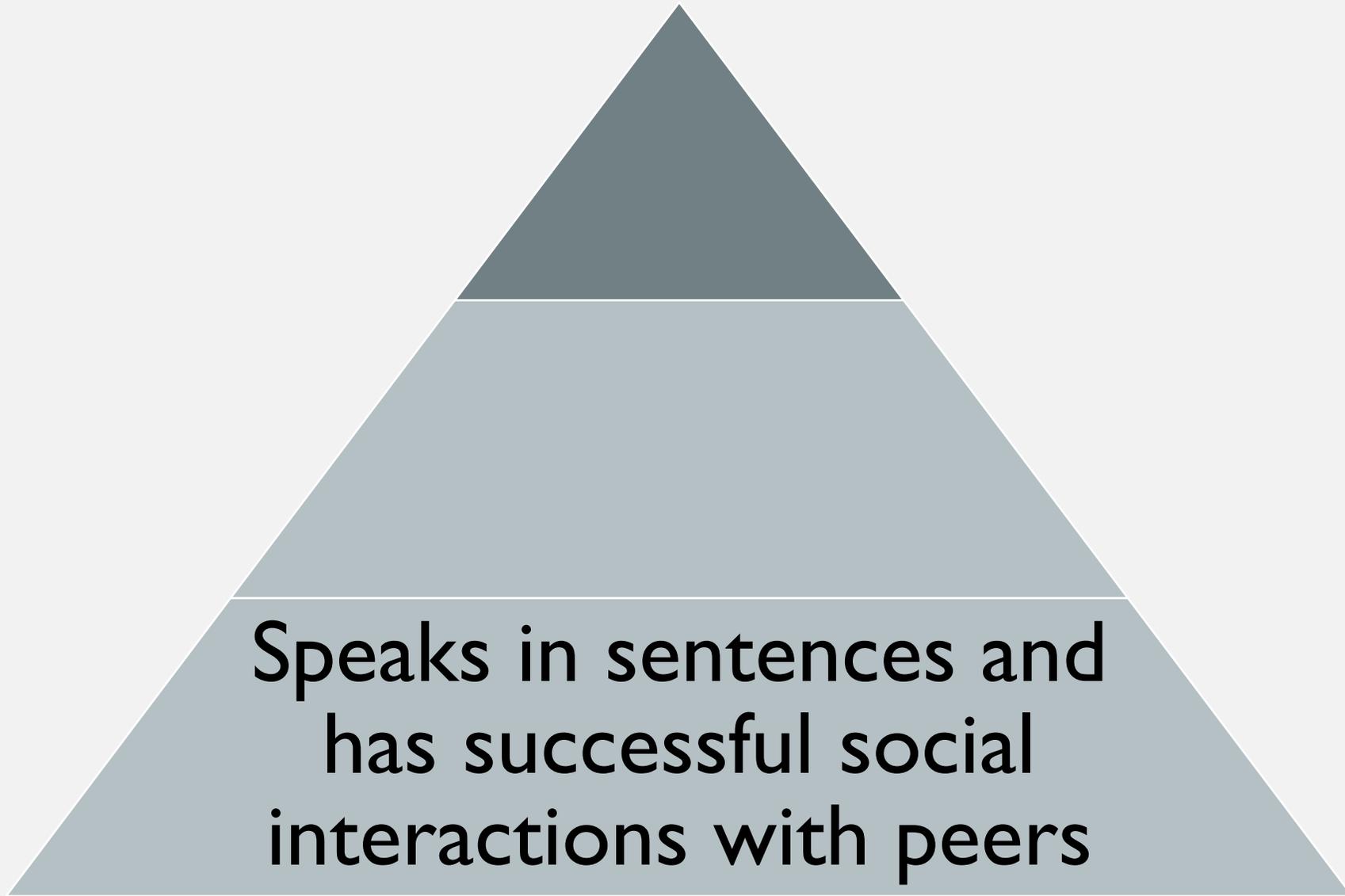
??

??

??



Speaks in full sentences and
has successful interactions with peers



THE SHIFT TOWARD CONSTRUCTION



Encourage acknowledgement of skills



Notice successes



Discuss what goes well (with Jack and his team)



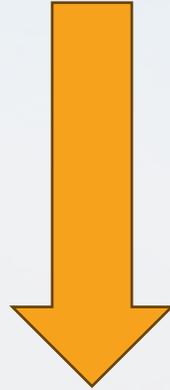
**DON'T THINK ABOUT
A POLAR BEAR!**



**THINK ABOUT A
PENGUIN!**



STOP DISRUPTING



SHOW ME HOW TO BUILD A TOWER.

JACK: NEXT STEPS

- What is meaningful to my client?
 - Watch what they seek
 - **Do they ask for anything?**
 - What do they do when no one is asking them to do something?
 - When do I see them display indices of enjoyment?
 - **Are they comfortable/clean/able to request those things?**
 - Are all of their needs met?



Rarely receives
positive attention

Assignments are not
visible

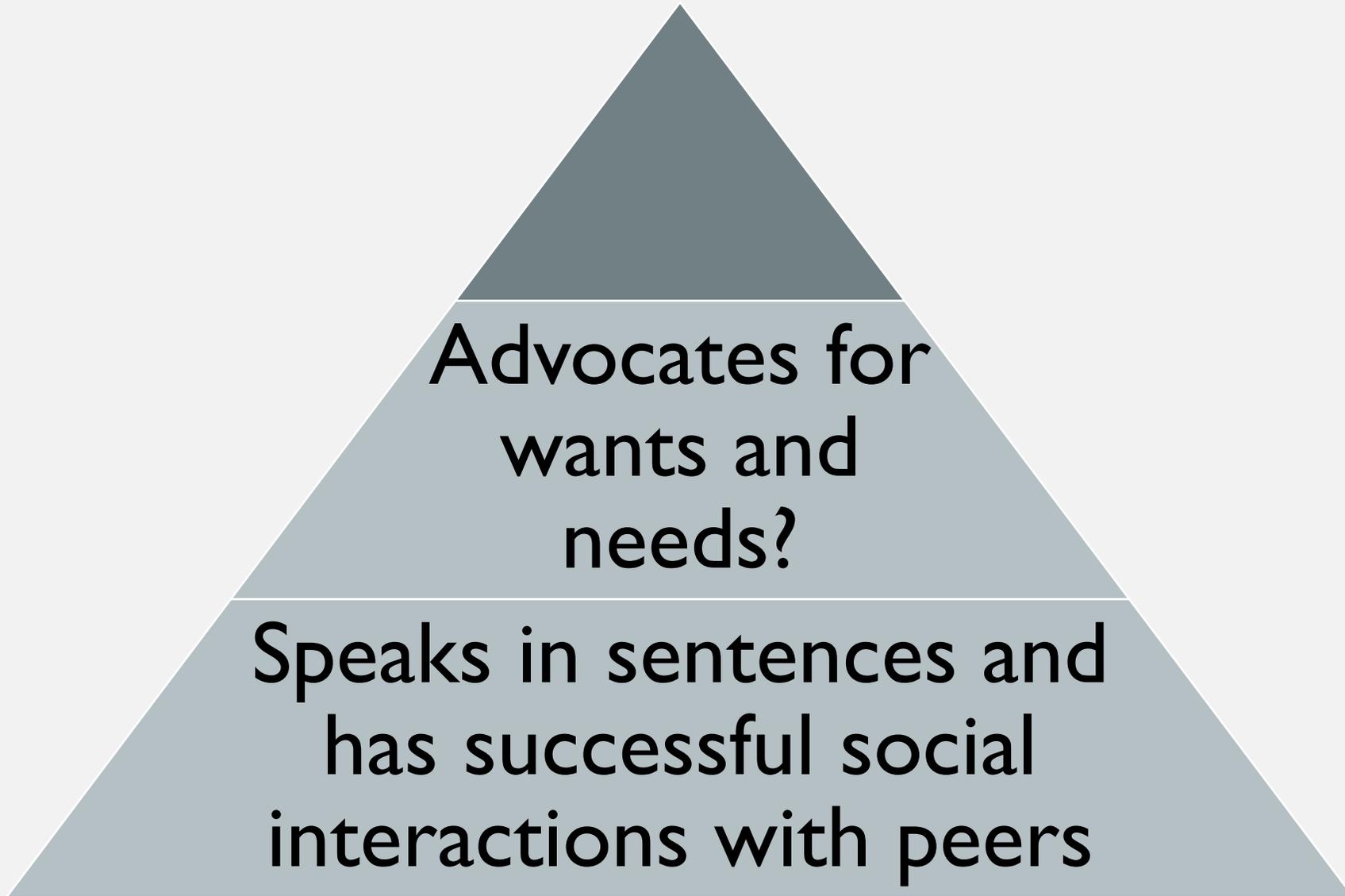
iPad is delivered
following challenging
behavior & not
delivered any other
time

FOCUS: ABILITY TO MEANINGFULLY ADVOCATE FOR WANTS & NEEDS

- Does the client have a way to advocate for what is meaningful to them?
 - Asking
 - Getting it themselves
 - Pointing, exchanging a card
- Is the way they ask for it reliable (work most of the time, across contexts?)

FOCUS: ABILITY TO MEANINGFULLY ADVOCATE FOR WANTS & NEEDS

- Does the client have a way to advocate for what is meaningful to them?
 - Asking
 - Getting it themselves
 - Pointing, exchanging a card
- **Is the way they ask for it reliable (work most of the time, across contexts?)**



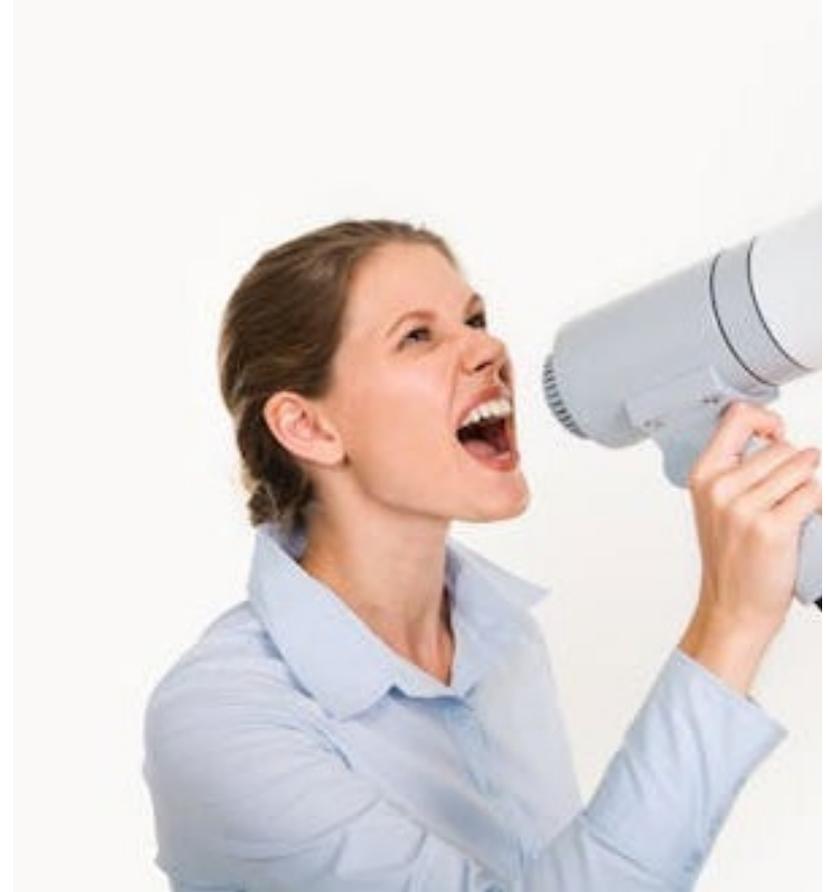
WHY WOULDN'T A CLIENT WHO CAN
SPEAK IN FULL SENTENCES
ADVOCATE FOR THEIR WANTS AND
NEEDS?

Requests...

have not historically worked most of
the time

do not work across contexts

result in "I'll get back to you..."





MEET CYNTHIA

- 22-year-old attending a day program
- ASD diagnosis
- Engages in self-injury in the form of hand biting
- Extremely frequent



HISTORICAL APPROACHES

- Reprimands
- Gloves
- Chewy



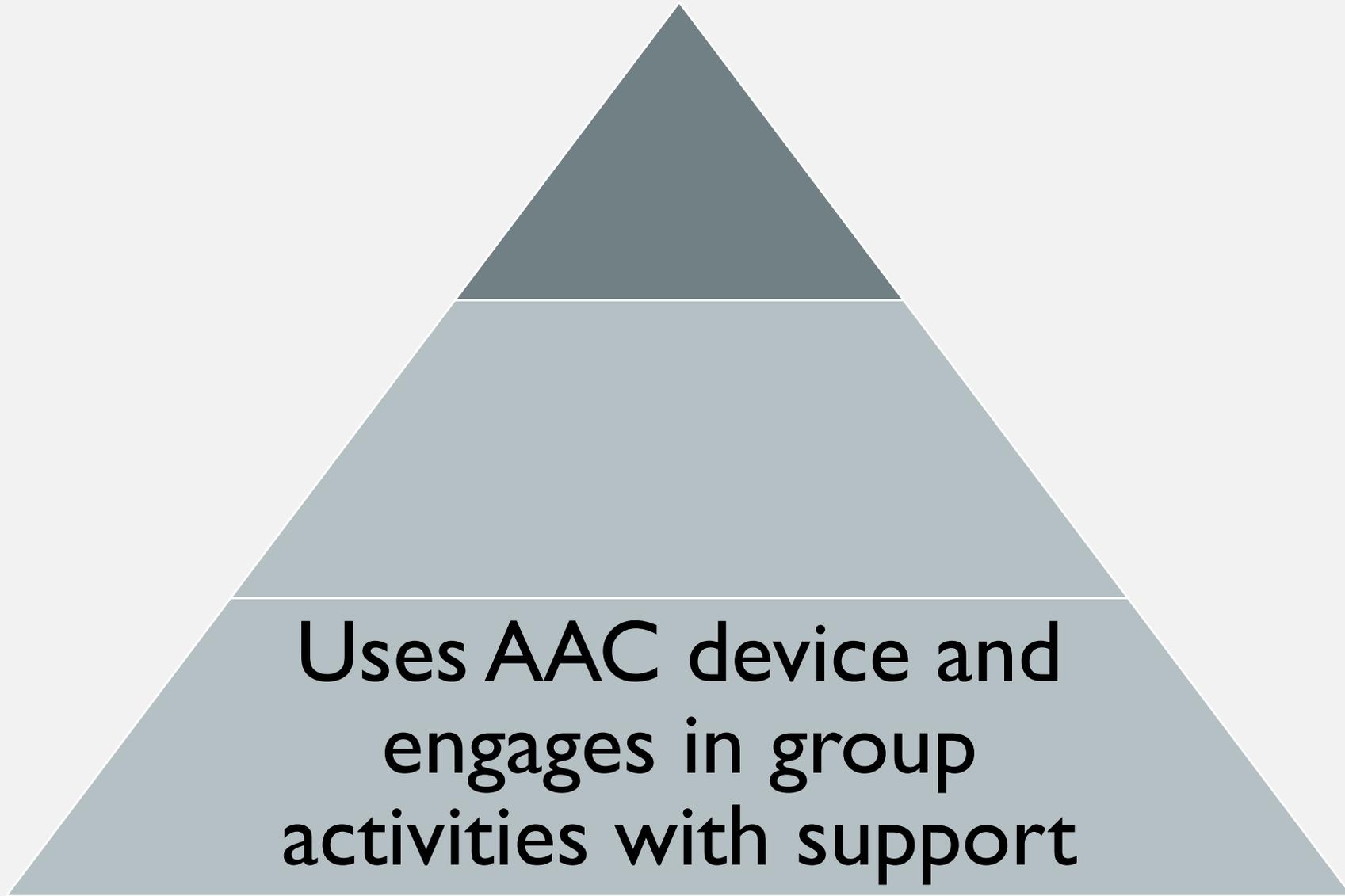
MEET CYNTHIA

- 22-year-old attending a day program
- ASD diagnosis
- Uses Communication device
- Engages in various group activities when a staff member is able to provide 1:1 guidance
- Engages in self-injury in the form of hand biting
- Extremely frequent





Uses AAC device and engages in
group activities with support



CYNTHIA: NEXT STEPS

- What is meaningful to my client?
 - Watch what they seek
 - Do they ask for anything?
 - **What do they do when no one is asking them to do something?**
 - **When do I see them display indices of enjoyment?**
 - Are they comfortable/clean/able to request those things?
 - Are all of their needs met?



Challenging Behavior

No attention

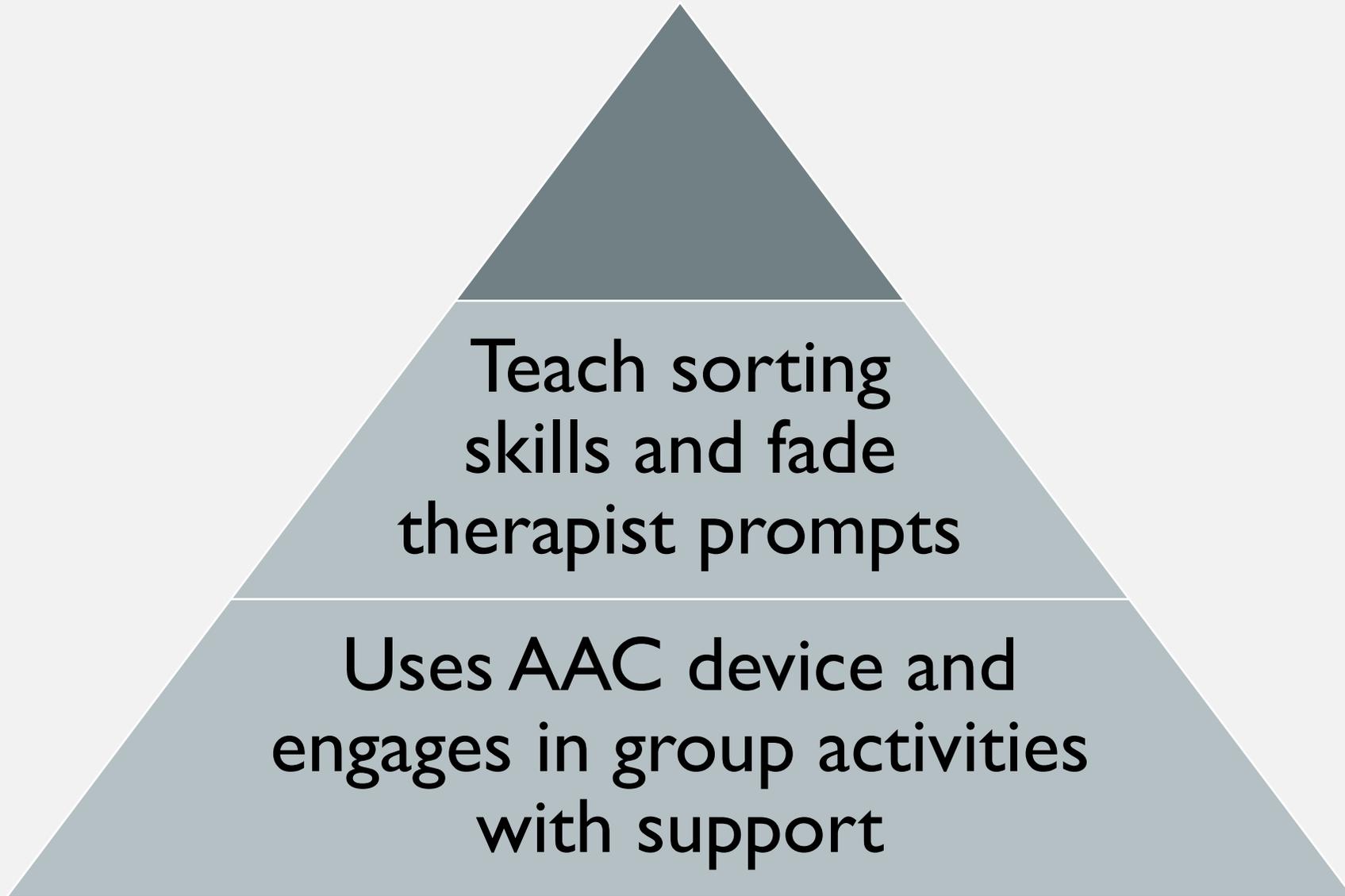
No group activity

FOCUS: WHEN NO ACTIVITY IS ONGOING

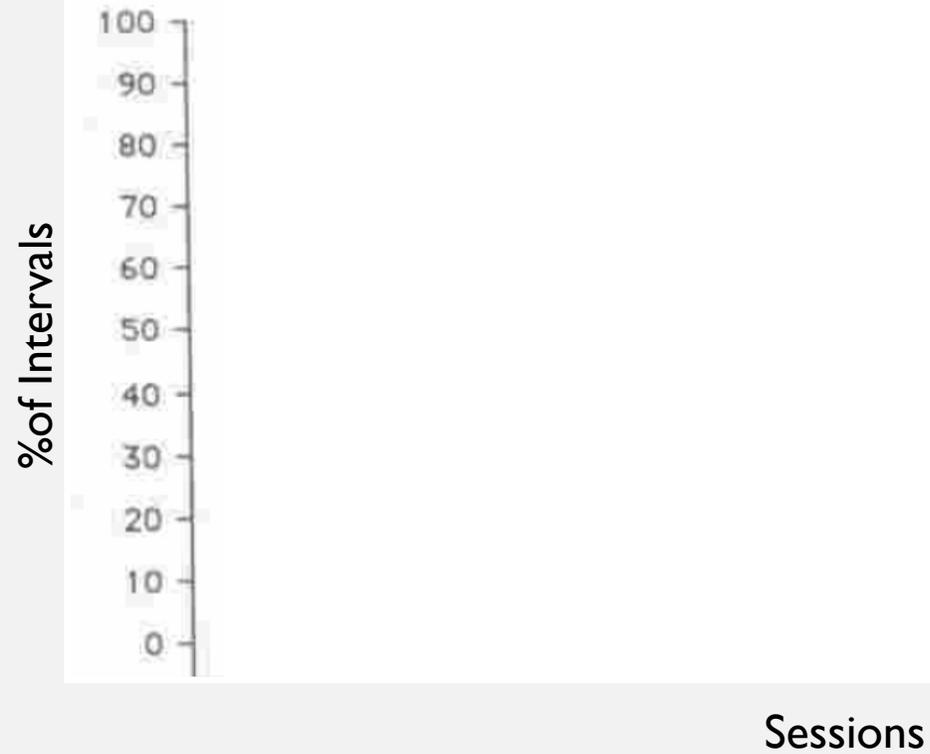
- When no activity is ongoing, hand biting occurs
- Reliable context of occurrence
- Staff members not available to provide 1:1 support for more activity engagement

FOCUS: INDICES OF ENJOYMENT

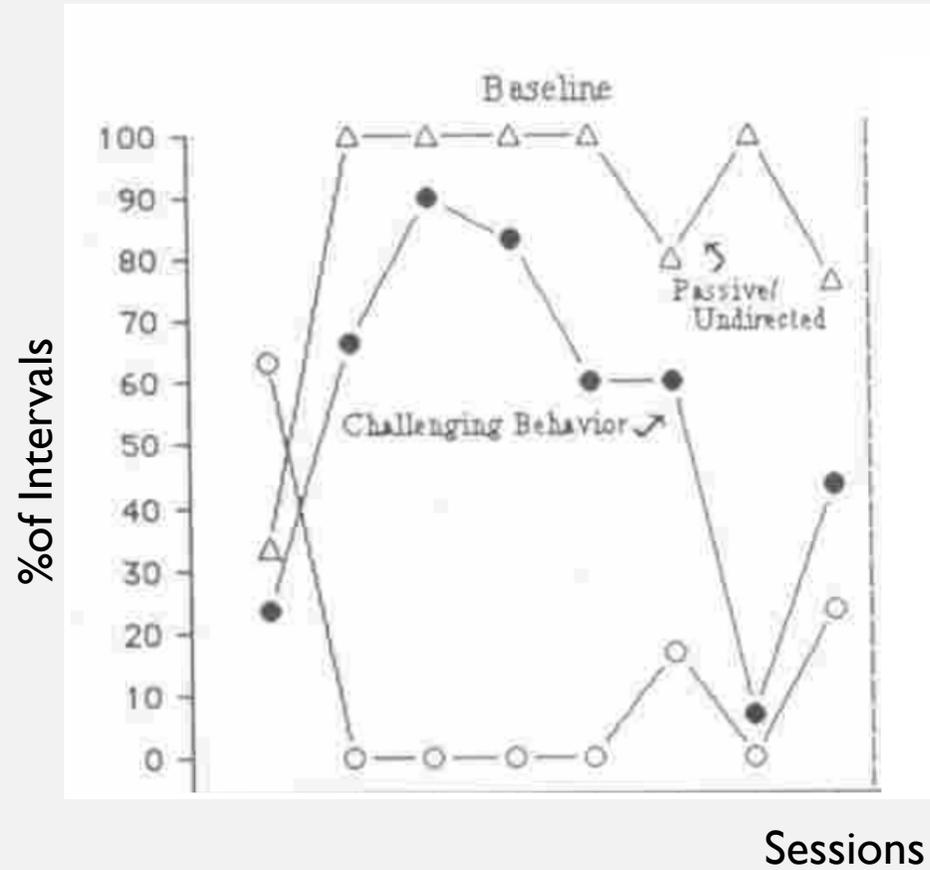
- Occurs during activities and with staff attention
- Particularly likely during sorting activities



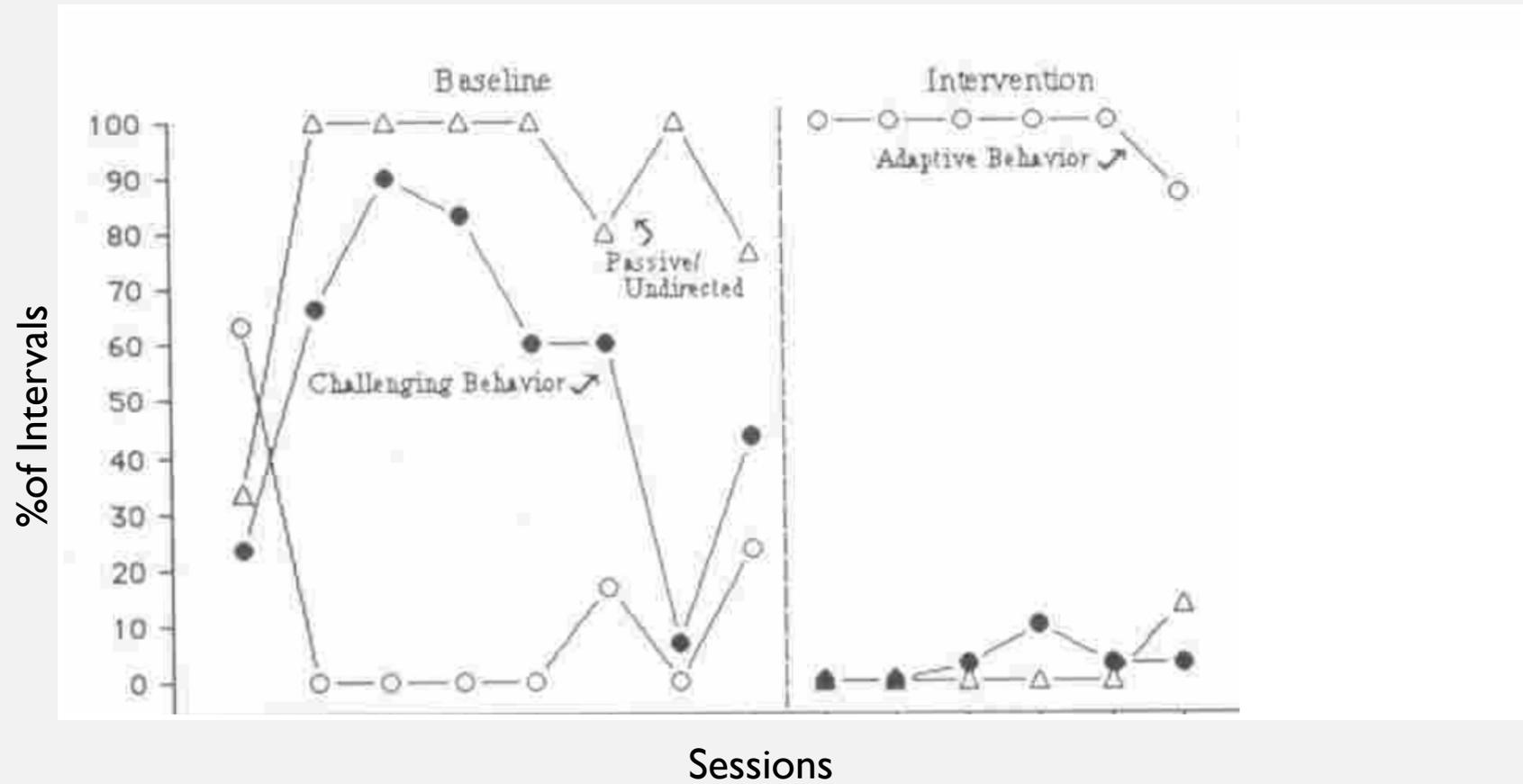
MEANINGFUL
ACTIVITIES &
CHALLENGING
BEHAVIOR



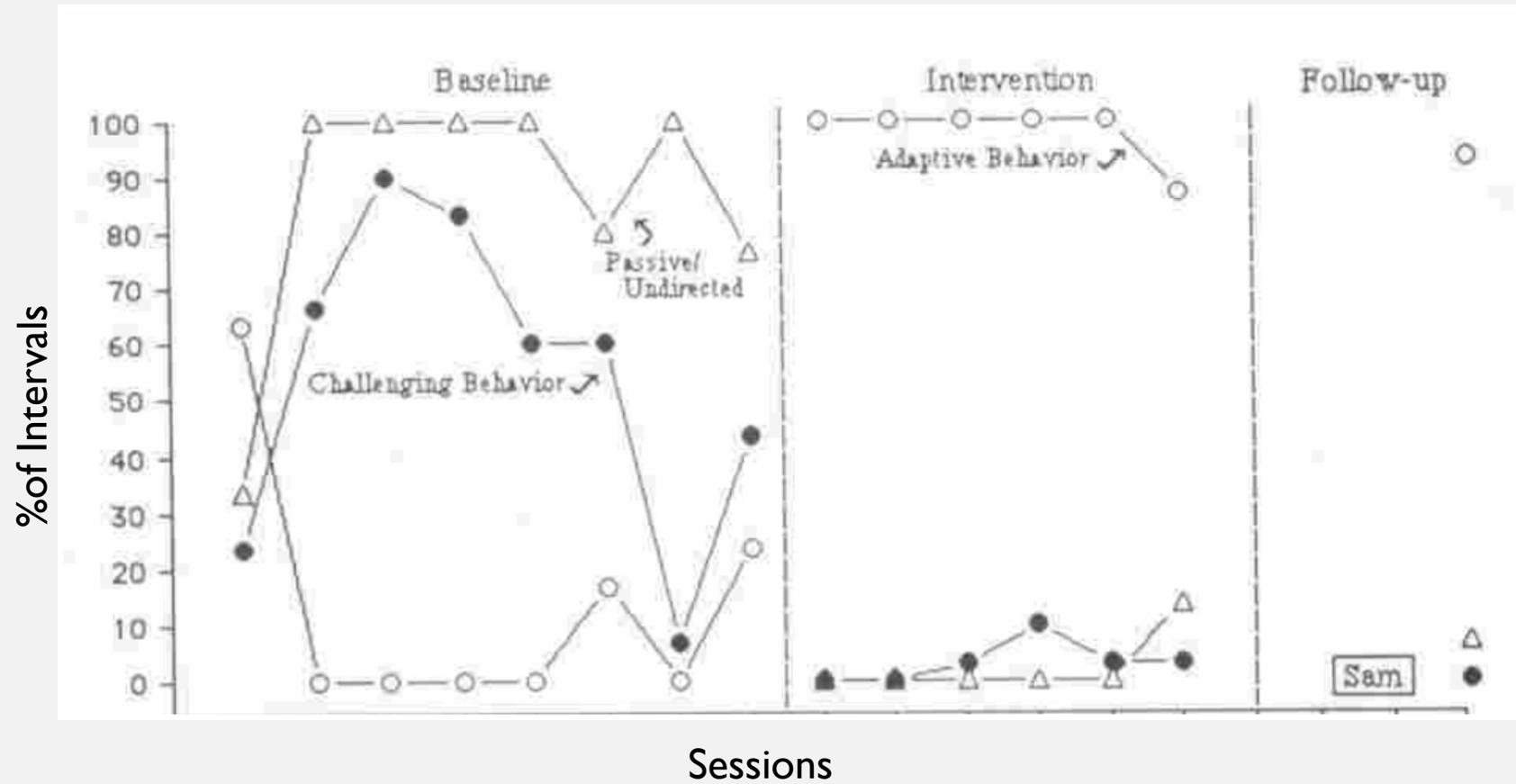
MEANINGFUL ACTIVITIES & CHALLENGING BEHAVIOR



MEANINGFUL ACTIVITIES & CHALLENGING BEHAVIOR



MEANINGFUL ACTIVITIES & CHALLENGING BEHAVIOR



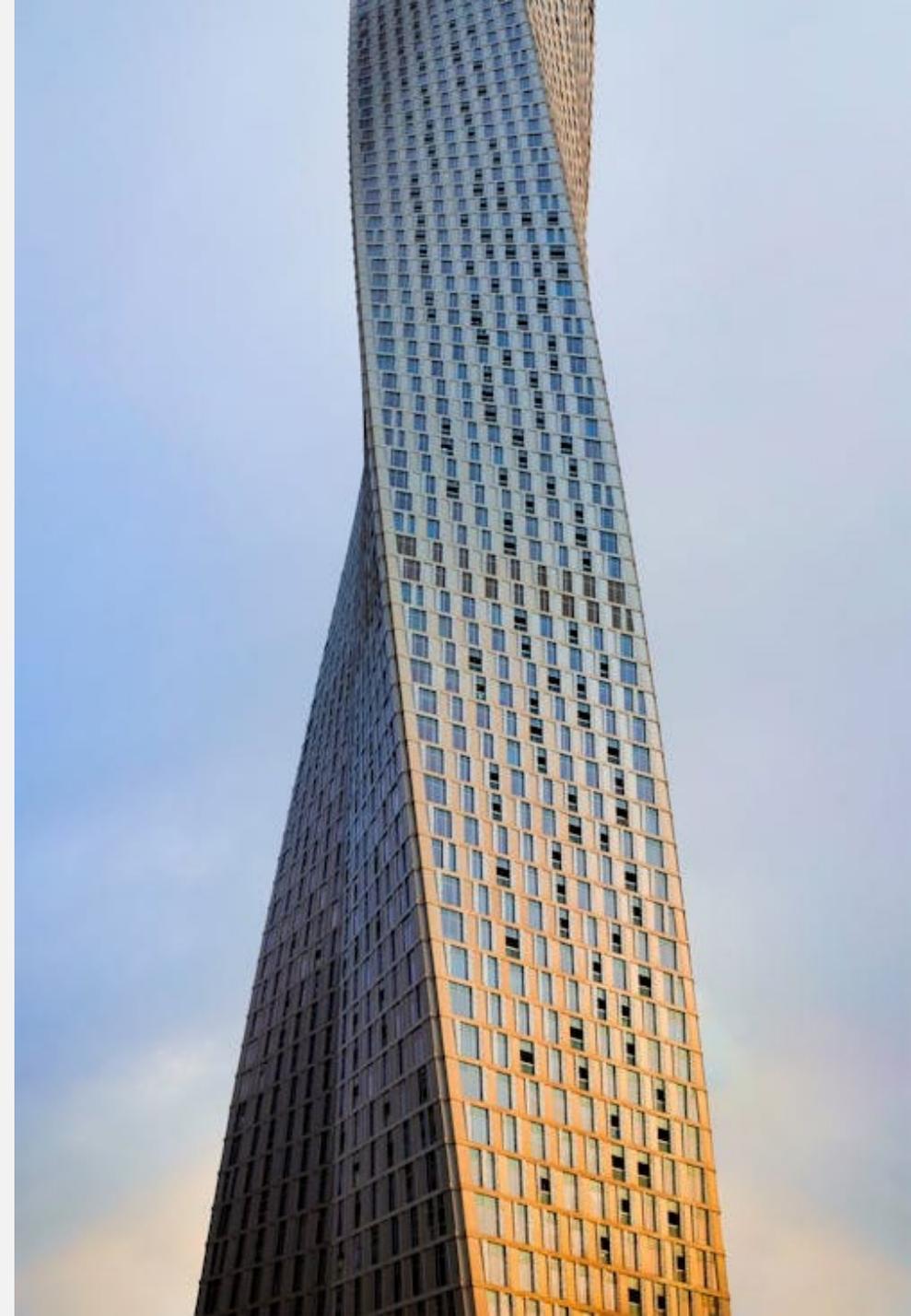
Siagfoos & Kerr (1994)

CONSTRUCTIONAL APPROACH

- May have similar impacts on reduction of dangerous behavior to pathological initially, but one approach expands a client's world while the other does not
- Ensure they can access what is meaningful to them in ways that support their independence and autonomy

SUSTAINABLE BEHAVIOR CHANGE

- Behavior change is more likely to be permanent when it involves teaching new behavior that can contact meaningful consequences rather than only decreasing behavior
- Consider:
 - Communication skills
 - Leisure skills
 - Relationship building skills



CONCLUSION

Challenging behavior happens for a reason

Understand situations around challenging behavior

Consider skills already in a client's repertoire

Identify skills to build



Thank you for your time and attention!



Stephanie.jones2@salve.edu