



## Stronger Together — Strategies for Maximizing Interprofessional Collaboration

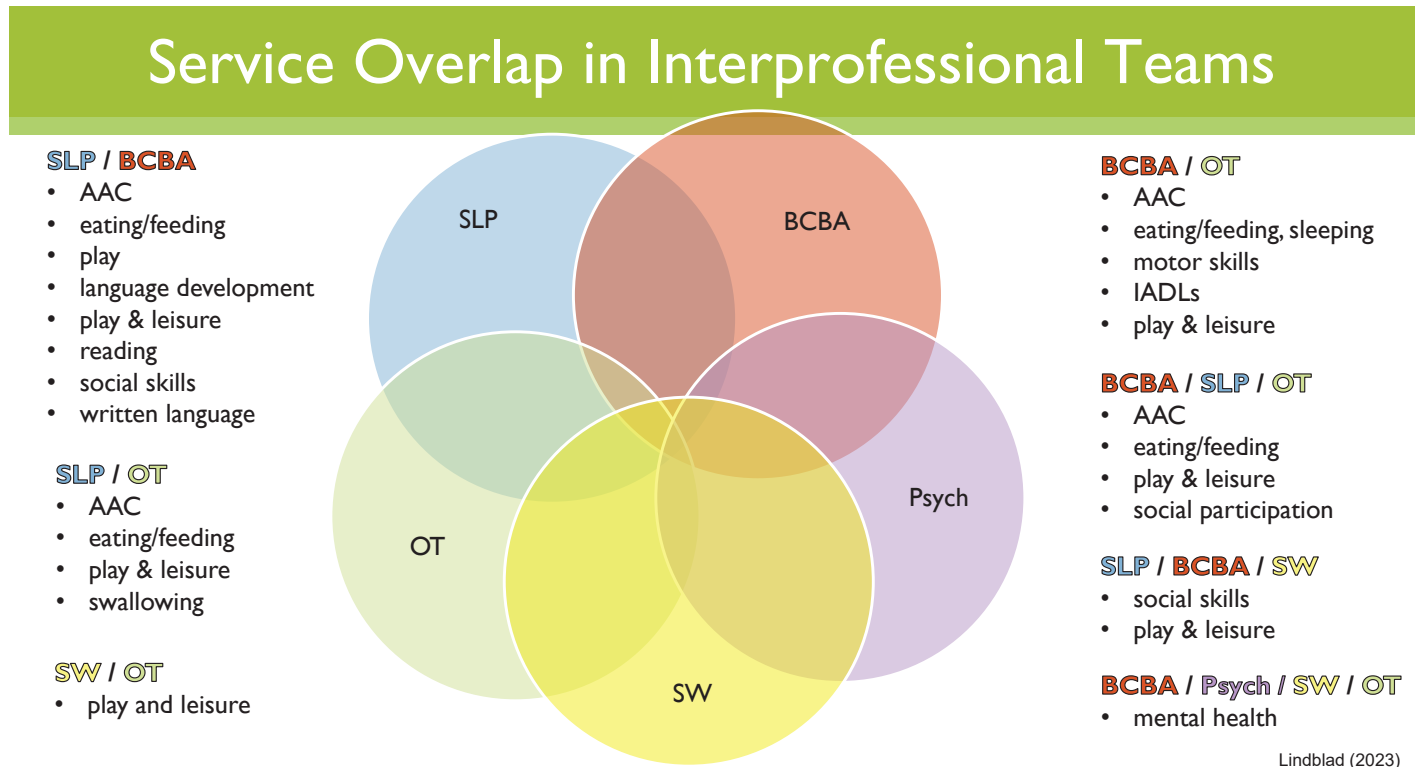
Behaviour analysts often work with individuals who have complex needs and receive services from a wide range of treating professionals, such as psychologists, occupational therapists, physicians, nurses, speech language-pathologists, social workers, and recreational therapists (Cox, 2012). Individuals in these helping professions are often supporting individuals they serve in areas that overlap with the work of behaviour analysts. It is no surprise that each profession's related discipline varies greatly in terms of content knowledge and skills, with some overlap across professions (LaFrance, 2019; See Figure 1). Despite the understandable differences, these helping professions share two primary guiding values: 1) beneficence (i.e., providing services that are of direct and primary benefit to the individual, and 2) non-maleficance (i.e., the directive to do no harm).

Interprofessional collaboration involves a partnership among stakeholders to coordinate efforts in the best interest of the client and client outcomes. This collaborative partnership occurs across different health care professionals and includes the client and caregivers. Within this partnership, professionals actively endeavor to learn from and alongside their colleagues to improve the quality of care for clients and caregivers. Interprofessional collaboration seeks to find a sort of harmony across contributing stakeholders.

**The purpose of this document is to facilitate interprofessional collaboration between behaviour analysts and other critical treating professionals in the service of optimizing client outcomes and strengthening professional skills.**



**Figure 1. Service Overlap in Interprofessional Teams**



Interprofessional collaboration is a necessary and important part of high-quality education and healthcare that can maximize client benefits and outcomes (Cox, 2012; Lindblad, 2021). Having different perspectives, skills, and approaches does not resign professionals to a relationship of incompatibility — instead these differences can produce a more effective team that can engage in robust problem solving and comprehensive treatment planning (LaFrance, 2019). Interprofessional collaboration involves practitioners of differing professions working

together in a concerted effort to provide coordinated services to the individuals they serve. Most professionals have ethics guidelines or standards that set the expectation that they will actively collaborate with other professionals in a positive and client-centered manner. For behaviour analysts, the Ethics Code for Behavior Analysts (2020) outlines these expectations most explicitly in standards 1.04, 1.05, 2.10, and 2.12 (BACB, 2020).

This type of collaborative work ensures that a client's services are coordinated in a way that facilitates individualized treatment (Brodhead, 2015), amplifies outcomes, and avoids negative interactive effects or competition across services. The benefits of interprofessional collaboration extend far past the client. When professionals actively work together, caregivers benefit because they don't then bear the burden of facilitating collaboration or sharing information across professionals. The professionals themselves benefit from working with other professionals as their repertoires are likely to strengthen and they may learn new information and skills.

**Interprofessional collaboration practices vary greatly, from simply sharing information, to considering the impact on and from the work of other professionals, to actively work in concert by bringing each professional's skills to bear on the issue or task at hand (Cook & Friend 2010; LaFrance, 2019).**



## Considerations for Successful Interprofessional Collaboration

Successful interprofessional practice or collaboration requires that professionals understand and value the benefits other professionals bring to the team (Dallmer, 2004) and that they have the skills necessary for effective communication and collaboration (Dillenburger et al., 2014). It is critical they have a working knowledge of the typical scope of practice of other professions and those professions' codes of ethics. It is important that members of an interprofessional team are aware of the ways in which they may benefit from the support and collaboration from others, as well as the ways in which they can offer support to others within their profession's scope of practice and their individual scope of competence.

Interprofessional collaboration is naturally more effortful than "going it alone" and there are very real barriers

to consider and actively address. Authors, such as Lindblad (2021) and Paproski and Haverkamp (2000), have identified common barriers to interprofessional activities, such as:

- Client confidentiality and protection
- Variability in professionalism training and typical practices across professions
- Time constraints
- Reluctance or professional biases
- Lack of collaboration skills and knowledge of other professions
- Lack of coordination of the interprofessional practice or collaboration team

### Interprofessional Competency Domains

1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.
Role Clarification	Team Functioning	Interprofessional Communication	Patient/ client/family/ community- Centered Care	Interprofessional Conflict Resolution	Collaborative Leadership



Successful collaboration requires a commitment to engage with other professionals through active listening and sharing of skills and resources. The Canadian Interprofessional Health Collaborative (2022) framework identified six competency domains critical for successful collaborative practice: 1) role clarification, 2) team functioning, 3) interprofessional communication, 4) patient/client/family/community-centered care, 5) interprofessional conflict resolution, and 6) collaborative leadership.

To support those competency domains, here are a few strategies for overcoming barriers and engaging in successful interprofessional practice and collaboration.

**Know About Your Profession and Your Skills** — Engage in self-evaluation and be prepared to describe, without using jargon, the following:

- Your profession’s scope of practice
- Your scope of competence (see Brodhead et al., 2018 Table 1 for a checklist), including your skills related to interprofessional practice and collaboration (see Lindblad, 2021 Table 2 for a list of evaluation tools)
- Your role in each context or on a given team

**Learn About Your Colleagues’ Professions and Skills** — Engage in professional development (e.g., reading scholarly work, attending professional presentations) and ask questions to:

- Learn about the scope of practice of other professions
  - » *“I am really interested in learning about the scope of practice for your profession. Would you mind telling me a bit more about the types of assessment and treatment activities professionals tend to carry out?”*
- Learn about your professional colleagues’ scope of competence and areas of specialization or expertise
  - » *“I am often looking for guidance or collaboration opportunities. Can you share a little bit about your areas of specialization?”*
- Learn about your professional colleagues’ roles in each context or on a given team
  - » *“I am excited about the chance to work with you! Can you share what your role is in providing services to X?”*



**Prepare for Interprofessional Collaboration** — Actively set the stage for collaboration and mutual support. Here are some strategies:

- Ensure that all required consents for confidentiality and exchange or release of information are obtained and maintained
- Identify common and individual goals to find collaboration points and clearly outline individual areas of focus
- Identify what collaboration will look like (e.g., sharing reports and results, collaborating on goal selection, reviewing data and engaging in problem solving, preparing for interprofessional team meetings) and when it will occur (e.g., as needed, at regular intervals)
- Identify modes of communication (e.g., email, phone, virtual or in-person meetings) and share contact information
- Identify where there might be overlap and actively discuss how to maximize benefits and minimize undesirable impacts
  - » *“I am planning to work on X, and I’d love to know if that overlaps with your work at all/if you can foresee any benefits or barriers between our work.”*
- If developing a formal Interprofessional Collaboration Team, identify someone to coordinate or lead the team (Lindblad, 2021; Paproski & Haverkamp, 2000)





**Engage in Professional Behaviour** — In your Interprofessional collaboration, conduct yourself in a professional manner. Here are some considerations:

- Respect the professional knowledge and skills of others and acknowledge what they bring to team; point out and thank them for their contributions
- Minimize the use of jargon to avoid having to engage in lengthy explanations; use language that is familiar to your colleagues
- Be flexible with terminology; if a colleague uses a term differently than you do that is ok. If you are not sure about the meaning and cannot figure it out from the context, ask polite and thoughtful questions to gain more information
  - » *"I just want to be sure I understand; when you say X do you mean..."*
  - » *"That term might mean something different in my profession, do you mind just briefly explaining it to me please?"*

- Use decision models that can facilitate and guide decision making related to research-based interventions and when making choices between multiple intervention options (see Brodhead 2015 and Newhouse-Oisten et al., 2017)
- Compromise — there is typically more than one right way to get the same results. Ask yourself 1) is there is any risk of harm in using a different approach and 2) will the other approach have a significant, negative impact on your services. If the answer to either is yes, respectfully express your concern, share your rationale, and share that you would like to discuss a few alternatives.

There are many ways that treating professionals can support one another through interprofessional collaboration. Here are just a few areas that are well suited to such collaborative activities:





## Activities Benefiting from Interprofessional Collaboration

**Records Reviews** — Sharing records across interprofessional team members ensures that each professional has all the relevant information that may impact their recommendations and services. When a professional is reviewing a report or other documentation from a differing profession, it may be beneficial for them to seek out support in interpreting unfamiliar terms, assessments, procedures, or data displays.

- For example, behaviour analysts may need support from a psychologist to understand the implications of psychological assessment results and how those can be used to inform their behavioural assessment and treatment planning.
- A behaviour analyst may be able to offer support to other treating professionals with interpreting data from behaviour analytic assessments (e.g., functional behaviour assessments, functional analyses), behaviour reduction programming, and skill acquisition programming.

**Selecting & Designing Assessments** — Treating professionals can minimize risk and maximize benefits to clients by collaborating to select and design assessments. Working within an interprofessional team provides the opportunity for professionals to support each other in identifying potential risks and developing procedures to minimize those risks during an assessment.

- Professionals may be able to minimize the total time an individual spends in assessment and testing activities by collaborating on the intended assessment/test and swiftly sharing results.
- A behaviour analyst might benefit from collaborating with a medical professional when designing assessments for individuals who engage in severe self-injurious behaviour.
- It may be informative for a behaviour analyst to collaborate with a Speech-Language Pathologist or Occupational Therapist when conducting skill-based assessments to ensure that tasks and any allowable modifications are developmentally appropriate.



- A behaviour analyst may support other treating professionals who may be struggling to complete needed assessment procedures due to the presence of interfering challenging behaviour by collaborating on things like the environmental set up and the use of allowable additional supports, such as visual schedules.

### **Selecting, Designing, & Evaluating Treatment Goals & Interventions**

— Because service professionals are often addressing the same or similar needs from slightly different approaches, collaborating is necessary to ensure that the interventions being used are neutral or beneficial, in terms of their possible interactions. Collaboration also allows professionals to share information about progress, or lack thereof, on a treatment goal that might inform the treatment choices of other professionals.

- Interprofessional collaboration can support the selection of treatment goals that are both socially significant and culturally responsive for the individual and their family, as the professionals can share perspectives and invite a critical analysis of the appropriateness of the goals.
- Behaviour analysts can enhance their goal and target selection by collaborating with professionals from other disciplines who can inform the sequences of goals and assist in ensuring that goals and targets are developmentally and culturally appropriate. For example, whereas behaviour analysts are skilled at arranging the environment to evoke and shape vocalizations, they are unlikely to have expertise related to the developmental sequence or the mechanics of sound production or the knowledge of appropriate sound substitutions.
- Other treating professionals may benefit from collaborating with a behaviour analyst to design simple ways to evaluate the effects of their interventions.

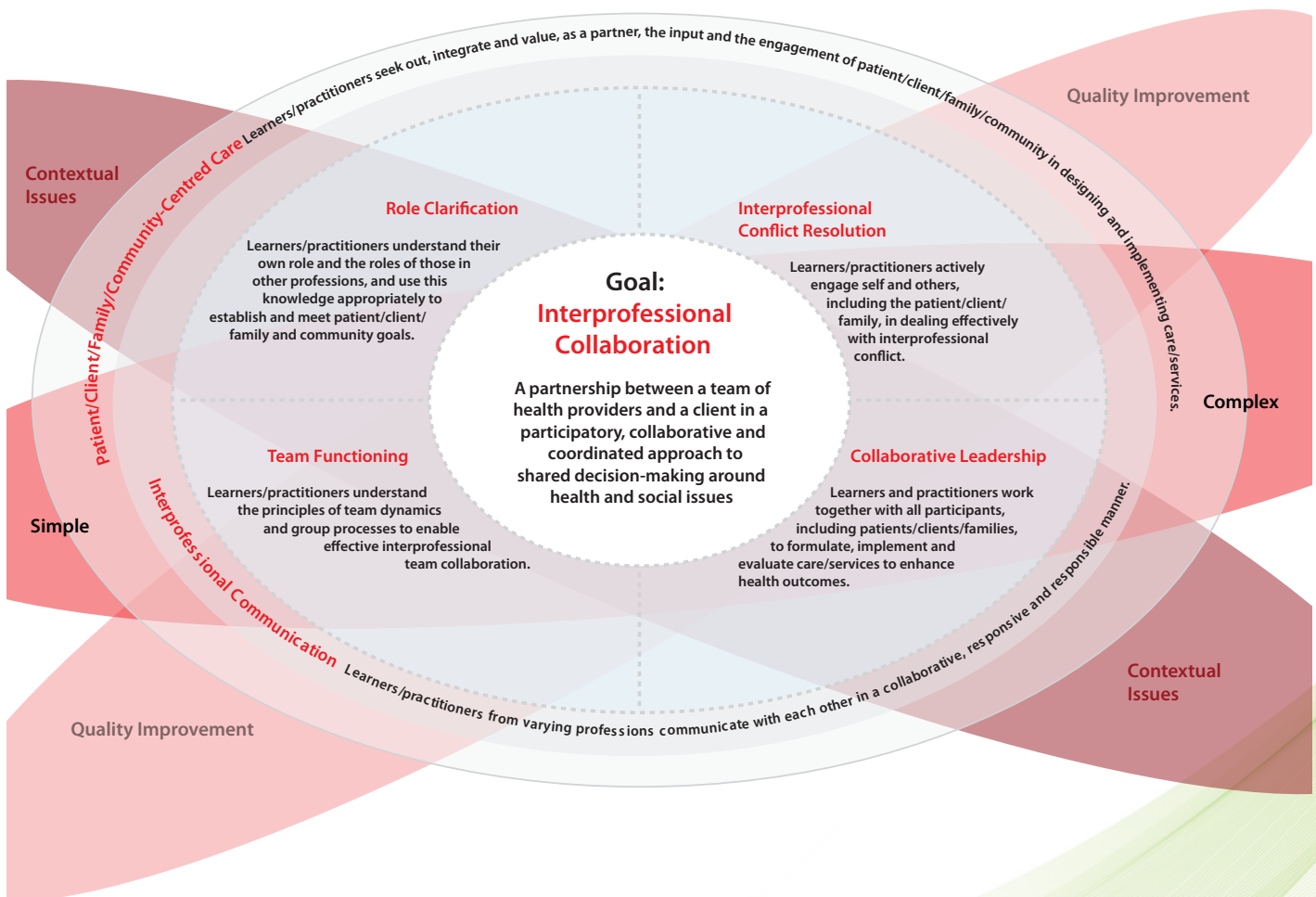
**Data Collection & Problem Solving** — Critical to all service provision is the ability to track and evaluate progress to ensure that the treatments are producing the desired changes and to make any necessary modifications in a timely manner. Collaborative teams can facilitate effective data collection, evaluation, and problem solving by working together to support efforts to implement appropriate data collection and to engage in critical analysis.

- Treating professionals may directly benefit from a collaborative approach to reviewing data and problem solving, as the diverse backgrounds and unique perspectives may facilitate the identification of interaction patterns that might remain undetected when reviewed by only one professional.
- Because many individuals with intellectual or developmental disabilities have medical needs requiring medication, behaviour analysts benefit from collaborating with medical professionals to keep track of the effects of medication. For example, behaviour analysts can track behaviour to assist physicians in evaluating if prescribed medication is producing the desired results, as well as the presence of possible side effects.
- Behaviour analysts will benefit from collaboration with physicians and other prescribing professionals in reviewing data, as those medical professionals may be better equipped to identify possible biological impacts (e.g., allergies, GI issues, menstrual cycles) on behaviours and to assist in making decisions about the time to implement certain interventions (e.g., toilet training).
- Behaviour analysts can support other professionals with their data collection efforts by sharing ideas to simplify or enhance data collection and visual depiction of data.

## Summary

Interprofessional collaboration is well aligned with the core values or principles of helping professions, such as beneficence, non-maleficence, placing the client first, and behaving with integrity. As this document highlights, there are many benefits to engaging in purposeful collaboration with other treating professionals that include increasing the efficiency and effectiveness of the services provided, as well as providing professional development for the treating providers. The strategies for successful collaboration and the benefits of interprofessional collaboration outlined in this document are offered in the spirit of supporting treating professionals' commitment to make meaningful and lasting positive change that ultimately benefits the lives of clients and others.

### Interprofessional Collaboration Competency Domain.



*Note: Depiction of the structure of the interprofessional collaboration competency domains and highlights additional factors that influence how the competency framework may be applied across varying settings and contexts. Reprinted from A National Interprofessional Competency Framework (p.11) by CIHC, 2010. Copyright 2010 by Her Majesty the Queen in Right of Canada. Reprinted with permission.*

*Citation: Canadian Interprofessional Health Collaborative. (2010). A national interprofessional competency framework. University of British Columbia*



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