

Before Exercise Behaviour



It is safe for me to say that Exercise Behaviour was born out of pure compassion, empathy, and concern for the younger kids of today who are finding it difficult to stay on the right track. When the going gets tough, staying positive and progressing through life somehow become the hardest tasks in the world, and all of a sudden, you feel alone and hopeless. I am here to tell you my story of how I overcame my times of despair, and how staying positive and making healthy decisions led to my recovery, and ultimately to the creation of Exercise Behaviour.

Let's start at adolescence - I was 16 years old and smoking Cannabis was a regular occurrence throughout these years of my teenage life. My daily life was full of inactivity, and my choices in life at that stage were far from healthy or appropriate to say the least, and a few years down the line I was arrested for possession and theft. Clearly, my actions, thought processes, and behaviour were shrouded by a negative mind state, and this also affected my relationship with my immediate family members.



This was a place where I would go to take drugs

My relationship with my father was not very strong throughout these years of my life, which only added more stress and negativity to my head space at the time, and this caused me to become even more jaded with the world around me. At times like these, our actions and our decisions always seem to be weightless as a result of how numbed we can become from constant despair, and so my lifestyle continued as it was and I grew even more careless as time went on.

Having said that, even in the deepest states of despair, there can still be times where we can sink further away from the brink of recovery. At the age of 19, I experienced this feeling first-hand when my father passed away. My father

was very passionate about flying - he was an avid glider pilot. His death happened very suddenly in a gliding accident, and his death affected me deeply. It then struck me how many life lessons he tried to teach me when he was alive, all of which came flooding back to me. It turns out that now, years on, I am acting out many of the things he taught me.



This is my father in a glider

After his death, I was in a deep state of depression, and I was using drugs to medicate. This is how things stayed for a while, until one day, I felt a change in the current. Laying on the floor of my bedroom, I could not press my body weight off the floor, leading to a sinking feeling of 'where did things go wrong?'

My friends gave me a call and invited me over, which could only mean one thing: let's do drugs. Knowing this, I decided to reject the offer, and from that

point onwards, I stopped doing drugs all together. I started to thoroughly enjoy exercise and training, once over the initial struggle to get my body moving, and I made physical activity part of my lifestyle.

This was a turning point, and my passion for exercising and keeping fit led me to finish a degree in Sports & Culture. I then went into teaching, and started my journey as a teaching assistant , and 2011 saw me starting my PGCE course.



Here's a picture of me when I first started on the course

Upon starting the course, I had an issue with the curriculum and the way it was taught, and I felt as though there was very little focus on how to motivate

students to engage in the various exercises. More importantly, this model didn't pay any mind to the wellbeing of the children or their lifestyles. When I eventually started mainstream teaching, I felt as though what I had learned was not at all useful in encouraging children to engage in sport activities, and I became very disappointed and generally disillusioned with the way sports were taught to children. This became apparent to me when standing on a netball court teaching a year 10 class how to throw a ball from their chest.

With my mentor telling me I hit this standard, and that standard, I experienced another defining moment in my life, asking myself several deep questions about what I was doing. How does this vehicle support the children in the class going towards obesity? What about those abusing drugs? And those with a difficult home life, struggling to manage their behaviour and emotions?

This made me depressed, and I ended up leaving. It was my vision to help others grow and prosper through the power of exercise and physical activity, and I felt as though this was not being achieved by what I was delivering. However, I found solace in skipping, and I used it as a new means of overcoming my depression. Years on from medicating depression with drug use, with an increased self awareness of my actions, exercise and skipping in particular became my medication. What was once a means of overcoming depression, though, blossomed into a huge passion of mine. I used skipping as a way to meditate, by listening to music and matching my skips to the beat. This was so therapeutic, and skipping was something that I encouraged my students to engage with during my time in teaching.

I then went back to the school where I was a teaching assistant, and started to challenge the way in which their inclusion department dealt with the behaviour of children. The idea was to support kids through their behavioural troubles and tutoring them by using quick exercises and thoughtful discussions when they would get kicked out of class and sent to my office. I then got the idea to create the behaviour scale, and this idea started with a boy named Joel. While I was trying to illustrate the negative consequences, I sketched out a triangular diagram to help Joel visualise how his behaviour would affect his freedom in life. I started to use this diagram to show other kids the consequences of their behaviour, and how to solve issues around how they conducted themselves in their lives.

This served as the catalyst that sparked the invention of the exercise scale. The exercise scale really serves as a foundation to the Exercise Behaviour programme, as it is something that the children build in real time and perform a variety of exercises in. There are two sides to the scale, a negative side and a positive side. Different exercises are conducted in each side of the scale, and the idea is to show children how much more freedom they would have by behaving appropriately and healthily. The programme grew in popularity from this point onwards, and I began to get more and more referrals. What was initially a 1 to 1 behavioural support programme became a whole school model that can now be implemented within school culture. I started moving around schools in an effort to spread the message.

What also suddenly dawned on me, is that in my time as a child at school, I do not remember being taught about actions and consequences, positive attitude and freedom, or mental health, so I went on a mission to change this.

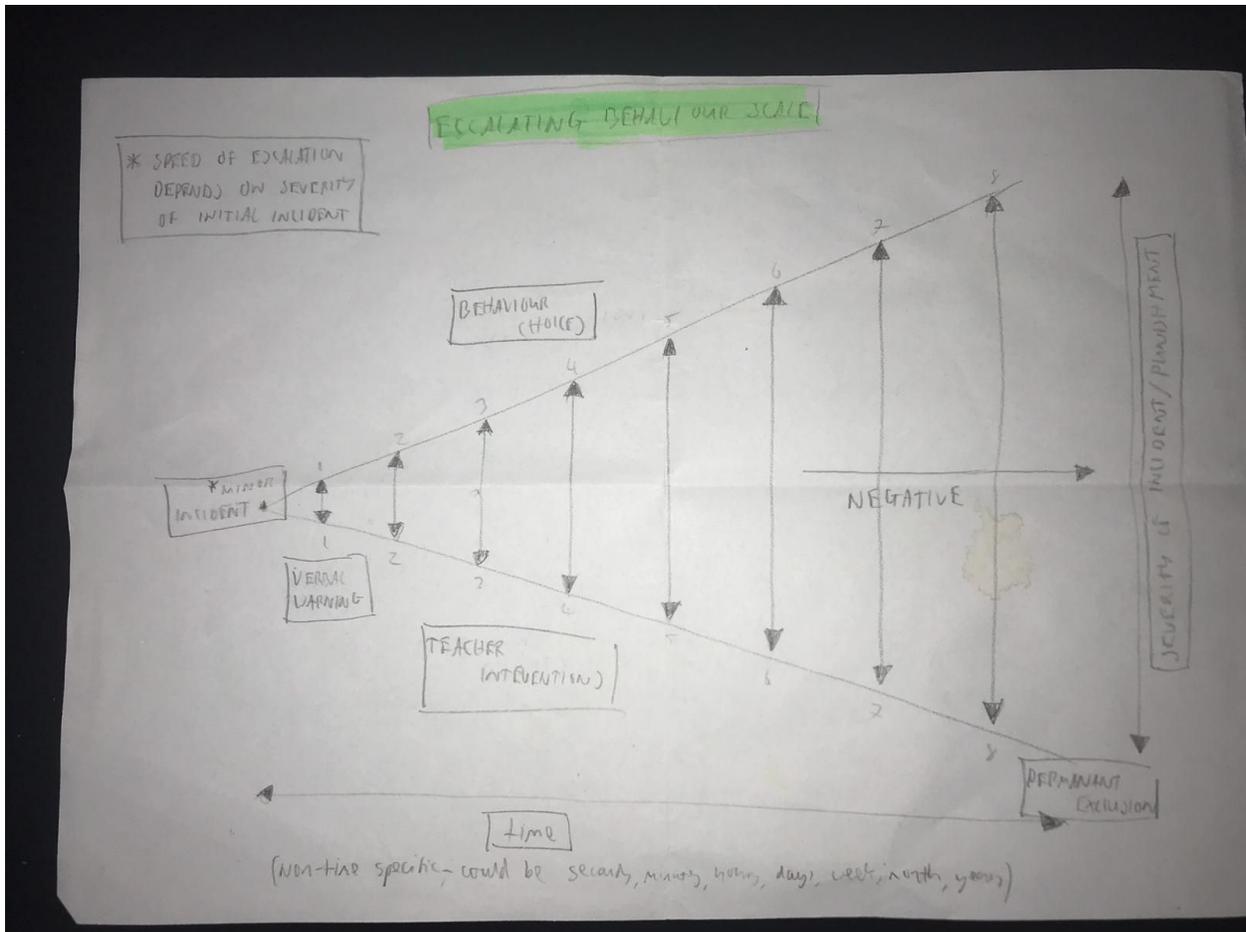
Throughout this time, I continued to skip. I skipped so much, that in April 2017, I broke the world record for the most crossovers while skipping in one minute! It also struck me that the process of training to break the world record required determination, commitment, and unwavering focus. These are the qualities that exercise and training can bring into the lifestyles of those who are looking to set goals for themselves. The goal of Exercise Behaviour is to help people in this situation, as well as those who are not fully capable of realising how they need to change the way they live and behave.



110 crossovers in 60 seconds!

Exercise Behaviour is now a solution for preventing the early onset of persistent disruptive behaviour in children, as a means of identifying the root causes behind their behaviour and changing their outlook on life through

exercise. The behaviour scale serves as a metaphor for life - the negative end of the scale illustrates how negative actions and behaviours will limit your freedom in life. The positive end shows students the benefits of being positive in life by allowing more space for students to perform their sport activities. Overall, the programme has grown in its popularity, and is now a part of school curriculum in a number of schools across the country. Best of all, I feel encouraged by the fact that this programme will help children live their best lives, and will hopefully guide them away from falling into the same pitfalls that I once fell into.



This is the first ever concept sketch of the exercise scale

I'd like to end this by referring back to Joel, the young student who originally participated in the early stages of the programme and helped me realise the potential of the exercise scale. Joel is now 22, and is on his way to the USA to start training to become a wrestler. I reached out to him recently, and he responded with a very touching account on how he felt Exercise Behaviour helped him:

"I've been meaning to say for a while. The Exercise Behaviour programme is really spot on, and this is something myself and the others I was with probably didn't realise at the time. Although things may not have fully resonated with us back then, you were definitely onto something - it has just taken me a couple of years to fully realise it. So, I just wanted to say thank you for being so helpful and giving me and the others a lot more chance and liberty than we should have had. I really do believe in what you were telling us back then, and I'm very glad that your hard work and patience has proven it's worth today. I give you all my thanks and respect for what you're doing and for what you did for me back then."

Above all, this really shows the long term impact of Exercise Behaviour and the way in which it can provide guidance to those who need it.

Understandably, many schools will tend to look for immediate impact when it comes to behavioural support with children. However, it is imperative that we look ahead rather than getting stuck in the present perspective - the ultimate goal of Exercise Behaviour is to form solid foundations for every child who needs it, so they have something to build on as well as a better chance of securing a brighter future. Everybody deserves to become the best version of themselves, and with the right support and perseverance, I believe that everybody is truly capable in one way or another.

At this point, I would like to summon all of the sincerity I can possibly muster and pay endless thanks to:

My Mother, for being so strong and sticking with me throughout everything.

Karen Fusco, my first manager in education.

Tom Barwood, my friend and mentor who helped me realise my potential.

Don Weerasirie, my camera man and friend who helped me step into the limelight.

Jonny Woolf, my brother who helped me push myself to another level of fitness.

Laura Ross, my good friend and colleague who always encouraged me and believed in the programme.

I could not have done all of this without the support and encouragement of these people, along with many others who very kindly helped me on the way.



