Addressing Problem Behavior
A Successful Team Approach

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Objectives
By the end of the session, you will be able to:

- Understand reasons problem behaviors can occur
- List essential components of a Behavior Intervention Plan, including replacement behaviors
- Describe when to involve an outside professional
- Describe ways to create collaboration on the child’s educational team to address behaviors of concern

First, we must know that…

- Behavior, including problem behavior is learned.
- Behavior can be changed.

Also understand that.....

- Problem behavior serves a purpose for the individual
- Problem behavior occurs within an environmental context (antecedents/consequences)
- Good behavior and problem behavior relate to what is being reinforced.

Why important to address?

- May be unsafe for the child and others
- Interferes with skill acquisition and can be socially-stigmatizing
- Reduces available opportunities (e.g., social, inclusion) and limits generalization
- There are often underlying deficits to consider - can translate as behavioral problems.
- Educators and parents can be effective change agents.

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Other Setting Events / Development

- Normal challenges (and opportunities!) present at various stages, affecting behavior (initial transition to school, middle school/adolescents, new sibling).
- Other conditions set stage for problem behaviors to develop: ASD, anxiety, ADHD, learning disorders (content is too hard), poor executive functioning (gets stuck/can’t initiate or shift).
- How addressed by adults is critical.

Functional (Behavioral) Assessment

- A specific process for addressing problem behavior.
- Seeks to answer the question “Why does he/she do that?”
- This information (“why”) helps us best respond to the behavior.
- What antecedents occasion behavior (what sets the stage) and what consequents maintain behavior (what keeps it going)?
- School format varies. Need to conduct a solid assessment to identify the function(s). Requires more than completing a form or doing informal observations.

Understanding the Context

- In addition to child’s environment….
- Also understand the adult’s environment so that we can begin the process of partnersing to achieve an effective plan.
- What is the philosophy across the multidisciplinary team so that rapport and shared goals are created.
- Commitment to Evidence Based Practice (EBP) for problem behavior will focus on Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA).

How do these behaviors look?

- Disruption (calling out, throwing items)
- Task refusal (not initiating, out of seat)
- Tantrums (whining, yelling)
- Aggression (pushing, hitting peers)
- Self-injurious behavior (self-hitting, head banging)
- Repetitive Behavior (movements/words)

We must identify and properly define the problem behavior (and later the relevant replacement behavior).
Why do they occur (Function)?

- To escape or avoid
- To gain attention (peer, teacher)
- To access a preferred item or activity
- Internal/sensory (or behavior is self-reinforcing)
- But, there are nuances that must be considered for each individual.

Functional Assessment Methods

IDEA mandates FBAs, few guidelines. Schools without agreed upon methods. Avoid teacher-generated/non-normed measures.

- Educational teams may get minimal training (knowledge gap)
- Data collection usually by sped teacher - should not constitute teacher’s “impressions” alone
- ABA field can help – provides solid methodology as standard in the field.

What is Functional Assessment?

A set of procedures used to identify the “reason” the behavior is occurring, usually involving a combination of:

- Indirect assessment – no direct observations: rating scales, interview – FAST, QABF
- Descriptive assessment - observing the behavior in context: Structured ABC Analysis
- Functional analysis - observing and measuring problem behavior in at least 2 contexts, derived from an interview and testing if behavior occurs in one context and not another, for example. Requires advanced training in ABA.

FAST

Structured ABC Analysis
Functional Assessment

Again we are looking at

**Antecedents (occur before):** such as a skill deficit in communication or child’s difficulty maintaining attention which establishes escape as more reinforcing

**Consequences (occurs after):** child getting someone’s attention or a break through problem behavior can keep that behavior going

Functional Analysis

In a **Functional Analysis**, we directly manipulate and observe environmental events to test our hypothesis.

- **Standard functional analysis** – Rapidly alternate 4 conditions in a multi-element design: attention, escape, alone, play conditions (Iwata et al., 1982/1994)
- **Brief Functional Analysis** – a variation: shorter sessions
- **Precursor Analysis** – a variation: can be safer – assess specific behaviors which often precede a more dangerous behavior (yelling before hitting)
- **Interview-informed Synthesized Contingency Analysis (ISCA)** - can also be brief: begins with interview/observation, and about 30 min period of test conditions (Hanley, 2010-2019)

After understanding the function-

- We can design an individualized Behavior Intervention Plan to address that function (aka function-based intervention)
- Informed Consent
- Is the plan acceptable to parents and implementers?
- How will training and monitoring occur?

Two ways to help

**Accommodate**
- Change the environment
- Change expectations
- Change the task

**Remediate**
- Explain the rationale
- Introduce new concepts
- Teach new skills
- Teach a process

Necessary Components~

- **Operational Definitions** - what constitutes the behavior (for consistency across adults): what does it look or sound like? Modify as needed
- **Plan to teach functionally-equivalent replacement behaviors** (ex: waiting, requesting, raising hand) that directly match the function – reinforcing “good” behavior quickly and often.
- **Adult response** to problem behavior?
- **Outcome measurement with objective data**

Skills we may need to teach:

- Teach to communicate – based on function
- Teach to tolerate when reinforcers are not available (ended, delayed or not coming)
- Teach play / leisure skills to compete with internal/sensory function
- Teach to appropriately gain the attention of others
- Teach compliance with usual directions
- Teach to escape or avoid situations unpleasant to them
- Teach how to gain access to and keep preferred items
- Extend these skills so they occur with relevant people and contexts (Hanley, 2012)
Interventions – Antecedents

- Give choice
- Reduce demands (help, breaks, easier work)
- Visually structure rules/expectations (what to do)
- Visual daily schedule
- Provide more attention or breaks (scheduled)
- Reduce environmental noise and/or verbal prompts
- Enriched the environment (e.g., preferred items/location)

Prevention

An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure.

Interventions

- Use Differential Reinforcement Procedures: such as reinforcing other behavior, alternative behavior, lower or higher rates of behavior or incompatible behaviors
- Must be specific
- Visual supports (rules on desk, materials, point/token chart, individual schedule). Teaching expectations

Behavior to Reduce

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Behavior</th>
<th>Behavior to Increase</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Grabbing from others</td>
<td>Offering to share</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Calling out</td>
<td>Raising hand</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hitting</td>
<td>Using words to communicate, way to find a compromise</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Out of seat</td>
<td>Asking for help, in seat</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Interventions - Extinction

- Discontinuing reinforcement for previously reinforced behavior. Is there good control over reinforcement?
- Can mean ignoring the behavior, interrupting the behavior, or working through (depending on function)
- May see an Extinction Burst. Ensure that it is safe before starting (not always an essential piece).

More Function-based Intervention Ideas

Escape
- Make it easier, request break or scheduled break, break tasks down, 3-step guided compliance /follow-through, reinforce cooperation (in smaller parts), teacher assistance.

Attention / Tangible
- Teach requesting attention or item, give attention/item on a schedule, reinforce absence of behavior, cue peers to ignore, allow to earn item when tokens/points are earned

Internal
- Provide alternative (competing) stimulation, blocking, reinforce nonoccurrence, allow access at certain times (teach discrimination)
Creating a “Positive” Environment

- Have structure and routines
- Communicate with full team for consistency
- Get a home-school communication plan (what/when/how to convey info)
- Request feedback from the child and take turns talking
- Build the child’s self-esteem by highlighting strengths
- Help the child solve problems with peers

(Forehand & Long, 2002)

Measuring Progress

Not optional, but fit to student/setting

Data must be objective vs. subjective

Collect data for behaviors targeted for both decrease and increase:

- Rate/frequency
- Duration
- Intensity
- Latency
- Percentage of intervals (yes/no every 30 min) in which desired/undesired behavior occurred
- Percentage of opportunities in which these occurred

Measuring Progress

- Data reviewed at least quarterly. Look at FBA annually
- Meeting short term goals, revise?
- Clearly document changes to plan on IEP/BIP
- Extra attention to transitions (changing schools/staff) with written specifics on what did/did not work

Where the I.E.P. comes in

- Present level of performance – record frequency, duration, intensity, etc. of behavior and areas of need that impact behavior, like communication and social deficits
- Parent input – list child’s support needs, what has/not been effective, how disability impacts gen ed inclusion
- Goals and objectives – communication, behavior, academic, social goals, etc. …
- Necessary accommodations: frequent breaks, a positive reinforcement system, visual schedule, extended time, preferential seating, reduced distractions, BIP, nonverbal prompting, etc.

Why is this difficult to do?

- Staff may feel:
  - They have insufficient training and support
  - Encumbered by other team members
  - Challenged to confront child and/or be bad guy
  - It sets a “bad example” to accommodate one student
  - It takes too much time and resources for one child
  - Concerned with disruption to classroom environment
  - A lack of administrative support

What is hindering the best line of action?
When things are not working...

- Schedule IEP meeting (or BIP meeting)
- Collect fidelity data on the plan (how well implemented): Outside professionals can help monitor.
- Consider ways to maximize generalization and maintenance of plan.
- Evaluate if data based decision-making is in place and data are accurate.
- Return to FBA process – involve more highly trained staff/ BCBA

When things are not working...

- Disciplinary action towards child – is it a manifestation of the child’s disability?
- Procedural Safeguards: Parents need to understand their rights and the best way to advocate for their child
- Building (rebuilding?) collaboration: Has communication and the team process broken down?

Goals of Educational System?

- Schools exist to enhance educational outcomes of students.
- Clinical practice may not be the focus, though EBP is mandated by IDEA.
- Schools operate within designated and limited resources.
- But, behavioral consultants /advocates/ med team can bridge the gap between educational and clinical practice. (Tagg, 2018)

Partnership between School and Outside Professionals

- Needed if serving child in home
- What do schools say?
- Schools request respect and understanding of their constraints in scheduling, meeting, etc.

Is Outside Consultation Needed?

- Added expertise, objective opinion, or fill knowledge gap
- More in depth eval and treatment– behavior is unsafe
- Observing across settings: home tie in
- Initial and ongoing training for high fidelity implementation
- Problem solving on time constraints and limited internal resources
- Bringing together parties to commit to a plan- outside “change agent!”
- Monitor outcome (review data) and ongoing plan adjustments

Any Questions?