ADDRESSING STUDENT PROBLEM BEHAVIOR

AN IEP TEAM'S INTRODUCTION TO FUNCTIONAL BEHAVIORAL ASSESSMENT AND BEHAVIOR INTERVENTION PLANS

January 16, 1998

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This document was produced under grant number H237T60005. The views expressed herein do not necessarily reflect the views of the U.S. Department of Education or any other Federal agency and should not be regarded as such. The *Center for Effective Collaboration and Practice: Improving Services for Children and Youth with Emotional and Behavioral Problems* is funded under a cooperative agreement with the Office of Special Education Programs, Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services, U.S. Department of Education, with additional support from the Child, Adolescent, and Family Branch, Center for Mental Health Services, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Administration, of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The authors wish to thank the following people for their valuable assistance in the conception and production of this document:

Ed Amundson, M.Ed., *National Education Association*
Beth Bader, M.Ed., *American Federation of Teachers*
George Bear, Ph.D., *University of Delaware*
Kevin Dwyer, M.A., *National Association of School Psychologists*
Frank Gresham, Ph.D., *University of California, Riverside*
Marsha Griswold, M.S., *Baltimore City Public Schools*
Beverley Johns, M.S., *Council for Children with Behavioral Disorders*
Dixie Jordan, *PACER Center*
David Osher, Ph.D., *Center for Effective Collaboration and Practice*
Trina Osher, M.A., *Federation of Families for Children's Mental Health*
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George Sugai, Ph.D., *University of Oregon*

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The object of the IDEA is not to arbitrarily mandate change, but to provide an environment conducive to the education of all students, including those with disabilities.

Educators have long understood that behavior difficulties can keep students from functioning productively in class. Many school personnel have been considering the effects of behavior on learning for some time. The 1997 Amendments to the IDEA take that consideration one step further: *the relationship between behavior and learning must not only be considered but acted upon*. The Amendments have addressed this issue by requiring teams charged with developing individualized education programs (IEPs) to conduct a functional behavioral assessment and to implement behavior intervention plans that utilize positive behavioral interventions and supports to address behaviors which interfere with the learning of students with disabilities and with the learning of others (or that require disciplinary action).

The requirements specified in the 1997 Amendments to the IDEA that pertain to functional behavioral assessments and positive behavioral intervention plans and supports as they relate to the responsibilities of the IEP team and to the IEP itself are the subject of this paper. This is the first in a series of working papers on developing and implementing functional behavioral assessments and behavior intervention plans. It is intended to be used by school personnel who participate in a student's IEP meetings. Future papers will be designed to address the special concerns of parents, as important members of IEP teams; and to convey more detailed information on specific topics addressing functional behavioral assessment and positive behavioral intervention plans and supports.

In order to give readers a cursory background in the topics addressed herein, the concept of a functional behavioral assessment to determine the underlying "functions" of a student's problem behaviors is described, as are the process and guidelines for conducting a *functional behavioral assessment*. Next we offer a review of behavior intervention plans, including a description of how to develop, implement, and evaluate various interventions.

For readers who are unfamiliar with these procedures, there is a sampling of resources available for further study. We use both general and technical terminology to assist the reader in understanding techniques and to provide the vocabulary necessary to locate further information on the subject at hand.

This initial discussion is not intended to provide a complete course of training, but to offer an overview of some of the techniques involved. Further, we do not advocate one philosophical base over another. Rather, we promote a combination of techniques to address behavioral, cognitive, and affective functions of a student's behavior and advocate the development of positive behavioral interventions and supports that tap each of these areas as well. The authors believe that the individuals charged with the responsibility of developing and conducting functional behavioral assessments and behavior

intervention plans should be afforded proper training in these techniques and provided the supports necessary to effectively carry out their duties.

IDEA Rights and Requirements

The 1997 Amendments to IDEA are explicit in what they require of an IEP team addressing behavioral problems of children with disabilities:

- *The team should explore the need for strategies and support systems to address any behavior that may impede the learning of the child with the disability or the learning of his or her peers;*
- *In response to disciplinary actions by school personnel, the IEP team should, within 10 days, meet to formulate a functional behavioral assessment plan to collect data for developing a behavior intervention plan. If a behavior intervention plan already exists, the team must review and revise it (as necessary), to ensure that it addresses the behavior upon which disciplinary action is predicated; and*
- *States shall address the needs of in-service and pre-service personnel (including professionals and paraprofessionals who provide special education, general education, related services, or early intervention services) as they relate to developing and implementing positive intervention strategies.*

IEP Team Roles and Responsibilities

As schools explore educational options, many educators are being cast in unfamiliar roles and are acquiring new responsibilities. In the past, special educators provided classroom instruction to students with disabilities. More recently, their responsibilities, like those of their colleagues in general education, have enlarged to include professional collaboration to support the participation of students with disabilities in the general education curriculum.

Due to this change in focus, there is an increased emphasis upon not only teaching students with disabilities in the general education curriculum, but assessing their progress by means of technically sound instruments and procedures as mandated by the Amendments to IDEA. In addition, demand to collaborate with all relevant education personnel to resolve behavior problems that may interfere with academic progress has increased. As members of IEP teams, general educators play an ever increasing role in collaboratively developing comprehensive management and instructional plans for students with disabilities.

Why a Functional Assessment of Behavior is Necessary

Although professionals in the field hold a variety of philosophical beliefs, they generally agree that there is no single cause for problem behaviors. The following examples illustrate some of the underlying causes for "acting-out" behavior:

- Juan, a 16 year old who reads at a second grade level, feels embarrassed to be seen with an elementary text and reacts by throwing his reading book across the room and using inappropriate language to inform the teacher that he does not intend to complete his homework.
- Sumi, an eight year old who reads Stephen King novels for recreation, finds her reading assignments boring and, therefore,

shoves her book and workbook to the floor when the teacher comments on her lack of progress.

- Maurice, a 10 year old who finds multiplication of fractions difficult, becomes frustrated and throws tantrums when asked to complete worksheets requiring him to multiply fractions; and
- Kerry, a 12 year old who has problems paying attention, is so overstimulated by what she sees out of the window and hears in the nearby reading group, she slams her text shut and loudly declares that she cannot work.

A conclusion gleaned from these examples may be that, although the topography (what the behavior looks like or sounds like) of the behaviors may be similar, in each case, the "causes," or functions, of the behaviors are very different. Thus, focusing only on the topography will usually yield little information about effective interventions. Identifying the underlying cause(s) of a student's behavior, however, or, more specifically, what the student "gets" or "avoids" through the behavior, can provide the IEP team with the diagnostic information necessary to develop proactive instructional strategies (such as positive behavioral interventions and supports) that are crafted to address behaviors that interfere with academic instruction.

To illustrate this point, again consider the acting-out behaviors previously described. Reactive procedures, such as suspending each student as a punishment for acting-out, will only address the symptoms of the problem, and will not eliminate the embarrassment Juan feels, Sumi's boredom, the frustration that Maurice is experiencing, or Kerry's overstimulation. Therefore, each of these behaviors are likely to occur again, regardless of punishment, unless the underlying causes are addressed.

Functional behavioral assessment is an approach that incorporates a variety of techniques and strategies to diagnose the causes and to identify likely interventions intended to address problem behaviors. In other words, functional behavioral assessment looks beyond the overt topography of the behavior, and focuses, instead, upon identifying biological, social, affective, and environmental factors that initiate, sustain, or end the behavior in question. This approach is important because it leads the observer beyond the "symptom" (the behavior) to the student's underlying motivation to escape, "avoid," or "get" something (which is, to the functional analyst, the root of all behavior). Research and experience has demonstrated that behavior intervention plans stemming from the knowledge of *why* a student misbehaves (i.e., based on a functional behavioral assessment) are extremely useful in addressing a wide range of problems.

The *functions* of behavior are not usually considered inappropriate. Rather, it is the behavior itself that is judged appropriate or inappropriate. For example, getting high grades and acting-out may serve the same function (i.e., getting attention from adults), yet, the behaviors that lead to good grades are judged to be more appropriate than those that make up acting-out behavior. For example, if the IEP team determines through a functional behavioral assessment that a student is seeking attention by acting-out, they can develop a plan to teach the student more appropriate ways to gain attention, thereby filling the student's need for attention with an alternative behavior that serves the *same function* as the inappropriate behavior.

By incorporating functional behavioral assessment into the IEP process, team members can develop a plan that teaches and

supports *replacement behaviors,* which serve the same function as the problem behavior, itself (e.g., teaching Maurice to calmly tell the teacher when he feels frustrated, and to ask for assistance when he finds a task too difficult to accomplish). At the same time, strategies may be developed to decrease or even eliminate *opportunities* for the student to engage in behavior that hinders positive academic outcomes (e.g., making sure that Maurice's assignments are at his instructional level).

CONDUCTING A FUNCTIONAL BEHAVIORAL ASSESSMENT

Identifying the underlying causes of behavior will take many forms; and, while the Amendments to IDEA advise a functional behavioral assessment approach to determine specific *contributors* to behavior, they do not require or suggest specific techniques or strategies to use when assessing that behavior. While there are a variety of techniques available to conduct a functional behavioral assessment, the first step in the process is to define the behavior in concrete terms. In the following section we will discuss techniques to define behavior.

Identifying the Problem Behavior

Before a functional behavioral assessment can be implemented, it is necessary to pinpoint the behavior causing learning or discipline problems, and to define that behavior in concrete terms that are easy to communicate and simple to measure and record. If descriptions of behaviors are vague (e.g., poor attitude), it is difficult to determine appropriate interventions. Examples of concrete descriptions of problem behaviors are:

Problem Behavior	Concrete Definition
Trish is aggressive.	Trish hits other students during recess when she does not get her way.
Carlos is disruptive.	Carlos makes irrelevant and inappropriate comments during class discussion.
Jan is hyperactive.	Jan leaves her assigned area without permission. Jan completes only small portions of her independent work. Jan blurts out answers without raising her hand.

It may be necessary to carefully and objectively observe the student's behavior in different settings and during different types of activities, and to conduct interviews with other school staff and caregivers, in order to pinpoint the specific characteristics of the behavior.

Once the problem behavior has been defined concretely, the team can begin to devise a plan for conducting a functional behavioral assessment to determine functions of the behavior. The following discussion can be used to guide teams in choosing the most effective techniques to determine the likely causes of behavior.

ALTERNATIVE ASSESSMENT STRATEGIES

The use of a variety of assessment techniques will lead teams to better understand student behavior. Each technique can, in effect, bring the team closer to developing a workable intervention plan.

A well developed and executed functional behavioral assessment will identify the contextual factors that contribute to behavior. Determining the specific contextual factors for a behavior is accomplished by collecting information on the various conditions under

which a student is most and least likely to be a successful learner. That information, collected both indirectly and directly, allows school personnel to predict the circumstances under which the problem behavior is likely and not likely to occur.

Multiple sources and methods are used for this kind of assessment, as a single source of information generally does not produce sufficiently accurate information, especially if the problem behavior serves several functions that vary according to circumstance (e.g., making inappropriate comments during lectures may serve to get peer attention in some instances, while in other situations it may serve to avoid the possibility of being called on by the teacher).

It is important to understand, though, that contextual factors are more than the sum of observable behaviors, and include certain *affective* and *cognitive* behaviors, as well. In other words, the trigger, or antecedent for the behavior, may not be something that anyone else can directly observe, and, therefore, must be identified using indirect measures. For instance, if the student acts out when given a worksheet, it may not be the worksheet that caused the acting-out, but the fact that the student does not know what is required and thus anticipates failure or ridicule. Information of this type may be gleaned through a discussion with the student.

Since problem behavior stems from a variety of causes, it is best to examine the behavior from as many different angles as possible. Teams, for instance, should consider what the "pay-off" for engaging in either inappropriate or appropriate behavior is, or what the student "escapes," "avoids," or "gets" by engaging in the behavior. This process will enable the teams to identify workable techniques for developing and conducting functional behavioral assessments and developing behavior interventions. When carrying out these duties, teams might consider the following questions.

Is the problem behavior linked to a skill deficit?

Is there evidence to suggest that the student does not know how to perform the skill and, therefore cannot? Students who lack the skills to perform expected tasks may exhibit behaviors that help them avoid or escape those tasks. If the team suspects that the student "can't" perform the skills, *or has a skill deficit,* they could devise a functional behavioral assessment plan to determine the answers to further questions, such as the following:

- Does the student understand the behavioral expectations for the situation?
- Does the student realize that he or she is engaging in unacceptable behavior, or has that behavior simply become a "habit"?
- Is it within the student's power to control the behavior, or does he or she need support?
- Does the student have the skills necessary to perform expected, new behaviors?

Does the student have the skill, but, for some reason, not the desire to modify his or her behavior?

Sometimes it may be that the student can perform a skill, but, for some reason, does not use it consistently (e.g., in particular settings). This situation is often referred to as a "performance deficit." Students who can, but do not perform certain tasks may be experiencing consequences that affect their performance (e.g., their non-performance is rewarded by peer or teacher attention, or

performance of the task is not sufficiently rewarding). If the team suspects that the problem is a result of a *performance deficit*, it may be helpful to devise an assessment plan that addresses questions such as the following:

- Is it possible that the student is uncertain about the appropriateness of the behavior (e.g., it is appropriate to clap loudly and yell during sporting events, yet these behaviors are often inappropriate when playing academic games in the classroom)?
- Does the student find any value in engaging in appropriate behavior?
- Is the behavior problem associated with certain social or environmental conditions?
    - Is the student attempting to avoid a "low-interest" or demanding task?
    - What current rules, routines, or expectations does the student consider irrelevant?

Addressing such questions will assist the IEP team in determining the necessary components of the assessment plan, and ultimately will lead to more effective behavior intervention plans. Some techniques that could be considered when developing a functional behavioral assessment plan are discussed in the following section.

Techniques for Conducting the Functional Behavioral Assessment

Indirect assessment. *Indirect* or *informant assessment* relies heavily upon the use of structured interviews with students, teachers, and other adults who have direct responsibility for the students concerned. Individuals should structure the interview so that it yields information regarding the questions discussed in the previous section, such as:

- In what settings do you observe the behavior?
- Are there any settings where the behavior does not occur?
- Who is present when the behavior occurs?
- What activities or interactions take place just prior to the behavior?
- What usually happens immediately after the behavior?
- Can you think of a more acceptable behavior that might replace this behavior?

Interviews with the student may be useful in identifying how he or she perceived the situation and what caused her or him to react or act in the way they did. Examples of questions that one may ask include:

- What were you thinking just before you threw the textbook?
- How did the assignment make you feel?
- Can you tell me how Mr. Smith expects you to contribute to class lectures?
- When you have a "temper tantrum" in class, what usually happens afterward?

Commercially available student questionnaires, motivational scales, and checklists can also be used to structure indirect assessments of behavior. The district's school psychologist can be a valuable source of information regarding the feasibility of using these instruments.

Direct assessment. *Direct assessment* involves observing and recording situational factors surrounding a problem behavior (e.g., *antecedent* and *consequent* events). A member of the IEP team may observe the behavior in the setting that it is likely to occur, and record data using an Antecedent-Behavior-

Consequence (ABC) approach. (Appendix A shows two examples of an ABC recording sheet.)

The observer also may choose to use a *matrix* or *scatter plot* to chart the relationship between specific instructional variables and student responses. (See Appendix B for examples). These techniques also will be useful in identifying possible environmental factors (e.g., seating arrangements), activities (e.g., independent work), or temporal factors (e.g., mornings) that may influence the behavior. These tools can be developed specifically to address the type of variable in question, and can be customized to analyze specific behaviors and situations (e.g., increments of 5 minutes, 30 minutes, 1 hour, or even a few days). Regardless of the tool, observations that occur consistently across time and situations, and that reflect both quantitative and qualitative measures of the behavior in question, are recommended.

Data analysis. Once the team is satisfied that enough data have been collected, the next step is to compare and analyze the information. This analysis will help the team to determine whether or not there are any patterns associated with the behavior (e.g., whenever Trish does not get her way, she reacts by hitting someone). If patterns cannot be determined, the team should review and revise (as necessary) the functional behavioral assessment plan to identify other methods for assessing behavior.

Hypothesis statement. Drawing upon information that emerges from the analysis, school personnel can establish a hypothesis regarding the function of the behaviors in question. This hypothesis predicts the general conditions under which the behavior is most and least likely to occur (antecedents), as well as the probable consequences that serve to maintain it. For instance, should a teacher report that Lucia calls out during instruction, a functional behavioral assessment might reveal the function of the behavior is to gain attention (e.g., verbal approval of classmates), avoid instruction (e.g., difficult assignment), seek excitement (i.e., external stimulation), or both to gain attention and avoid a low-interest subject.

Only when the relevance of the behavior is known is it possible to speculate the true function of the behavior and establish an individual behavior intervention plan. In other words, before any plan is set in motion, the team needs to formulate a plausible explanation (*hypothesis*) for the student's behavior. It is then desirable to manipulate various conditions to verify the assumptions made by the team regarding the function of the behavior. For instance, the team working with Lucia in the example above may hypothesize that during class discussions, Lucia calls out to get peer attention. Thus, the teacher might make accommodations in the environment to ensure that Lucia gets the peer attention she seeks as a consequence of appropriate, rather than inappropriate behaviors. If this manipulation changes Lucia's behavior, the team can assume their hypothesis was correct; if Lucia's behavior remains unchanged following the environmental manipulation, a new hypothesis needs to be formulated using data collected during the functional behavioral assessment.

Many products are available commercially to help IEP teams to assess behaviors in order to determine their function. Sources for more information about techniques, strategies, and tools for assessing behavior are presented in the last section of this discussion.

INDIVIDUALS ASSESSING BEHAVIOR

Persons responsible for conducting the functional behavioral assessment will vary from district to district and possibly from team to team. Some behavioral assessment procedures, such as standardized tests, may require an individual with specific training (e.g., behavior specialist or school psychologist). With specialized training, experience, and support, however, many components of the assessment can be conducted by other members of the IEP team, such as special or general education teachers, counselors, and administrators. Again, it is important to note that in academic testing, the intervention should not be based upon one assessment measure, alone, or upon data collected by only one observer.

BEHAVIOR INTERVENTION PLANS

After collecting data on a student's behavior, and after developing a hypothesis of the likely function of that behavior, a team must develop (or revise) the student's behavior intervention plan, which should include positive strategies, program or curricular modifications, and supplementary aids and supports required to address the disruptive behaviors in question. It is helpful to use the data collected during the functional behavioral assessment to develop the plan and to determine the discrepancy between the child's actual and expected behavior.

The input of the general education teacher, as appropriate (i.e., if the student is, or may be placed in the mainstream), is especially crucial at this point. He or she will be able to relay to the team not only his or her behavioral expectations, but also valuable information about how the existing classroom environment and/or general education curriculum can be modified to support the student.

Intervention plans emphasizing skills students need in order to behave in a more appropriate manner, or plans providing motivation to conform to required standards, will be more effective than plans that simply serve to *control* behavior. Interventions based upon *control* often fail to generalize (i.e., continue to be used for long periods of time, in many settings, and in a variety of situations) — and many times they serve only to *suppress* behavior — resulting in a child manifesting unaddressed needs in alternative, inappropriate ways. Positive plans for behavioral intervention, on the other hand, will address both the source of the problem and the problem itself.

IEP teams may want to consider the following techniques when designing behavior intervention plans and supports:

- Manipulate the antecedents and/or consequences of the behavior;
- Teach more acceptable replacement behaviors that serve the same function as the inappropriate behavior;
- Implement changes in curriculum and instructional strategies; and
- Modify the physical environment.

The following section describes some ideas IEP teams may consider when developing behavior intervention plans.

ADDRESSING SKILL DEFICITS

n assessment might indicate the student has a *skill deficit*, and does not know how to perform desired skills. The functional behavioral assessment may show that, although ineffective, the child may engage in the inappropriate behavior to escape or avoid a

situation: (1) for which he or she lacks the appropriate skills; or (2) because she or he lacks appropriate, alternative skills and truly believes this behavior is effective in getting what he or she wants or needs. For example, a child may engage in physically violent behavior because he or she believes violence is necessary to efficiently end the confrontational situation, and may believe that these behaviors will effectively accomplish his or her goals. However, when taught to use appropriate problem-solving techniques, the student will be more likely to approach potentially volatile situations in a nonviolent manner. If this is the case, the intervention may address that deficit by including, within the larger plan, a description of how to teach the problem-solving skills needed to support the child.

If the student does not know what the behavioral expectations are, the plan can be formulated to teach expectations, and would include the supports, aids, strategies, and modifications necessary to accomplish this instruction, with expectations explained in concrete terms. For example, if the expectation is "to listen to lectures," the intervention plan might include the following:

Goal: D*uring classroom lectures, Jim will make only relevant comments and ask only relevant questions in 80 percent of the opportunities.*
Objectives: *Given a 50 minute, large group (i.e., more than 20 students) classroom lecture, Jim will ask one appropriate question and make two relevant comments on each of 3 consecutive school days.*

Activities to accomplish the goal and objectives:

- The teacher will model examples and non-examples of situations when listening is important and assist Jim in identifying the components of active listening (e.g., hands and feet still, eyes facing the speaker, quiet lips, think about what is being said and determine if you need more information, think about how the information makes you feel, and if necessary, make a comment or ask a question);
- Jim will list the situations in which active listening skills are important and will describe the necessary behaviors in each of those situations;
- Jim will participate in "role-plays" of situations in which active listening skills are necessary;
- Jim will practice active listening in each of the situations listed above — and will report the results to his teacher, counselor, or parent;
- Jim will monitor the opportunity and degree to which he actively listens during lectures and will reinforce himself (e.g., "I did a great job!"); and
- Jim will identify and use active listening skills in situations other than class lectures.

If the student does not realize that he or she is engaging in the behavior, (i.e., the student is reacting out of habit), the team may devise a plan to cue the child when she or he is so engaged. Such a cue could be private and understood only by the teacher and the student. If Mariah, for instance, impulsively talks out during Ms. Bader's class discussions, Ms. Bader and Mariah may agree that Ms. Bader will look directly at Mariah and slightly move her right hand in an upward motion to remind Mariah to raise her hand. If Mariah does raise her hand, Ms. Bader agrees to call on her.

Sometimes, for biological or other reasons, a student is unable to control his or her behavior without supports. Although it is never the place of the IEP team to make medical

diagnoses, it is appropriate for the team to make referrals to obtain medical evaluations.

Should the student not know how to perform the expected behaviors, the intervention plan could include modifications and supports to teach the child the needed skills. Such instruction may require teaching academic skills as well as behavioral and cognitive skills, and may require a team member to do a *task analysis* (i.e., break down a skill into its component parts) of the individual behaviors that make up the skill. For example, if the skill is to "think through and solve social problems," the individual skills may include:

- Define the problem *(What is the goal? What is the obstacle?)*;
- List the possible solutions to the problem;
- Determine the likely consequences of each solution;
- Evaluate each solution to determine which solution has the best likelihood of solving the problem in the long term;
- Pick the best solution;
- Plan how to carry out the solution;
- Carry out the solution; and
- Evaluate the effectiveness of the solution (and decide where to go from there).

The behavior intervention plan, in the previous case, would include methods to teach the necessary skills to the child, and would provide the supports necessary to accomplish such plans. Methods may include the following components:

- Identify the steps necessary to solve social problems;
- Recognize the steps to solve social problems when they are modeled by a teacher or a peer;
- Participate in role-play situations requiring the use of the social problem solving skills; and
- Practice social problem solving in real-life situations.

A technique known as *curricular integration* is useful in teaching skills to students, as the technique integrates positive strategies for modifying problem behavior into the existing classroom curriculum, and is based upon the premise that a skill is more likely to be learned when taught in the context in which it is used. Teachers who incorporate behavioral interventions into daily instruction generally state that this technique has proven to be particularly effective for teaching replacement behaviors.

ADDRESSING PERFORMANCE DEFICITS

If the functional behavioral assessment reveals that the student knows the skills necessary to perform the behavior, but does not consistently perform the skills, the intervention plan may include techniques, strategies, and supports designed to increase motivation to perform the skills.

If the assessment reveals that the student is engaging in the problem behavior because it is more desirable (or reinforcing) than the alternative, appropriate behavior, the intervention plan could include techniques for making the appropriate behavior more desirable. For instance, if the student makes rude comments in class in order to make her peers laugh, the plan might include strategies for rewarding appropriate comments as well as teaching the student appropriate ways to gain peer attention. *Behavioral contracts or token economies* and other interventions that include peer and family support may be necessary in order to change the behavior.

Sometimes a child does not perform the behavior simply because he or she sees no value in it. While the relevance of much of what we expect students to learn in school is apparent to most children, sometimes (especially with older children) it is not. For example, if Sheran wants to be a hairdresser when she graduates, she may not see any value in learning about the Battle of Waterloo. Therefore, the intervention plan may include strategies to increase her motivation, such as demonstrating to Sheran that she must pass History in order to graduate and be accepted into the beauty school program at the local community college.

Another technique for working with students who lack *intrinsic* motivators is to provide *extrinsic* motivators. If the student cannot see any intrinsic value in performing the expected behaviors, it may be necessary to, at least initially, reinforce the behaviors with some type of extrinsic reward, such as food, activities, toys, tokens, or free time. Of course, extrinsic rewards should gradually be replaced with more "naturally occurring" rewards, such as good grades, approval from others, or the sheer pleasure that comes from success. This process of *fading out,* or gradually replacing extrinsic rewards with more natural or intrinsic rewards, may be facilitated by pairing the extrinsic reward with an intrinsic reward. For example, when rewarding David with popcorn for completing his homework, the paraprofessional could say, *David, you have completed all of your homework this week, and your class participation has increased because you are better prepared. You must be very proud of yourself for the hard work you have done.* In this way, David should eventually become intrinsically rewarded by a sense of pride in completing all of his assignments

ADDRESSING BOTH SKILL AND PERFORMANCE DEFICITS

Some student problems are so severe they require a combination of techniques and supports. For example, if the student finds it difficult to control his or her anger, she or he may need to be taught the following skills to:

- recognize the physical signs that he or she is becoming angry,
- use relaxation skills,
- apply problem-solving skills,
- practice communication skills,

and have the added support of:

- the school counselor,
- the school psychologist, and
- curricular or environmental modifications.

In addition, the student may need to be provided with external rewards for appropriately dealing with anger.

Many professionals and professional organizations agree that it is usually ineffective and often unethical to use *aversive* techniques to control behaviors, except in very extreme cases, such as situations in which:

- the child's behavior severely endangers her or his safety or the safety of others,
- every possible positive intervention has been tried for an appropriate length of time and found ineffective, and
- the behavior of the student severely limits his or her learning or socialization, or that of others.

It is important for IEP teams to consider all positive interventions *before* they consider punishment as an option. Punishment often makes behavior worse. Further, punishment seeks to control the symptom of the problem and does not address the function of the behavior.

MODIFYING THE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

In addition to factors of skill and motivation, the functional behavioral assessment may reveal conditions within the learning environment, itself, that may precipitate problem behavior. Factors that can serve as precursors to misbehavior range from the physical arrangement of the classroom or student seating assignment to academic tasks that are "too demanding" or "too boring." Again, simple curricular or environmental modifications may be enough to eliminate such problems.

Providing Supports

Sometimes *supports* are necessary to help students use appropriate behavior. The student, for example, may benefit from work with school personnel, such as counselors or school psychologists. Other people who may provide sources of support include:

- Peers, who may provide academic or behavioral support through tutoring or conflict-resolution activities, thereby fulfilling the student's need for attention in appropriate ways;
- Families, who may provide support through setting up a homework center in the home and developing a homework schedule, which enables the child to appropriately participate in follow-up class discussions;
- Teachers and paraprofessionals, who may provide both academic supports and curricular modifications to address and decrease a student's need to avoid academically challenging situations; and
- Language pathologists, who are able to increase a child's expressive and receptive language skills, thereby providing the child with alternative ways to respond to any situation.

In addition, a variety of adults and students in and around the school and community may contribute support. An example of how one Local Education Agency helped a student use some of his energy in an appropriate manner involved allowing the student to work with the school custodian, contingent upon his completing his academic work each day.

Whatever the approach, the more proactive and inclusive the behavior intervention plan – and the more closely it reflects the results of the functional behavioral assessment – the more likely that it will succeed. In brief, one's options for positive behavioral interventions may include:

- Replacing problem behaviors with appropriate behaviors that serve the same (or similar) function as inappropriate ones;
- Increasing rates of existing appropriate behaviors;
- Making changes to the environment that eliminate the possibility of engaging in inappropriate behavior; and
- Providing the supports necessary for the child to use the appropriate behaviors.

Care should be given to select a behavior that likely will be elicited by and reinforced in the natural environment, for example, using appropriate problem-solving skills on the playground will help the student stay out of the

principal's office.

EVALUATING THE BEHAVIOR INTERVENTION PLAN

It is good practice for IEP teams to include two evaluation procedures in an intervention plan: one procedure designed to monitor the faithfulness with which the management plan is implemented, the other designed to measure changes in behavior. In addition, IEP teams must determine a timeline for implementation and reassessment, and specify the degree of behavior change consistent with the goal of the overall intervention. Completion of assessments should be in accordance with timelines prescribed under the 1997 Amendments to the IDEA. It is important to remember that if a student already has a behavior intervention plan, the IEP team may elect to simply review the plan and modify it, or they may determine that more information is necessary and conduct a functional behavioral assessment.

The Amendments to the IDEA state that a behavior intervention plan based on a functional behavioral assessment should be considered when developing the IEP, if a student's behavior interferes with learning or the learning of classmates. To be meaningful, plans need to be reviewed at least annually and revised as appropriate. However, the plan may be reviewed and reevaluated whenever any member of the child's IEP team feels that a review is necessary. Circumstances that may warrant such a review include:

- The child has reached his or her behavioral goals and objectives, and new goals and objectives need to be established;
- The "situation" has changed and the behavioral interventions no longer address the current needs of the student;
- The IEP team makes a change in placement; and
- It is clear that the original behavior intervention plan is not bringing about positive changes in the student's behavior.

The point is to predicate all evaluation on student success.

SUMMARY

The practice of conducting functional behavioral assessments of behavior that interferes with positive student outcomes allows IEP teams to develop more effective and efficient behavior intervention plans. Emphasis should be on enlarging student capacity to profit from instruction, which can be accomplished by designing pupil-specific interventions that not only discourage inappropriate behaviors, but teach alternative
behaviors, and provide the student with the opportunity and motivation to engage in that behavior. If done correctly, the net result of behavioral assessments is that school personnel are better able to provide an educational environment that addresses the learning needs of all students.

RESOURCES

Because there are many resources available to help IEP teams develop and implement effective behavior intervention plans, the following are simply a sampling of possible sources of information:

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National Information Center for Children and Youth with Disabilities

Academy for Educational Development
P.O. Box 1492
Washington, DC 20013-1492
Toll-free: (800) 695-0285
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E-mail: nichcy@aed.org
Web site: http://nichcy.org/

Office of Special Education Programs

U.S. Department of Education
Mary E. Switzer Building
330 C Street, SW
Washington, DC 20202
Toll-Free: (800)872-5327
Local: (202) 401-2000
Web site: http://www.ed.gov/offices/OSERS/OSEP/index.html

OSEP's Technical Assistance and Dissemination Network

Federal Resource Center for Special Education (FRC)
Academy for Educational Development
1875 Connecticut Avenue, NW, Suite 900
Washington, DC 20009
Phone: (202) 884-8215
E-mail: frc@aed.org
Web site: http://www.dssc.org/frc/

ABC OBSERVATION FORM

Student Name: _____ Observation Date: _____

Observer: _____ Time: _____

Activity: _____ Class Period: _____

Behavior: _____

ANTECEDENT	BEHAVIOR	CONSEQUENCE

ABC OBSERVATION FORM

Student: _____ Observer: _____

Date: _____ Time: _____ Activity: _____

Context of Incident:

Antecedent:

Behavior:

Consequence:

Comments/Other Observations:

SCATTER PLOT ASSESSMENT

Student Name: _____ Starting Date: _____

☐ socially engaged ▨ low rates of social engagement ■ not socially engaged

Observer: _____

Time of day
Five minute intervals

	5/1	5/2	5/3	5/4	5/5	5/8	5/9	5/10	5/11	5/12
9:00										
9:05										
9:10										
9:15										
9:20										
9:25										
9:30										
9:35										
9:40										
9:45										
9:50										
9:55										
10:00										

FUNCTIONAL BEHAVIORAL ASSESSMENT MATRIX

Observed Behaviors	*Transition*	*Large Group Lecture*	*Small Group*	*Independent Work*	*Paper-pencil*	*Worksheet/ Workbook*	*Read aloud*	*Read silently*	*Instructional game*	*Media*	*Other*
Off-task											
Out-of-seat											
Talk-out											
Non-compliant											
Other											

Code: ☐ = no behavior

☒ = low rates of behavior

■ = persistent behavior