



Functional Behavioral Assessment

Introduction

The hard copy version of this packet contains the following article:
Strain, P. S., & Hemmeter, M. L. (1997). Keys to being successful when confronted with challenging behaviors. *Young Exceptional Children*, 1(1), 2-8.

Susan L. Jack, M.Ed. & David P. Lindeman, Ph.D.

June 2005

Kansas Inservice Training System

Kansas University Center on Developmental Disabilities

2601 Gabriel, Parsons, Kansas 67357

620-421-6550 ext. 1618 or 1-800-362-0390 ext. 1618

Functional Behavioral Assessment — What is it?

Functional Behavioral Assessment (FBA) is a multi-level process consisting of several different assessment methods. Each of these methods will be discussed in detail in later sections of this packet, and include:

- Interviewing caregivers who know the child best
- Observing the child in typical daily routines for an extended period of time
- Systematically manipulating the environment (experimental analysis)

Once completed, the child's IEP team can use the assessment information to make a determination about the function of the problem behavior. The team will have a descriptive definition of the behavior, and be able to identify the times, situations and/or activities when the behavior is most likely and least likely to occur. The focus of the assessment of problem behavior is not only on the behavior; it is also on the child as a member of his or her immediate environment, and on the setting and social context as a whole. As stated in the Overview, FBA focuses on the events preceding and following the behavior, and the environment in which the behavior occurs. In this manner, several typical functions of problem behavior have been identified.

Antecedents are preceding events that may set the occasion for problem behavior. Some examples of antecedents that may occasion problem behavior include demands to do something and difficult tasks, as in our first example. Antecedent events may be aversive enough to make the child want to get away from them (escape) or avoid contact with them altogether. So, problem behavior related to antecedents functions to escape or avoid unpleasant stimuli immediately preceding the problem behavior.

Consequences are events following behavior that may reinforce or punish the behavior. Consequences that reinforce behavior make it more likely to occur in the future; punishers make it less likely to occur in the future. If problem behavior is increasing (i.e., getting worse) following a certain type of consequence, that behavior is being reinforced. Some examples of consequences that may reinforce problem behavior include: attention (such as smiles, hugs, or even scolding), objects or activities (such as food, toys, money), nonsocial stimuli (such as sensory stimulation—i.e., it feels good).

In summary, there are two most common functions of problem behavior: to escape or avoid something unpleasant, and to get something (e.g., attention, objects or activities). The nonsocial stimuli that may reinforce problem behavior are less common and are more likely to occur in children with sensory deficit related disorders.

On the next page are some simple examples that help illustrate the role of antecedents and consequences in maintaining problem behaviors. Write in the function for each type of problem behaviors (answers following).

Example of Functions

(see answers below)

Problem 1

- Antecedent: Jill playing with ball
- Behavior: Jack hits Jill
- Consequence: Jill cries, drops ball, Jack gets ball
- Possible Function? _____

Problem 2

- Antecedent: Instructor tells Nate to pick up blocks
- Behavior: Nate throws blocks
- Consequence: Instructor picks up blocks
- Possible Function? _____

Problem 3

- Antecedent: Emily sits in corner
- Behavior: Emily hits self in ear
- Consequence: Instructor: "Don't hit yourself"
- Possible Function? _____

Problem 4

- Antecedent: Instructor: "Circle the picture that goes with RED"
- Behavior: Julie scribbles over the entire paper
- Consequence: Instructor removes the paper
- Possible Function? _____

For more information on addressing problem behavior and understanding the interaction between antecedents - behavior - consequences, and the environment as a whole, please read Strain, P. S., & Hemmeter, M. L. (1997). Keys to being successful when confronted with challenging behaviors. *Young Exceptional Children*, 1(1), 2-8.

Answers: 1) gets object, 2) escapes demand to pick up, 3) gets attention, 4) escapes difficult task