



Kansas Inservice Training System
Kansas University Center on Developmental Disabilities
2601 Gabriel, Parsons, KS 67357
620-421-6550 ext. 1618

June 2005

Dear Colleague,

Children with disruptive or challenging behavior are a concern to all who interact with that child or have responsibility for that child. As early childhood educators we must be prepared to provide a positive learning environment to prevent problematic behaviors and be prepared to respond should problems occur. This packet has been provided to enable you and your staff to develop policies and practices related to functional behavioral assessment. Please disseminate as appropriate.

We hope that when you have taken the time to review the packet, you will find that it contains helpful information. Thank you for your interest and your efforts toward the education of young children.

Sincerely,
David P. Lindeman, Ph.D.
Project Director

DPL/rb

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Functional Behavioral Assessment

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The purpose of this packet is to provide information about conducting a problem-solving process for challenging behavior. This process, called Functional Behavioral Assessment (FBA), is meant to examine problem behavior in the environments in which the behavior occurs, and determine the meaning (or function) that the problem behavior serves for the child. Using a team-based problem solving approach, FBA will lead to the development of meaningful interventions that will prevent future episodes of problem behavior, teach the child appropriate replacement behaviors, and teach caregivers different ways of responding to the child. It is our hope that this information will assist teachers and other caregivers in developing effective supports and interventions for children who exhibit the most severe forms of problem behavior.

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Functional Behavioral Assessment Packet Evaluation

This packet has been developed as a resource to enable you to understand the issues related to Functional Behavioral Assessment. Its contents were chosen based on your requests and needs assessment information completed previously. We would like you to evaluate how helpful this packet has been for you. Please tell us what you found most useful, what was not useful, and what material might have been helpful that was not included and return this form to us at the below address. Please check the parts of the packet that you found most helpful. In the space provided briefly tell us how or why each part was helpful to you.

- Overview* *Introduction* *Interviews and Rating Scales* *Functional Analysis*
 Summary Analysis *References & Resources*

Please identify why each part you checked was helpful:

Please check the parts of the packet that you found were not helpful to you. Then in the space provided, briefly tell us how or why each part was of little use to you.

- Overview* *Introduction* *Interviews and Rating Scales* *Functional Analysis*
 Summary Analysis *References & Resources*

Please identify what about this part(s) made it of little use:

Please tell us what was not available in the packet that would have been helpful to you.

Please describe how you plan to use the information in this packet.

Other comments or suggestions for future packets:

Thank you for completing this form and returning it to us!
Kansas Inservice Training System
KUCDD-Parsons
2601 Gabriel
Parsons, KS 67357
620-421-6550 ext. 1618



Functional Behavioral Assessment

Overview

The hard copy version of this packet contains the following article:
Neilsen, S. L., Olive, M. L., Donovan, A., & McElvoy, M. (1998). Challenging behaviors in your classroom? Don't react, teach instead. *Young Exceptional Children*, 2(1), 2-10.

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

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2601 Gabriel, Parsons, Kansas 67357

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

Overview

One of the most frequent requests made by teachers and caregivers is how to manage problem behaviors displayed by some children with whom they work. Although the actual number of children may be small, the problem behaviors they exhibit demand a significant amount of time and energy from others in their classroom or home environments. In the past, the typical solution to problem behaviors may have been to provide extra reinforcement when the child was being “good” (i.e., appropriate for the setting), and/or to punish the problem behavior by using time-out or withholding privileges. While these approaches may work to reduce problem behavior some of the time, they do not work in all instances. One reason may be that these consequence-based approaches simply address WHAT the child does, not WHY he/she does it.

In behavioral terms, behavior happens for a reason. This reason is called the *function* of the behavior. It may be that a child engages in problem behavior to get something (such as attention or preferred items), or to get out of something (such as difficult tasks). Although we may be accustomed to recognizing the power of consequences such as attention or tangibles in maintaining problem behavior, it is also important to acknowledge the role of antecedents, or events immediately preceding problem behavior. Here’s an example:

Imagine for a moment a situation in which you are given tasks each day from your employer. One task is to type letters that your boss has dictated the night before. On one morning in June, you receive an important letter that has to be typed and mailed by 10:00 am. The dictation begins: “Dear Coach SHU-CHEF-SKI...” . Realizing that you don’t know how to spell the coach’s name, you rewind and listen carefully to each syllable. Still, no clue on how to spell SHU-CHEF-SKI. You call the boss on the car phone, hoping she hasn’t left town for her business meeting yet. No answer. “Well,” you think, “here’s my best shot: *Chuchevsky*. No, that’s not it!” Now panic starts to swell in your chest. It is already after nine o’clock and you haven’t typed three words of your four page letter. “HOW DO YOU SPELL IT?” Suddenly, you remember that your best friend loves Duke University basketball, and you call her. “Charlene, how do you spell the name of Duke’s coach?”, you beg. “K-r-z-y-z-e-w-s-k-i”, she answers. You rip the paper from the typewriter and start again.

Now, imagine that you are four years old. Every day you are given tasks to do at school. Some days those tasks are easy, and you can do them, no problem. But other days, the teacher asks you to write your name on a paper and you have trouble making the Z in your name Zeron. Since you can’t make a good Z, you don’t like

writing your name at all. It is very hard to tell the teacher this, so when she asks you to write your name, you just throw the paper on the floor. Maybe if you do this enough, she'll stop asking you to write your name on the paper. If she doesn't, maybe you have to think of something else to do to make her stop.

Now in the first situation, you have the very good social skills to call someone and ask for help when you are having trouble with a difficult task. But Zeron doesn't have such skills. He's young and inexperienced in handling difficult requests, so he has to rely on his less developed social skills to communicate his trouble. Sometimes this communication is in the form of problem behavior. This example has just demonstrated two things: 1) antecedents, such as requests to do something the child is unable to do, can cause problem behavior to occur, and 2) behavior can communicate something to us. It is our job to use our "very good social skills" to determine what that something is.

Fortunately, there are assessment methods designed to help us determine the function, or maintaining reinforcers, of challenging behavior. These methods are known as *functional behavioral assessment*, and have been developed to identify the factors maintaining problem behavior in one or more environments. Functional behavioral assessment, or FBA, is a process of collecting information from several different sources and looking for common factors or situations. FBA is not one thing, rather it is a fluid, ongoing process of collecting information, analyzing it, and making hypotheses about potential causes of problem behavior. It is the only systematic way to find out *why* a behavior occurs. It will identify the circumstances under which a behavior does and does not occur, and will guide intervention development and progress monitoring. The following article entitled "Challenging behaviors in your classroom? Don't react — Teach instead!" highlights some of the important issues related to the main functions, or causes, of challenging behavior, and provides an overview of the FBA process.