



Functional Behavioral Assessment

Interviews and Rating Scales

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
kskits.org



Conducting the Assessment: Interview

The purpose of the functional assessment interview is to question key people in a child's environment about the nature of the problem behavior, the conditions under which it occurs, and to help rule out other factors, such as an illness, that may cause problem behavior. The format of the interview is loosely structured around things the child typically does, overall well-being, descriptions of the problem behaviors, and interventions previously tried. The advantages of interviews are that they help interventionists identify potential functions by obtaining information that may be missed by other formats. Interviews also obtain specific information about the child (such as learning style, likes/dislikes) that may help guide decisions regarding interventions. The disadvantages of interviews are that it is time consuming, it may not contain objective or reliable information, and it may not identify all the functions of problem behavior.

The work of Robert O'Neill and his colleagues has been instrumental in providing a framework for the FBA interview process. These researchers have produced a set of materials aimed at determining the functions of problem behavior with an array of assessment tools. O'Neill et al. (1997) developed a Functional Analysis Interview (FAI) format that addresses many issues regarding programming for individuals with disabilities who display problem behavior. The FAI is a 38 item questionnaire that asks questions of a primary caregiver on a wide range of topics. The FAI, however, is primarily targeted toward persons with more severe disabilities, and may not be particularly well-suited for young children. A modified interview format, similar to that of O'Neill et al., may provide appropriate answers within the context of early childhood environments, and an example is provided here.

FUNCTIONAL ASSESSMENT INTERVIEW FORM - YOUNG CHILD

Child with Problem Behavior(s): _____ Date of Interview: _____

Age: _____ Yrs _____ Mos _____ Sex: M F

Interviewer: _____ Respondent(s): _____

A. DESCRIBE THE BEHAVIOR(S)

1. What are the behaviors of concern? For each, define how it is performed, how often it occurs per day, week, or month, how long it lasts when it occurs, and the intensity in which it occurs (low, medium, high).

Behavior	How is it performed?	How often?	How long?	Intensity?
a)				
b)				
c)				
d)				
e)				
f)				

2. Which of the behaviors described above occur together (e.g., occur at the same time; occur in a predictable "chain"; occur in response to the same situation)?

B. DEFINE POTENTIAL ECOLOGICAL EVENTS THAT MAY AFFECT THE BEHAVIOR(S)

1. What *medications* does the child take, and how do you believe these may affect his/her behavior?

2. What *medical complication* (if any) does the child experience that may affect his/her behavior (e.g., asthma, allergies, rashes, sinus infections, seizures)?

3. Describe the *sleep cycles* of the child and the extent to which these cycles may affect his/her behavior.

4. Describe the *eating routines and diet* of the child and the extent to which these routines may affect his/her behavior.

5. Below, briefly list the child's typical daily schedule of activities and how well he/she does within each activity.

DAILY ACTIVITIES	
Activity	Child's Reaction
6:00 am	
7:00 am	
8:00 am	
9:00 am	
10:00 am	
11:00 am	
12:00 pm	
1:00 pm	
2:00 pm	
3:00 pm	
4:00 pm	
5:00 pm	
6:00 pm	
7:00 pm	
8:00 pm	
9:00 pm	

6. Describe the extent to which you believe activities that occur during the day are *predictable* for your child. To what extent does the child know what he/she will be doing and what will occur during the day (e.g., when to get up, when to eat breakfast, when to play outside)? How does your child know this?

7. What choices does the child get to make each day (e.g., food, toys, activities?)

C. DEFINE EVENTS AND SITUATIONS THAT PREDICT OCCURRENCES OF THE BEHAVIOR(S)

1. **Time of Day**: *When* are the behaviors most and least likely to happen?

Most likely:

Least likely:

2. **Settings**: *Where* are the behaviors most and least likely to happen?

Most likely:

Least likely:

3. **Social Control**: *With whom* are the behaviors most and least likely to happen?

Most likely:

Least likely:

4. **Activity:** *What activities* are most and least likely to produce the behaviors?

Most likely:

Least likely:

5. Are there particular situations, events, etc. that are not listed above that “set off” the behaviors that cause concern (particular demands, interruptions, transitions, delays, being ignored, etc.)?
6. What one thing could you do that would most likely make the problem behavior occur?
7. What one thing could you do to make sure the problem behavior did not occur?

D. DESCRIBE THE CHILD’S PLAY ABILITIES AND DIFFICULTIES

1. Describe how your child plays (with what? how often?).
2. Does your child have problem behavior when playing? Describe.
3. Does your child play alone? What does he/she do?
4. Does your child play with adults? What toys or games?

5. Does your child play with other children his/her age? What toys or games?
6. How does your child react if you join in a play activity with him/her?
7. How does your child react if you stop playing with him/her?
8. How does your child react if you ask him/her to stop playing with a toy and switch to a different toy?

E. IDENTIFY THE "FUNCTION" OF THE UNDESIRABLE BEHAVIOR(S)

1. Think of each of the behaviors listed in Section A, and define the function(s) you believe the behavior serves for the child (i.e., what does he/she *get* and/or *avoid* by doing the behavior?)

	<u>Behavior</u>	<u>What does he/she get?</u>	<u>Or</u>	<u>What exactly does he/she avoid?</u>
1.	_____	_____		_____
2.	_____	_____		_____
3.	_____	_____		_____
4.	_____	_____		_____
5.	_____	_____		_____
6.	_____	_____		_____
7.	_____	_____		_____
8.	_____	_____		_____
9.	_____	_____		_____
10.	_____	_____		_____

2. Describe the child's most typical response to the following situations:
 - a. Are the above behavior(s) more likely, less likely, or unaffected if you present him/her with a difficult task?

- b. Are the above behavior(s) more likely, less likely, or unaffected if you interrupt a desired event (eating ice cream, watching a video)?

- c. Are the above behavior(s) more likely, less likely, or unaffected if you deliver a “stern” request/ command/ reprimand?

- d. Are the above behavior(s) more likely, less likely, or unaffected if you are present but do not interact with (ignore) the child for 15 minutes.

- e. Are the above behavior(s) more likely, less likely, or unaffected by changes in routine?

- f. Are the above behavior(s) more likely, less likely, or unaffected if something the child wants is present but he/ she can’t get it (i.e., a desired toy that is visible but out of reach)?

- g. Are the above behavior(s) more likely, less likely, or unaffected if he/ she is alone (no one else is present)?

F. DEFINE THE EFFICIENCY OF THE UNDESIRABLE BEHAVIOR(S)

1. What amount of physical effort is involved in the behaviors (e.g., prolonged intense tantrums vs. simple verbal outbursts, etc.)?

2. Does engaging in the behaviors result in a “payoff” (getting attention, avoiding work) every time? Almost every time? Once in a while?

3. How much of a delay is there between the time the child engages in the behavior and gets the “payoff”? Is it immediate, a few seconds, longer?

G. DEFINE THE PRIMARY METHOD(S) USED BY THE CHILD TO COMMUNICATE

1. What are the general expressive communication strategies used by or available to the child? (e.g., vocal speech, signs/gestures, communication books/boards, electronic devices, etc.) How consistently are the strategies used?
2. If your child is trying to tell you something or show you something and you don't understand, what will your child do? (repeat the action or vocalization? modify the action or vocalization?)
3. Tell me how your child expresses the following:

MEANS OF COMMUNICATION

	GRAB & REACH	GIVE	POINT	LEAD	GAZE SHIFT	MOVE TO YOU	MOVE AWAY FROM YOU	HEAD NOD/HEAD SHAKE	FACIAL EXPRESSION	VOCALIZE	IMMEDIATE ECHO	DELAYED ECHO	CREATIVE SINGLE WORD	CREATIVE MULTIWORD	SIMPLE SIGNS	COMPLEX SIGNS	SELF-INJURY	AGGRESSION	TANTRUM	CRY OR WHINE	OTHER	NONE
<u>FUNCTIONS</u>																						
Requests an Object																						
Requests an Action																						
Protests or Escapes																						
Requests Help																						
Requests a Social Routine																						
Requests Comfort																						
Indicates Illness																						
Shows you something																						

NOTES:

4. With regard to receptive communication ability:
 - a. Does the child follow verbal requests or instructions? If so, approximately how many? (List, if only a few).
 - b. Is the child able to imitate someone demonstrating how to do a task or play with a toy?
 - c. Does the child respond to sign language or gestures? If so, approximately how many? (List, if only a few.)
 - d. How does the child tell you “yes” or “no” (if asked whether he/she wants to do something, go somewhere, etc.)?

H. WHAT EVENTS, ACTIONS, AND OBJECTS ARE SUPPORTIVE OR PRESENT CHALLENGES TO THE CHILD

1. Describe the things that your child really enjoys. For example, what makes him/her happy? What might someone do or provide that makes your child happy?
2. What kinds of things have you or your child’s care providers done to try and change the problem behaviors?

I. DEVELOP SUMMARY STATEMENTS FOR EACH MAJOR PREDICTOR AND/OR CONSEQUENCE

Immediate Antecedent (Predictor)

Problem Behavior

Maintaining
Consequence

Function

--	--	--	--

--	--	--	--

--	--	--	--

--	--	--	--

--	--	--	--

--	--	--	--

--	--	--	--

--	--	--	--

--	--	--	--

--	--	--	--

--	--	--	--

--	--	--	--

--	--	--	--

--	--	--	--

--	--	--	--

--	--	--	--

Conducting the Assessment: Motivation Assessment Scale (MAS)

The Motivation Assessment Scale (MAS) is a 16 item questionnaire designed to pinpoint the functions of problem behavior. It will identify the situations in which the behavior is likely to occur, and assist in developing interventions that are based on the functions of the behavior. The 16 questions are geared toward identifying the four main functions of challenging behavior: **attention, tangible, escape, and sensory**. Four questionnaire items are rated for each of the four functions on a scale of least to most likely, with the highest rated items indicating a probable function. For example, a series of questions are designed to determine the likelihood of an escape function: "Does the behavior occur following a command or prompt to perform a difficult task?" Similar escape-function questions may yield a high score for the escape category, which would indicate that the behavior is functioning to escape from difficult tasks or demands.

The advantages of MAS are that it identifies potential functions of behavior, it can be completed quickly (i.e., 10-15 minutes), and it requires little formal training to use. The disadvantages of MAS are that you may have to complete it several times for multiple behaviors, it does not give specific information about the environmental situation (such as specific people, types of tasks) that may be related to problem behavior, and the reliability is questionable. The reliability problem is particularly important: when a person completes the questionnaire and identifies a function of a particular behavior, and another person does the same, they may not agree on that function. A final concern regarding the MAS is that despite its widespread use and potential usefulness in helping identifying functions, it has not been tested on young children. The MAS, although a helpful starting point, should never be used as the sole method of assessment.

Motivation Assessment Scale

Name: _____ Rater: _____ Date _____

Behavior Description: _____

Instructions: The **Motivation Assessment Scale** is a questionnaire designed to identify those situations in which a child is likely to behave in certain ways. From this information, more informed decisions can be made concerning the selection of appropriate reinforcers and treatments. It is important that you identify the behavior to be rated, read each question carefully and circle the one number that best describes your observations of this behavior.

1. Would this behavior occur continuously, if the child was left alone for long periods of time? (For example, one hour.)

Never	Almost Never	Seldom	Half the Time	Usually	Almost Always	Always
0	1	2	3	4	5	6

2. Does this behavior occur following a command or prompt to perform a difficult task?

Never	Almost Never	Seldom	Half the Time	Usually	Almost Always	Always
0	1	2	3	4	5	6

3. Does this behavior occur when you are talking to other persons in the room?

Never	Almost Never	Seldom	Half the Time	Usually	Almost Always	Always
0	1	2	3	4	5	6

4. Does this behavior ever occur to get a toy, food, or game that the child has been refused?

Never	Almost Never	Seldom	Half the Time	Usually	Almost Always	Always
0	1	2	3	4	5	6

5. Does this behavior occur repeatedly, over and over, in the same way? (For example, rocking back and front for five minutes.)

Never	Almost Never	Seldom	Half the Time	Usually	Almost Always	Always
0	1	2	3	4	5	6

6. Does this behavior occur when any request is made of the child?

Never	Almost Never	Seldom	Half the Time	Usually	Almost Always	Always
0	1	2	3	4	5	6

7. Does this behavior occur whenever you stop attending to the child?

	Almost		Half the		Almost	
Never	Never	Seldom	Time	Usually	Always	Always
0	1	2	3	4	5	6

8. Does this behavior occur when you take away a favorite toy, object, or food?

	Almost		Half the		Almost	
Never	Never	Seldom	Time	Usually	Always	Always
0	1	2	3	4	5	6

9. Does it appear to you that the child enjoys performing this behavior and would continue even if no one was around?

	Almost		Half the		Almost	
Never	Never	Seldom	Time	Usually	Always	Always
0	1	2	3	4	5	6

10. Does the child seem to do this behavior to upset or annoy you when you are trying to get him or her to do what you ask?

	Almost		Half the		Almost	
Never	Never	Seldom	Time	Usually	Always	Always
0	1	2	3	4	5	6

11. Does the child seem to do this behavior to upset or annoy you when you are not paying attention to him or her? (For example, sitting in a separate room, interacting with another child.)

	Almost		Half the		Almost	
Never	Never	Seldom	Time	Usually	Always	Always
0	1	2	3	4	5	6

12. Does this behavior stop occurring shortly after you give the child a toy, object, or food s/he has requested?

	Almost		Half the		Almost	
Never	Never	Seldom	Time	Usually	Always	Always
0	1	2	3	4	5	6

13. When this behavior is occurring, does the child seem unaware of anything else going on around him or her?

	Almost		Half the		Almost	
Never	Never	Seldom	Time	Usually	Always	Always
0	1	2	3	4	5	6

14. Does this behavior stop occurring shortly after (one to five minutes) you stop working or stop making demands of him or her?

	Almost		Half the		Almost	
Never	Never	Seldom	Time	Usually	Always	Always
0	1	2	3	4	5	6

15. Does he or she seem to do this behavior to get you to spend time with him/her?

	Almost		Half the		Almost	
Never	Never	Seldom	Time	Usually	Always	Always
0	1	2	3	4	5	6

16. Does this behavior seem to occur when the child has been told that he or she can't do something he or she had wanted to do?

Never	Almost Never	Seldom	Half the Time	Usually	Almost Always	Always
0	1	2	3	4	5	6

SUMMARY

Place the score for each item next to the corresponding number. Add down each column to obtain the total score for each category; divide by 4 to obtain the mean. Rank the total scores:

Highest = 1, Lowest = 4.

SENSORY		ESCAPE		ATTENTION		TANGIBLE	
1.	_____	2.	_____	3.	_____	4.	_____
5.	_____	6.	_____	7.	_____	8.	_____
9.	_____	10.	_____	11.	_____	12.	_____
13.	_____	14.	_____	15.	_____	16.	_____
Total = _____		Total = _____		Total = _____		Total = _____	
Mean = _____		Mean = _____		Mean = _____		Mean = _____	

Conducting the Assessment: Direct Observation

Direct observation of challenging behavior provides useful assessment because it examines the overall context in which the behavior occurs. Challenging behavior does not occur in isolation. It occurs in the context of ongoing instruction, during certain periods of time, or in the presence of certain people or things. Observation of the behavior in context helps pinpoint the persons, places, or things that may be related to the occurrence of challenging behavior, or which may maintain or reinforce the behavior.

One observation method is the A-B-C analysis which is designed to record the immediate antecedents, consequences, and events surrounding each occurrence of problem behavior. An A-B-C observation form (see following) is a helpful tool for this process. Observations need to be planned for several consecutive days, throughout the day. Each time the behavior occurs, the observer writes the time of day, the event (e.g., activity, statement of demand) immediately preceding the behavior (antecedent), the exact behavior that was observed (e.g., hitting, biting, throwing materials, etc.), and the event immediately following the behavior (consequence). If possible, you may make a guess as to the possible function of that behavior, or provide other comments regarding the specific context.

The advantages of the A-B-C analysis are that it provides a specific record of each occurrence of challenging behavior, and its antecedents and consequences. The disadvantages are that it is time-consuming to complete— it requires systematic observation for several days, possibly even weeks. Another disadvantage is that it may not identify a consistent pattern, which is the main objective in conducting a direct observation. The following is a copy of an ABC observation form.

The second type of observation format is the scatterplot which is used to record the frequencies of problem behavior across time periods in a day. An observation day is broken into smaller intervals (30 minutes or less), and the observer makes a mark in the grid next to the time period to indicate the frequency of the challenging behavior during that time period. The observer has the flexibility of making a code to indicate the behavior's frequency, such as a half filled (shaded in) block to indicate 1-5 instances of the behavior, a completely filled block to indicate more than 5, or an open (unfilled) block to indicate no instances of challenging behavior during that time period. This process is completed for each time interval, for at least 5 days.

One advantage of the scatterplot is that it is simple to use. Depending on the coding scheme selected, one or two marks per period of time, across several days will complete the grid. The scatterplot will also identify the time of day associated with the most occurrences of challenging behavior. With a completed grid, one can quickly see patterns across days and patterns that occur at the same time each day. The disadvantage is that it does not provide specific information about the situation, antecedents, or consequences to problem behavior. The scatterplot also may not identify a consistent pattern of behavior within the grid.

Both direct observation formats provide more specific information than the interviews and rating scale formats. One reason is that the observation methods are more objective measures of challenging behavior, because they require the observer to simply report each occurrence, not make subjective statements about the behavior. Therefore, observation methods are potentially more reliable measures of what and when a behavior occurs, which will help lead to a hypothesis as to why it occurs.

