Positive Behavior Support: A Functional Approach to Assessment and Intervention for Challenging Behavior

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What Is “Problem Behavior” or “Challenging Behavior”? 

- Aggression
- Self-injury
- Property destruction
- Tantrum behavior
- Disruptive Behavior
- Noncompliance
- Repetitive behavior/stereotypy
Problem Behavior is Functional

- Children engage in challenging behavior because it pays off – it serves a **FUNCTION or PURPOSE**
  - *Problem behavior persists because it meets an immediate need*

- If engaging in the behavior results in the change the child wants → increased probability he will engage in that behavior again

- Behaviors persist because children want/need to...

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Get something</th>
<th>Escape something</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Gain parent/peer/staff attention</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Obtain preferred items or activities</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Obtain sensory stimulation</td>
<td>• Escape or avoid demands</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Escape/avoid social interaction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Escape/avoid anxiety</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Escape/avoid sensory stimulation or pain/discomfort</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*(Positive Reinforcement) (Negative Reinforcement)*
Behavior = Communication

• Functions of Communication:
  • Request object, activity, person (e.g., “I want the book”)
  • Request help or assistance (e.g., “I need help”)
  • Obtain attention (e.g., “Look at this!” or “Talk to me!”)
  • Request social interaction (e.g., “Can I play with you?”)
  • Request information (e.g., “How much longer do we have?”)
  • Request sensory stimulation (e.g., “This motion makes me feel calm”)
  • Escape demands (e.g., “I don’t want to do this work”)
  • Escape activity (e.g., “I don’t like this; I need a break”)
  • Escape a person (e.g., “I don’t want you to talk to me”)
  • Escape anxiety (e.g., “This makes me anxious; I need to get out of here!”)
  • Escape sensory stimulation (e.g., “This noise is too loud”)
  • Comment (e.g., “I like you” or “Look at that airplane”)
  • Protest (e.g., “No, I don’t want to do that”)
  • Reassurance/predictability (e.g., “I’m afraid, I need consistency”)

I hate this!
ABCs of Behavior Management

Antecedent: what happens before
Behavior
Consequence: what happens after
ABCs of Behavior Management: Example #1

- Antonio bangs his fork on the table; he is then given a cheeseburger.

  **Antecedent:** Seated at table
  **Behavior:** Bangs fork
  **Consequence:** Gets cheeseburger

- Next time he’s at the table, what will Antonio probably do?
ABCs of Behavior Management: Example #2

- Brayden grabs teacher’s eyeglasses as he walks down the hall and teacher looks him in the face and says, “Don’t do that!”

Antecedent: Walking down hallway
Behavior: Grabs eyeglasses
Consequence: Gets lots of attention

- Next time he’s in the hallway and sees someone with glasses, what will Brayden probably do?
ABCs of Behavior Management: Example #3

• Cassie hits people when she is given math that is too hard; then she is taken out of the classroom

Antecedent: Math is too hard  
Behavior: Hits para-professional  
Consequence: Gets out of math!

• Next time her math is too hard, what will Cassie probably do?
Problem Behaviors Depend on **Context**

- **Setting events**: “Time to go to school”
- **Antecedents (Triggers)**: Aggression
- **Behavior**: Sometimes gets on bus
- **Consequences**: Gets out of getting on bus

**Fatigue**
- “Time to go to school”
- Aggression
- Gets out of taking bus

**No Fatigue**
- “Time to go to school”
- Gets on bus
- Parent praise
Functional Behavior Assessment (FBA): Example of Scatter Plot

Functional Assessment Scatterplot

Student: **Myree**  
Grade: **6th**  
School: **John B. Lynn**  
Date(s): **10/4/97 to 10/8/97**  
Observer(s): **Dennis**  
Behavior(s) of concern: **disrupts class w/inappropriate comments and verbal threats directed at peers.**  
Setting:  

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ACTIVITY</th>
<th>TIME</th>
<th>MONDAY</th>
<th>TUESDAY</th>
<th>WEDNESDAY</th>
<th>THURSDAY</th>
<th>FRIDAY</th>
<th>TOTAL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Math</td>
<td>9:20 – 10:10</td>
<td>II</td>
<td>I</td>
<td>III</td>
<td>I</td>
<td></td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Science</td>
<td>10:10 – 11:00</td>
<td>II</td>
<td>I</td>
<td>I</td>
<td>I</td>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Studies</td>
<td>11:00 – 11:50</td>
<td>I</td>
<td></td>
<td>I</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English</td>
<td>11:50 – 12:30</td>
<td>I</td>
<td>I</td>
<td>I</td>
<td>II</td>
<td></td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lunch</td>
<td>12:30 – 1:00</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health/P.E.</td>
<td>1:00 – 1:50</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Art</td>
<td>1:50 – 2:40</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Total**  

5 18 15 4 7 49
Functional Behavior Assessment (FBA): Example of Filled-In ABC Chart

ABC Analysis

Name: George

Description of behavior(s) of interest: humming loudly, telling an inappropriate joke, putting head on desk, refusal to participate, throwing books.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Antecedent</th>
<th>Behavior</th>
<th>Consequence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2/7/99</td>
<td>9:40am</td>
<td>Teacher announces it is time for reading</td>
<td>Tells inappropriate joke</td>
<td>Peers laugh, class disrupted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2/7/99</td>
<td>9:45am</td>
<td>Teacher calls on George to read first</td>
<td>Throws book</td>
<td>Sent to office</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2/8/99</td>
<td>9:35am</td>
<td>Teacher asks George to pay attention</td>
<td>George crouches down so he can't see</td>
<td>George can't see instruction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2/8/99</td>
<td>9:40am</td>
<td>Teacher instructs class to move into reading groups</td>
<td>George sighs, puts head on desk</td>
<td>George doesn't join his group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2/8/99</td>
<td>9:42am</td>
<td>Teacher asks George to move to his reading group</td>
<td>George slams his book shut</td>
<td>George's teacher warns him not to throw book</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2/8/99</td>
<td>9:50am</td>
<td>Teacher says go to your group</td>
<td>George throws his book and walks out of the class towards the principal's office</td>
<td>Avoids reading group</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## FBA: Example of ABC Chart

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Antecedent</th>
<th>Behavior</th>
<th>Consequence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mother is on the phone (not talking to Eddie)</td>
<td>Eddie yells</td>
<td>Mother says, “Eddie, I’m on the phone.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mother asks Eddie to do math homework.</td>
<td>Eddie yells</td>
<td>Mother stops interacting with Eddie and leaves him alone.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Five minutes before dinner time, Tom’s mother walks into kitchen</td>
<td>Tom walks into the kitchen and starts crying &amp; screaming</td>
<td>Tom’s mother immediately gives him one of his favorite foods</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Going to library. Mother says, “Let’s go inside.”</td>
<td>Jen screams, kicks, and drops to the floor</td>
<td>Mother picks Jen up and carries her into library</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The Next Step...

Based on results of the FBA, develop & implement the Behavior Intervention Plan!
Creating a Function-Based Behavior Intervention Plan (BIP)

Once you figure out ANTECEDENTS that trigger challenging behavior & CONSEQUENCES that maintain the behavior....

Design intervention plan to:

**PREVENT** challenging behavior by changing circumstances that trigger it (i.e., remove or minimize the antecedents)

**TEACH** appropriate ways to help kids get what they need
   Teach skills to replace problem behavior with more desirable behavior

**MANAGE** challenging behavior by changing consequences
   Change how you respond to challenging behavior so that the challenging behavior NO LONGER WORKS
   Reward replacement behaviors/positive behaviors instead!
Intervention based on functional assessment (example)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Setting Event</th>
<th>Antecedent ($S^D$)</th>
<th>Behavior</th>
<th>Consequence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Amount of time since toy was last played with (i.e., child has not had access to her toys for a while)</td>
<td>Toys are currently out of reach</td>
<td>Self-injury (bangs her head)</td>
<td>Mother gives child her toys</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alter setting event:</td>
<td>Remove antecedent Place toys within child’s reach</td>
<td>Teach replacement for behavior: can teach child to request her toys</td>
<td>Alter consequences: If child appropriately requests toys, give her toys. If she head-bangs, do NOT give toys</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Immediately schedule play time with preferred toys</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Horner & Carr (1997)
Example Prevention Strategies
Prevention Strategies: Increase Predictability

• In New Situations, Review **Expectations** & What Will Happen:
  – Exactly **how** you want them to behave
  – **What** is going to happen next
  – **Where** they are going
  – **Who** will be there
  – **How long** they will be there
  – Positive **consequences** of good behavior
  – Be clear about **steps** or **sequences** of skills required

• **Example: Social Stories**

  • *Example:* We are going to the park. When we get there, I need you to hold my hand while we are in the parking lot. You can climb on the jungle gym, swing, and run around the playgroup, but you must stay on the mulch. When it is time to leave the park, I want you to hold my hand again while we go to the car. Afterward, if you have followed these rules, we can stop for ice cream.
Prevention Strategies:
Increase Predictability - Visual Schedules

- Helps make the environment, activities & tasks more predictable, less overwhelming
- Enhances sense of control over environment; promotes independence
- Reduces stress, uncertainty, anxiety
- Helps child prepare for transitions, preview what is coming next
- Builds on child’s strengths


McClannahan & Krantz (1999); Mesibov, Browder, & Kirkland (2002)
Examples of Visual Supports Around The Classroom:

Activity Turn Taking Cue

First

Then

Potty

Play
Visual Supports

Written Schedule

Activity Schedule

Visual Calendar

“First-Then” Card
Examples: Visually Presented Expectations/Rules

- Look with your eyes.
- Listen with your ears.
- Use nice hands and feet.
- Talk nicely.
- Listen to Teachers.
- Work Quietly.
- Raise Hand.
Prevention Strategies: Increase Predictability – Timers/Countdowns

• **Advanced warnings:** Used to alert child of end of activity
  – Provides child with time to prepare
  – Prevents/reduces anxiety, frustration associated with transitions
  – Makes transition a gradual process, instead of abrupt ending
  – Increases predictability, provides greater sense of control

Dettmer, Simpson, Myles, & Ganz (2000); Mace, Shapiro, & Mace (1998)
Prevention Strategies: Increase Predictability - Priming

- Previewsing future events, materials, or learning activities on a 1:1 basis, under relaxed conditions, so they become more predictable

- Effective for children for whom group instruction may be overwhelming
  - E.g., parents read story at home the night before

- E.g., Video priming
  - E.g., Carried camera through transition setting to show the environment as the child would see it when progressing through the transition

Priming: Wilde, Koegel, & Koegel (1992)
Prevention Strategies: Social Stories

- Written stories, sometimes illustrated, that give the child information on social topics
  - Used to develop better understanding of social expectations, provides coping techniques for difficult social situations
  - Written from the child’s perspective, describes situation/skill/concept, gives child relevant cues, perspectives of others, and common responses
  - Read on multiple occasions prior to the situation.

Kuttler, Smith Myles, & Carlson (1999); Ozdemir (2008)
Prevention Strategies: Provide Choices

• Provide frequent opportunities to make choices
  – Enhances sense of control
  – Child learns to become an active participant, rather than a passive, helpless bystander
  – Increases motivation to participate & behave well

Shogren, Faggella-Luby, Bae, & Wehmeyer, (2004)
Prevention Strategies: Incorporating Perseverative Interests

- Incorporating a child’s preferences or interests into a disliked or unpleasant activity can increase motivation and reduce the likelihood of problem behavior.
  - e.g., handwriting book exercises replaced with copying instructions from a preferred video games’ bonus point booklets.

- Perseverative:
  - An object, activity, or topic with which the child is intensely interested or even preoccupied (highly salient, highly preferred).

Baker, Koegel, & Koegel (1998); Vismara & Lyons (2007)
Prevention Strategies: Turn & Talk

Which of these Prevention Strategies would you use with one of your students?

- Increasing Predictability
  - Visual Schedules
  - Timers/Countdowns
  - Social Stories
  - Priming

- Providing Choices
- Incorporating Perseverative Interests
Replacement Strategies
1) Communication Skills (FCT)
   - Serves the same purpose of function but in a different way
     - e.g., “Can I play with you?”
     - e.g., “I need a break.”
     - e.g., “Help me!”
     - e.g., “Can I borrow ___?”, “Can I have a turn?”

2) Social Skills

3) Self-regulation Skills (coping skills)
   - Relaxation skills training
   - Problem-solving skills
   - Learning how to wait (tolerate “delay of reinforcement”)
   - Anger management
   - Desensitization to feared or anxiety-provoking objects/events
   - Self-management strategies

4) General Skill Improvement
   - Expand social, communicative, & academic competence
     - e.g., Academic skills, math skills, handwriting skills
Replacement Strategies: Communication Skills

Child engages in challenging behavior because it helps him get what he wants

Teach child a better way to get what he wants

Is challenging behavior getting child something he wants? Teach him to ask for preferred food or item or activity

Is challenging behavior getting child attention? Teach him to ask for attention, praise, or social interaction

Is challenging behavior letting child escape or avoid something he doesn’t want? Teach him to ask for break, help, or for change in activity

Is challenging behavior giving child sensory reinforcement? Teach child to ask for item that provides sensory stimulation or privacy
Replacement Strategies
Example: Escape

- Teach kids a better way to get what they want
- Make sure that the better way is EASY to learn and always gets them what they want! If not, they’ll just go back to the old way!

Math worksheet → Hits teacher → Sent to the office

Math worksheet → “I want a break” → Sent on a break
Response/Consequence Strategies

(“Management”)
Responding to Problem Behavior

When child does something appropriate, REWARD him!

- Give child specific praise about what he did
- Give them the thing they’re asking for (attention, toy/item/activity, help, or break)
- For completing difficult or disliked tasks, may also give stickers or points that count towards favorite activities

When child engages in challenging behavior, DO NOT reward him!

- Do not pay attention to the behavior
- Do not give them what they’re asking for
- Do not allow them to escape/avoid (or at least minimize escape/avoidance if possible)
- Prompt them how to ask appropriately, and then give them the thing they’re asking for
# Response/Consequence Strategies: Linking Positive Reinforcers to FUNCTION of Behavior

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Function: Attention</th>
<th>Function: Escape</th>
<th>Function: Tangible</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sit in teacher’s chair</td>
<td>Choosing which homework or classwork problem the teacher will give the answer to for a “freebie”</td>
<td>10 min of Computer time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Line leader</td>
<td>Get to go to Lunch or Recess 5 min early</td>
<td>Get to play Angry Birds on class Ipad for 5 min</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First in lunch line</td>
<td>10 min of reading preferred book</td>
<td>Get to print out 10 pictures from computer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Play freeze tag with class for 5 minutes</td>
<td>Pick a book from school library at end of day</td>
<td>Trip to vending machine at school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Get to tell 1 joke to class at end of the day (or end of each period)</td>
<td>Get to “buy back” a bad grade</td>
<td>Get to buy lunch instead of bringing lunch for a day</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Examples of Daily Rewards:**
- Sit in teacher’s chair
- Line leader
- First in lunch line
- Play freeze tag with class for 5 minutes
- Get to tell 1 joke to class at end of the day (or end of each period)

**Examples of Weekly Rewards:**
- Invite 1 or 2 friends to eat lunch in classroom
- Read morning announcements over loudspeaker
- Choose book for teacher to read aloud to class
- Breakfast with favorite person (e.g., custodian)

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[http://www.behaviordoctor.org/rewards.html](http://www.behaviordoctor.org/rewards.html)
Response/Consequence Strategies: Some Ideas for Reinforcers

- Helping in the cafeteria
- Assisting the custodian
- Helping the librarian
- Snacks
- Extra recess time
- Playing games
- Legos
- Writing lesson plans on the chalkboard
- Watering plants
- Tutoring a less able child
- Collecting papers
- Getting out gym equipment
- Taking roll
- Working with clay
- Listening to music
- Visiting the counselor or principal
- Access to hand held video games
- Free time in class
- Art projects
- Access to science area
- Helping correct work of others
- Erasing the chalkboard
- Feeding the fish or animals
- Raising or lowering flag
- Correcting papers
- Giving message over the intercom
- Going to the library
- Running errands
- Helping in the school office
- Classroom “helper”
- Small toys
- Field trips
- Working on a bulletin board
- Being in charge of sharing time
- Computer time
- Passing out books
- Acting as a line leader
Response/Consequence Strategies: Using Perseverative Interests as Reinforcers

- Using obsessions as reinforcers provided contingent upon nonoccurrence of problem behavior were the most effective at reducing inappropriate behaviors.

- Using a child’s “aberrant behaviors” (stereotypy, delayed echolalia and perseverative behaviors) as reinforcers was superior to using food reinforcers.
Think of one of the students you have worked with or are working with.

How did you (or how could you have) taught the student an appropriate behavior or skill to replace the problem behavior?

- Remember the behavior/skill should serve the same function as the problem behavior.

How could you reward the replacement behavior and other positive behaviors?

How could you make sure that problem behavior is NOT rewarded (or minimize the reward)?
Resources: Books on Positive Behavior Support


Resources: Websites on Positive Behavior Support (PBS)

- The Association for Positive Behavior Support (APBS)
  www.apbs.org
- The Behavior Doctor – Positive Interventions & Effective Strategies
  www.behaviordoctor.org
- Positive Behavior Support – Beach Center on Disability
  http://www.beachcenter.org/pbs/default.aspx
- Technical Assistance Center on Social Emotional Intervention for Young Children
  www.challengingbehavior.org
- Center on the Social & Emotional Foundations for Early Learning
  www.vanderbilt.edu/csefel
- OSEP Center on Positive Behavioral Interventions & Supports
  www.pbis.org
- Kansas Institute for Positive Behavior Support
  www.kipbs.org
- Florida's Positive Behavior Support Project
  http://flpbs.fmhi.usf.edu
Putting it All Together
Example Interventions if Function is to Gain Attention

• Prevention Strategies
  • Schedule adult attention (give undivided attention for periods of time)
  • When adult occupied, assign highly preferred or easier task, and let child know when your attention will be available
  • Schedule peer or sibling attention
  • Prompt child to request attention appropriately

• Teach Replacement/Coping Skills
  • Teach child to ask for your proximity, interaction, or physical contact
    • e.g., “Watch this!” “Look what I did!” “Can you read?”, tap
  • Teach child to engage in activities while waiting for your attention

• Managing Consequences
  • When child engages in PB, ignore these behaviors
  • When child engages in appropriate behaviors, respond immediately with attention!

Adapted from Bambara & Kern (2005); Hieneman (2015)
Example Interventions if Function is to Gain a Preferred Item/Activity

**Prevention Strategies**
- Give advanced warning that activity will end soon (e.g., timer, countdown)
- Schedule Transition Activity
- Provide access to preferred item/activity on a schedule
- Remove “off-limit” items from the surroundings
- Offer alternatives to items/activities that were denied to child

**Teach Replacement/Coping Skills**
- Teach child communication skills to ask for object/activity
  - e.g., “I want book please” or just “book”
  - e.g., “Can I take a turn with that?” or “My turn please” or “turn”
- Teach child to get object or access activity on his own
- Teach child to accept alternatives, to wait, and to accept “no”

**Managing Consequences**
- When child requests item/activity appropriately, give it to him
  - Over time, have child wait for longer periods of time to obtain the item/activity
- If child engages in problem behavior, do NOT give him item/activity

Adapted from Bambara & Kern (2005)
Example Interventions if Function is to Escape Demand

• Prevention Strategies
  • Modify mode of task completion
  • Embed easier tasks within more difficult tasks
  • Incorporate child’s preferences & interests into the activity
  • Offer choices between tasks or how to complete tasks

• Teach Replacement/Coping Skills
  • Teach child communication skills to....
    • Escape by requesting assistance (e.g., “help”)
    • Escape by requesting a break or rejecting (e.g., “No thank you”)
    • Escape by ending (e.g., “finished!”) or delaying activity (“later”)
  • Teach child to engage in non-preferred task for longer periods of time

• Managing Consequences
  • As soon as child asks appropriately, give help, short break, or simplify
  • Do not do this if child engages in problem behavior
  • Give reward (or stickers to count towards reward) for doing disliked task

Adapted from Bambara & Kern (2005)
Example Interventions if Function is to Escape Anxiety

• **Prevention Strategies**
  • Increase predictability (e.g., visual schedule, Social Story, video modeling)
  • Offer choices ahead of time and during anxiety-provoking situation
  • Pair anxiety-provoking situation (e.g., doctor’s office) with highly positive item or activity that child can only get in that situation

• **Teach Replacement/Coping Skills**
  • Teach child to gradually “face his fears” or expose himself to increasing amounts or proximity or intensity of the feared situation
  • Teach to ask for a break from stressful or anxiety-inducing activities (e.g., teach to say, “I want a break”) or ask, “What is happening next?”
  • Teach Relaxation training
  • Teach child to request a calming object/activity

• **Managing Consequences**
  • Acknowledge anxiety & provide positive reinforcement (e.g., labeled praise, reward) for “brave behavior” (e.g., facing his fears)

Lauren Moskowitz
Example Interventions if Function is to obtain Sensory Reinforcement

**Prevention Strategies**
- Provide alternative appropriate sensory stimulation
  - e.g., offer radio to a child seeking auditory reinforcement
- Prompt appropriate forms of stimulation

**Replacement Strategies**
- Teach child to obtain sensory input through alternative appropriate actions
- Teach replacement behavior that is incompatible with problem behavior
  - e.g., if child bites his finger, teach to chew gum or licorice
  - e.g., if child pinches himself, teach to squeeze ball or play-doh
  - e.g., if child finger-flicking, teach to fiddle with jewelry or draw picture
- Teach child to tolerate periods of reduced/increased stimulation

**Managing Consequences**
- Allow access to items/activities that provide appropriate sensory stimulation
- Reward child for engaging in behaviors that are incompatible with problem behavior
- Block child’s access to inappropriate stimulation and/or allow the sensory activity during a specific time/place/situation

Adapted from Bambara & Kern (2005)