The Biggest Behaviors: Function-Based Strategies for Managing Significant Problem Behavior

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Problem Behavior

• Commonly referred to as:
  – Problem behavior
  – Maladaptive behavior
  – Undesirable behavior
  – Unwanted behavior
  – Aberrant behavior

• Definition:
  – Any form of behavior that inhibits or interferes with daily functioning.

• Level of concern:
  – Mild vs. moderate vs. severe problem behavior

Problem Behavior

• Common Forms:
  – Aggression
  – Noncompliance
  – Self-injury
  – Disruptive behavior: throwing/breaking/etc.
  – Elopement
  – Stereotypy/repetitive behavior

• Some effects:
  – Dangerous: risk of physical harm
  – Stigmatizing: lack of social development leads to isolation
  – Skill acquisition deficits/ independent skill deficits (long term care), family stress
4-Phase Systematic Intervention Model

- Assessment
- Planning
- Implementation
- Evaluation

This model is used for skill acquisition AND behavior reduction.

This is a great model to follow regardless of your discipline.

Special Considerations in Assessing and Treating Problem Behavior

- Treatment is based on function, not form. Therefore, it is absolutely essential to assess function of the behavior.
- Social validity of target behavior, proposed intervention, and proposed outcomes must be determined
- Objective evaluation of outcomes is essential
- Collateral and unintended effects of treatment must be considered
- Teaching the person with ASD more adaptive and acceptable behaviors that serve the same function as the problem behavior is a necessary part of intervention
- Don’t short change assessment

Ideally, this is what happens...

- Begin with interview or other indirect assessment method
- Develop hypothesis about antecedents & consequences (i.e., function)
- Conduct direct observation assessments
- Confirm or modify original hypothesis based on direct assessment
- If assessments are consistent, develop and implement treatment that addresses function of behavior
- If indirect and direct assessments are not consistent, continue the assessment process
- Conduct functional analysis to confirm hypothesis or resolve inconsistency between indirect and direct assessment

(Note: we know that an FA may not be possible in your school setting.)
Why Problem Behavior Occurs

- Behavior is often communicative; a way for children without speech to communicate
- Behavior is a function of the interactions between the person and the environment (i.e., it’s a learned behavior that serves a purpose for the child (it gets them what they want)
- Intervention must address variables maintaining the behavior:
  - Behavior is related to specific antecedents (what happens before the behavior) and consequences (what happens after the behavior) in the environment: Antecedent $\rightarrow$ Behavior $\rightarrow$ Consequence
  - Understanding a child’s behavior = Determining what the “function” or “reinforcer” for the behavior is

Functions of Problem Behavior

- Positive Reinforcement (Sr+):
  - Social - Inadvertent attention
  - Automatic - Sensory stimulation
- Negative Reinforcement (Sr-):
  - Social - escape from task demands or from social interaction
  - Automatic - pain attenuation

4 functions most commonly assessed:
(1) Attention
(2) Escape
(3) Tangible
(4) Automatic

Case Study - Sam

- 10 years old
- In a class of 3rd to 5th grade students with severe disabilities
- Tall and slight
- Says single words, usually the names of food items
- Repeats single words, such as “hi, more, done” when prompted
- Requires prompting to use a picture communication system
- Feeds and toilets independently, needs help washing, fastening clothes
- IEP goals - communication, problem behavior, self care, pre-vocational skills such as sorting
- Sam’s mom is concerned about similar behaviors that happen at home and participates in all meetings regarding Sam’s education and behavior
Behaviors of concern

- Sam attempts to leave the instructional area 2 to 4 times per day
- When successful, he runs from one building toward another and through the parking lot
- When prevented from leaving, Sam slaps, kicks or scratches any adult or student who he perceives to be in his way

Case Study - Sam

- Behavior happens in all educational settings
- Sometimes at home but less frequently
- The original hypothesis, based primarily on the observation that Sam likes to leave the room and walk outside, is that Sam attempts to leave the room to access sensory input
- ABC data
  - Antecedents – non-structured time; peers getting attention; hearing a desired adult or peer near by
  - Consequences – physical struggle with adult; goes for a walk or to the sensory room with an adult.
  - Based on the data – hypothesis modified – access to social attention

If maintained by Positive Reinforcement:

Social Attention

- Extinction
  - Planned ignoring; provide minimal attention for problem behavior
  - Nonexclusionary time-out contingent on problem behavior
- Teach appropriate requests for attention (FCT, perhaps)
- Differential reinforcement for functionally equivalent bx
- Increase the rate of noncontingent attention
- Increase opportunity for social interaction
- Seating arrangements, interactive activities
Differential Reinforcement

• Differential reinforcement (DR) reduces the occurrence of interfering behaviors (e.g., tantrums, aggression, self-injury, stereotypic behavior) through the use of positive behavior supports.
• By reinforcing behaviors that are more functional than the interfering behavior or that are incompatible with the interfering behavior, the functional behavior will increase, and the interfering behavior will decrease.

Differential Reinforcement of Other Behaviors – DRO

○ Reinforcement is provided on a fixed or variable schedule as long as s/he does not perform the target behavior. As the desired behavior change occurs, the schedule can be progressively thinned.
○ Reinforcement is provided as long as the student performs any other behavior. The strategy should not be used if there are multiple significant behaviors
○ A replacement behavior must be taught in addition to using the DRO strategy

Differential Reinforcement of Low Rates of Behavior (DRL)

– Reinforcement is provided for performing a behavior at a lower rate than previously
– Reinforcement delivered when target behavior is separated from the previous performance by a specific (increasing) amount of time
– Reinforcement delivered when number of occurrences of the target behavior does not exceed a certain number (decreasing) in a specific amount of time
– DRL is used for behaviors that do not need to be eliminated completely but happen too frequently
Differential Reinforcement of Alternative Behavior (DRA)

- Reinforcement is provided for performing a functionally equivalent alternate to the target behavior.
- Depending on the function of the behavior, in some cases, the alternative behavior is the replacement behavior. In some cases, a different replacement behavior, that serves the same function will be taught.

Differential Reinforcement of an Incompatible Behavior

- Reinforcement is provided for performing a behavior that is incompatible (cannot be performed at the same time) with the target behavior.
- Depending on the function of the behavior, in some cases, the alternative behavior is the replacement behavior. In some cases a different replacement behavior, that serves the same function, will be taught.

Case Study - Sam

- Behavior happens in all educational settings
- Sometimes at home but less frequently
- Original hypothesis – Sam attempts to leave the room to access sensory input
- ABC data
  - Antecedents – structured & non-structured time; any task; independent activity or activity with adult or peer; time of behavior often coincidental with food and/or drink in the area or areas nearby
  - Consequences – physical struggle with adult; told he needs to wait for milk; allowed to check the refrigerator for milk; re-directed with small amounts of food or milk
- Based on the data – hypothesis modified – access to tangibles
If maintained by Positive Reinforcement:
Access to Tangibles

- Extinction
  - Withhold tangible items following problem behavior
- Teach appropriate requests for tangible items
- Use tangible reinforcers to teach appropriate behaviors
- Increase rate of noncontingent access to preferred materials

Case Study - Sam
- Behavior happens in the classroom and other instructional settings such as PE, art class, library and life skills room.
- Sometimes at home but less frequently
- Original hypothesis – Sam attempts to leave the room for access to sensory input
- ABC data
  - Antecedents – difficult task; independent work time; pencil/paper tasks; sometimes happens after completion of multiple tasks or multiple demands
  - Consequences – physical struggle with adult; taken for a walk with staff or he is taken to the sensory room with an assistant
- Based on the data – hypothesis modified – escape/avoidance of tasks

If maintained by
Escape/Avoidance of Demands

- Extinction
  - Guided compliance
  - Continued instruction
- Teach an appropriate escape response
  - Request assistance
  - Request breaks
- Stimulus Fading
  - Reduce task difficulty; provide alternative mode of task presentation
- Schedule frequent breaks
- Allow choice
- Increase reinforcement for task engagement
Case Study - Sam

- Behavior happens in all educational settings
- Sometimes at home but less frequently
- Original hypothesis – Sam attempts to leave the room to access sensory input
- ABC data
  - Antecedents – additional people in the instructional area; noisy environment; tasks in which he requires hand over hand assistance; the presence of food
  - Consequences – physical struggle with adult; taken for a walk with staff or he is taken to the sensory room with an assistant
- Based on the data – hypothesis modified – escape from sensory stimulus of a noisy environment or light touch that results from hand over hand assistance.

If Maintained by Sensory Consequences:

Negative Reinforcement
(Escape from Arousal)

- Attenuate sensory consequences of the task, or the environment
- Direct instruction in strategies that will mitigate effects of overstimulation (e.g., relaxation training, desensitization, exercise, paired stimuli)

Case Study - Sam

- Behavior happens in all educational settings
- Sometimes at home but less frequently
- Original hypothesis – Sam attempts to leave the room to access sensory input
- ABC data
  - Antecedents – non-structured time; sitting for a long time
  - Consequences – struggle with adult; taken to the sensory room with an assistant
- Based on the data – hypothesis confirmed – access to sensory stimulation (heavy work/deep proprioceptive input)
If maintained by Sensory Consequences: Automatic Positive Reinforcement

- Sensory extinction (where possible and practical)
  - Mask sensory stimulation
  - Response blocking
- Environmental enrichment
  - Increased social interaction
  - Increased access and training with preferred sensory materials
- Substitute a more functionally compatible, sensory reinforcer
- Allow child to earn the sensory reinforcer
- Teach alternative behaviors that will access the same reinforcing sensory consequence

You should have determined why
Antecedents - Behavior - Consequence

Worked to decrease problem bx

Problem Behavior

Attention
Tangible Escape

And worked to increase appropriate bx

Appropriate Behavior

Attention
Tangible Escape

Barriers to Implementing Procedures

- Sometimes behavior will get worse before it gets better!
- Some settings not conducive for running the program
  - Plan ahead to prevent problems
- More effortful to do procedure than to give in
- Adult behavior is just as sensitive to reinforcement as child behavior...the vicious cycle!
Common Treatment Errors: The Three Cs

- **Consistency**: Intervention was implemented inconsistently
- **Contingency**: Consequence was not used contingently
- **Contiguity**: Consequence was not contiguous with the target behavior (did not follow the target behavior immediately)

After intervention, don’t forget...

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<th>Assessment</th>
<th>Planning</th>
<th>Implementation</th>
<th>Evaluation</th>
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**EVALUATION**

- Was treatment effective?
- Did problem behaviors decrease?
- Did desirable behaviors increase?

**YES** - Promote maintenance & generalization

**NO** - Was treatment done correctly?
- **YES** → Repeat FBA and/or FA
- **NO** → Do it right

Special Problems in Assessing and Treating Aggression and Self-Injury

- Maintaining safety of person with ASD and others is essential and primary
  - Dress for the occasion
  - Protective equipment
  - Minimize potentially dangerous objects
  - Environmental arrangement and positioning
- Escape/avoidance of aggression is reinforcing to staff/parents (negative reinforcement trap)
- Escape/avoidance of self-injury may (or may not) be reinforcing to person with ASD
- If function is not addressed properly, substitution of other undesirable behavior is likely
When do you recommend medication?

- **Never**: however, should parents inquire about medication management...
  - Refer them to their pediatrician or other health care provider
  - Encourage them to access the "Autism: Should My Child Take Medicine for Challenging Behavior?" toolkit provided by Autism Speaks via their website.

What supports/resources can I access as an educator?

- Depends on your school district
- Does your district have a consultation or resource team?
- When talking with your administrator and/or initiating and IEP have the following:
  - Current FBA and BIP
  - Appropriate data to indicate what’s been tried, worked, didn’t work, consistency, contingency and contiguity
  - Record of all injuries to student, staff, other students
  - Record of all incidents of physical management
  - Record of all incidents using **objective** language

Concluding Thoughts

- The learner is always right
- Perceptions can be misleading: rely on your knowledge of the individual with ASD and the power of your objectivity
- The only appropriate intervention is a clinically, socially, and educationally effective intervention
References/Resources

- Books about ABA:
  - Applied Behavior Analysis (2007) by Cooper, Heron, and Heward
  - Understanding Applied Behavior Analysis: An Introduction to ABA for Parents, Teachers, and Other Professionals (2008) by Kearney
  - Applied Behavior Analysis for Teachers (2008) by Alberto and Troutman
  - Behavior Analysis for Effective Teaching (2009) by Vargas

- NM PED Resources:
  - NM PED Technical Assistance Manual: Addressing Student Behavior

- Functional Assessment Tools:
  - Motivation Assessment System (MAS):
  - Questions About Behavioral Function (QABF):
    - http://disabilityconsultants.org/QABF.php
  - Functional Assessment Interview (FAI):
  - Functional Assessment Screening Tool (FAST):
    - Available via several websites: google it.
  - Functional Assessment Checklist for Teachers and Staff (FACTS):

- Books about Functional Assessment:
  - Preventing Challenging Behavior in Your Classroom: Positive Behavior Support and Effective Classroom Management (2011) by Tincani
  - Functional Analysis of Problem Behavior: From Effective Assessment to Effective Support (1999) by Repp and Horner
  - Functional Behavioral Assessment, Diagnosis, and Treatment: A Complete System for Education and Mental Health Settings (2010) by Cipani and Schock