

Functional Behavioral Assessment

Introduction

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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, and
- systematically introducing interventions to reduce or eliminate problem behavior.

Once completed, the child’s intervention 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 for 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, the most common functions of problem behavior are 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	Problem 2	Problem 3	Problem 4
Antecedent	Jill playing with ball	Instructor tells Nate to pick up blocks	Emily sits in corner	Instructor: "Circle the picture that goes with RED"
Behavior	Jack hits Jill	Nate throws blocks	Emily hits self in ear	Julie scribbles over the entire paper
Consequence	Jill cries, drops ball, Jack gets ball	Instructor picks up blocks	Instructor: "Don't hit yourself"	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 Fox and Clarke's article: *Aggression? Using Positive Behavior Support to Address Challenging Behavior*. A self-study on individualized interventions may also be reviewed (see Module 1) at the University of Minnesota's Center for Early Education and Development's online course:

<http://slhslinux.cla.umn.edu/fullcourse/index.html>

Answers:

- 1) gets object
- 2) escapes demand to pick up
- 3) gets attention
- 4) escapes difficult task