



May 2012

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 support you and your staff in developing 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. After you have examined the packet, please complete the enclosed evaluation and return it to us at the address provided on the form or complete the evaluation online at <https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/QW7HFSZ>

Thank you for your interest and your efforts in the education of young children.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'David P. Lindeman' followed by a horizontal line.

David P. Lindeman, Ph.D.  
Project Director

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## Functional Behavioral Assessment Packet Evaluation

This packet has been developed as a resource to enable you to understand information and concepts related to Positive Behavior Intervention and Supports. Its contents were chosen based on requests and needs assessment information. 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 address below.

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.

- Overview*     *Introduction*     *Tools*     *Developing Function-Based Interventions*  
 *References & Resources*     *Articles*

Please identify why each part you checked was helpful.

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

- Overview*     *Introduction*     *Tools*     *Developing Function-Based Interventions*  
 *References & Resources*     *Articles*

Please identify why each part you checked was of little use or not helpful.

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

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

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Other comments or suggestions for future packets:

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**Thank you for completing this form and returning it to us!**

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# Functional Behavioral Assessment

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The material included in this packet is sourced from two national centers funded to assist practitioners in supporting the social emotional development of young children. The Center for Social Emotional Foundations in Early Learning (CSEFEL) and its sister center, the Technical Assistance Center on Social Emotional Interventions (TACSEI) provides the conceptual framework of evidence-based practices for promoting young children's social-emotional competence and preventing and addressing challenging behavior. For more information on these two centers, visit their websites: <http://www.vanderbilt.edu/csefel> and <http://www.challengingbehavior.org/>

The example organizations, people, places, and events depicted herein are fictitious. No association with any real organization, person, places, or events is intended or should be inferred.

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# Functional Behavioral Assessment

## Overview

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## Overview

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 designed to 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.



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), to avoid something they don’t like (non-preferred activity), 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 have purchased a new phone that also takes pictures and sends them to social media websites. While the picture taking function is pretty self-explanatory, the steps necessary to upload them are not. You have some great pictures from a family holiday that you would love to share, but cannot find a button, link, or help icon that will show you how to do this. After about 5 minutes of trying unsuccessfully,

you get pretty frustrated and slam the phone on the table. At the same time, your 13 year old daughter walks into the room and says “What’s wrong, Mom?” After you explain your situation and realize that she has probably completed this same task dozens of times, you ask your daughter to teach you how to load pictures from your phone to the sharing website.

Now, imagine that you are four years old. Every day you are given tasks to do at school. Some of those tasks are easy, and you can do them, no problem. But some of them are hard, and you have trouble completing them. Every day when you arrive at school, the teacher asks children to “sign in” at a table near the door. Everyone has to do this, but they can put a mark on the paper next to their printed name, or write their name in if they know how. Sally J. knows how to write her name and does this in very big letters above your name. You really want to write your name on the paper like Sally does, but 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 sign in, 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 analysis 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 a 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 article: *Keys to Being Successful When Confronted With Challenging Behavior* by Strain and Hemmeter (1997) highlights some of the important issues related to the main functions, or causes, of challenging behavior and issues to think about related to developing interventions.