



Effective Responses

Functional Behavioral Assessments & Individual Behavior Plans

Resources

- Functional Behavioral Assessment Worksheet. Pennsylvania Training & Technical Assistance Network, 6340 Flank Drive, Suite 600, Harrisburg, PA 17112-2793; 717-541-4960 or 800-360-7282 in PA only;
<http://www.pattan.k12.pa.us/>
This site provides sample forms, examples and other training materials on functional behavioral assessment and behavior intervention plans.
- Functional Behavioral Assessment- An Interactive Training Module by Carl J. Liaupsin, Terry M. Scott and C. Michael Nelson. Longmont, CO: Sopris West. Grades k-12. This is a CD-ROM based interactive training guide for a six step FBA process. It includes explanations, case studies, reproducible forms and self-tests.
- Functional Assessments. By Joseph Witt, Edward Daly, and George Noell. Longmont, CO: Sopris West. Grades k-12. This is a step-by-step guide to solving academic and behavior problems through a functional assessment process linked to effective behavior intervention plans.
- Beyond Functional Assessment by Joe Kaplan (2001). Austin, TX: Pro Ed. Designed to help school districts meet requirements, this book looks deeper into behavior problems than most traditional functional assessments by measuring personal variables such as cognitions and emotions in addition to environmental variables.
- Behavioral Intervention planning-Revised Computer Edition. By Kathleen McConnell Fad, James Patton and Edward Polloway. (2001). Austin, TX: ProEd. This CD-ROM and book provide a system for developing behavioral intervention plans using functional assessment, and include a way to manage students records.

Numerous other books and materials are now available to provide guidance in implementing the Functional Behavioral Assessment and Individual Behavior Plan process.

In spite of efforts to prevent behavior problems, educators may always face a number of students whose behaviors are chronically inappropriate or disruptive. These students tend not to respond positively to preventative approaches, or to general classroom management strategies such as classroom rules and loss of privileges. With these students, understanding the underlying function of the inappropriate behavior may be the key to changing the behavior. Moreover, it is essential to have an organized plan that coordinates the efforts of all adults interacting with the child, in order to make successful change in the behavior more likely. In these instances, “functional behavioral assessment” is a useful tool to gather information to determine why a behavior is occurring, as well as to develop an effective behavior intervention plan.

Overview

The functional assessment is a process based on the premise that all behavior occurs for a reason. The purpose of the functional assessment process is to attempt to determine the reason for the pattern of inappropriate behavior, and to use that information to develop and implement a behavior change plan. There may be many reasons why a pattern of inappropriate behavior occurs. Neel & Cessna (1983) identified seven examples of the functions which may be served by student behavior: Power/Control; Escape/Avoidance; Attention; Acceptance/Affiliation; Expression of Self; Gratification; and Justice/Revenge. For example, the student may use the pattern of inappropriate behavior to escape from an unpleasant task, to receive attention from a peer, teacher or parent, or to receive a tangible reward such as access to a preferred activity or to achieve other outcomes. While students may be conscious of these motivating factors, often they are not. Often they are not obvious to others in the environment either. Functional assessment is used to develop hypotheses for the functions of the inappropriate behavior for a specific student and situation. These hypotheses regarding the function of the problem behaviors are very useful in attempting to identify alternative, more socially appropriate behaviors that will serve the same function for the student.

All of this information is then used to construct a behavioral plan to address the problem behaviors. The plan might identify key target behaviors, and how they will be systematically measured. It will identify specific goals for the quantity of change desired in target behaviors, as well as more appropriate alternative or substitute behaviors. It will identify how the existing environment will be modified to eliminate setting events related to the inappropriate behavior, and will identify reinforcers for the alternative behaviors when they occur. It may also include other behavior change strategies deemed useful, and how adults should respond to appropriate and inappropriate behaviors (Jones, 1996).

The 1997 Individuals with Disabilities Education Act Amendments (IDEA-97) has mandated that this functional assessment process and the related behavior intervention plan be in place for students with disabilities before the student receives school discipline sanctions for these behaviors. This process can be but is not always part a of the student’s Individual Education Program (IEP). While this is the only situation where functional behavioral assessment and individual behavior plans are currently mandated, many educators and researchers have recognized that functional assessment is a valuable tool that can help any student who exhibits challenging behaviors (Nelson, Roberts & Smith, 1998).

What We Know

The functional assessment process has grown out of the need to provide interventions that are more directly linked to assessment data. Early research on functional assessment focused primarily on individuals with disabilities such as autism and mental retardation in restrictive clinical settings, and many times with children who engaged in self-injurious behavior. There is substantial data to suggest the effectiveness of this

approach with students with moderate or severe disabilities in clinical environments. It has also been applied to other settings and populations from sexual offenders to gerontology (Repp & Horner, 1999). However, there is little research applying this process to students with more mild disabilities, or with serious behavior problems. There is also not much research about using this approach in school settings. However, some preliminary studies have been promising. For example, functional assessment was used with a first grader to determine that low attention preceded the student's disruptive behavior (Grandy & Peck, 1997). It was also used with a student in a general education setting to determine that peer attention was maintaining the student's problem behavior (Lewis & Sugai, 1996). A study of three children of average intellectual functioning used functional assessment to determine why the students were talking out, getting out of their seats, and refusing to complete academic work. After determining the disruptive behaviors were maintained by peer and teacher attention, the researchers developed interventions that decreased the students' undesirable behaviors and increased both the students' work completion and accuracy (Broussard & Northrup, 1995). In another study (Umbreit, 1995), functional assessment was used to determine that social attention from peers and escape from the task at hand were factors maintaining the disruptive behaviors of a student with Attention-Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), and the intervention plan from that functional data resulted in a reduction in disruptive behavior and an increase in appropriate behavior.

Making It Work

Functional behavioral assessment and behavior intervention plans can be done in a variety of ways with varying intensity, depending on the intensity and/or complexity of the problem behavior. Numerous sets of forms or guidebooks can be used to prompt and guide this process, but are not required. It is useful to have at least one person trained in this process, and to employ a team of educators to maximize diverse input and creativity in analyzing behavior and in developing plans. Key components are:

Problem Specification. Interviews, observational forms, and checklists can be used to assist in the process of defining the behavior and identifying potential events related to the occurrence and nonoccurrence of the behavior. When defining a behavior, it is important to define the behavior in terms that are simple to measure and record. It is often useful to observe the student's behavior in different settings, during different types of activities, and to conduct interviews with other school staff to determine the specific characteristics of the behavior.

Identification of Replacement Behaviors. Typically, data from interviews, observations, and checklists are used to generate hypotheses about maintaining causes and conditions in two areas- setting events or environmental conditions that make the occurrence of the behavior more likely, and the function or payoff the behavior provides for the child. During this phase, it is also helpful to determine whether skill deficits may be contributing to the maladaptive behavior. The ultimate goal of

this phase is to specify a replacement behavior or behaviors that the student will be taught. In order to be an effective replacement behavior, the behavior should address the setting events, functions, or skill deficits that seem to be maintaining the behavior.

Plan Development. After educators have determined the function of a behavior and identified replacement behaviors, they can begin to develop a behavioral intervention plan. Effective behavioral plans preserve the safety of the classroom environment, while specifying comprehensive instructional plans for teaching new behaviors. Just as teachers use a variety of strategies (e.g., overviews, discussion, modeling, practice and feedback) to teach academic subjects, a variety of instructional approaches should be considered when designing an individual behavioral plan. The goal of the behavior plan should not be to simply control incidents of misbehavior, but to ensure new learning that will allow the student to succeed in this and other academic environments.

Conclusion

For a small number of students with serious and chronic behavior problems, it may be essential that an individual behavior intervention plan be developed based on the functional assessment process. This process will identify hypotheses regarding the functions of the behavior, and will use that information to develop and implement effective intervention plans. This process is required for some students with disabilities, and is probably useful for many other students whether or not they are in special education programs.

Russell J. Skiba & Reece L. Peterson. June, 2002

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About the Safe and Responsive Schools Project

The Safe and Responsive Schools Project, funded by the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs, is dedicated to developing prevention-based approaches to school safety, discipline reform and behavior improvement in schools.

Websites: <http://www.indiana.edu/~safeschl/> or <http://www.unl.edu/srs/> Or Contact:

Russell Skiba, Indiana Education Policy Ctr., 170 Smith Ctr., 2805 E. 10th Street, Bloomington, IN 47408; 812-855-1240; skiba@indiana.edu, or

Reece L. Peterson, 202A Barkley Center, University of Nebraska-Lincoln, Lincoln, NE 68583-0732; 402-472-5480; rpeterson1@unl.edu ©2003 Skiba & Peterson