“Behavior, what are you trying to tell me?”

Understanding and addressing problem behaviors

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Disclaimer of the evening!

This presentation reviews basic principles of behavior and basic solutions to common behavior problems.

Behavior intervention combines many tactics to address problem behavior. Please seek out help from a professional if you feel uncomfortable implementing these procedures or behavior worsens.
Let’s start with a problem

- In a 2005-2006 study done by the National Survey of Children with Special Health Care Needs determined that 25% of parents spend time coordinating care for their child.

- Access to qualified providers is more difficult for children with special needs, and even more so for children on the Autism Spectrum (Parellada M, Boada L, Moreno C, Llorente C, Romo J, Muela C, Arango C., 2013).

- Can anyone relate?

- What if we could change this dynamic?

- What if caregivers had the power to change behavior in their own homes?
Intended goal of ABA therapy

- BCBA meets child
- BCBA takes data determines function & makes plan
- BCBA Trains Parents with child during therapy

• Successful behavior change!
• Parents Trained
• Parents transitioned to role of therapist
• Maintenance set up
What makes this model successful?

- PARENTS!
- We need you!
- BCBAs!
- We need you!
- We have to work together to create sustainable change
So, let’s talk about behavior

Behavior is the activity of living organisms; human behavior includes everything that people DO (it’s everywhere!):

- Turning off a light switch
- Screaming
- Giving a hug
- Talking
- Asking for help
- Tugging on teacher’s clothes
- Crying
- Raising a hand
What drives our behavior?

- Motivation!
- Our behavior is driven by our motivation to attain something, escape something we don’t like or engage in something that feels good because we haven’t had it for a specific period of time

- Example: You’re thirsty, so you go get a glass of water.
  
  **MO** = Thirsty (deprivation of water for a period of time)
  
  **Behavior** = Getting water
  
  **Consequence** = Negative reinforcement (removal of being thirsty) Not thirsty anymore.

- MO = Bored
- Behavior = Headbanging
- Consequence = Positive Reinforcement (Parent give you lots of attention to stop headbanging)
Why do behaviors continue to occur? What maintains our behaviors?

- Consequences!
- The consequences of our actions are what determine if we are going to engage in behavior again.
Maintainers (functions) of behaviors

Behavior performs a function for the individual engaging in it. There are 4 functions that determine why behavior occurs and determines what interventions to use:

- **Attention (to gain attention from a person)**
  - Positive Reinforcement

- **Tangible (to gain access to something like an object or activity)**
  - Negative Reinforcement

- **Escape (to get away from a something aversive)**
  - Automatic Reinforcement

- **Automatic (sensory)**
Consider this:

- Why do you **hug a friend**? > You want their **attention**, you want to gain their comfort and affection.
- Why do you **recount the funny thing** your kid did at dinner the night before? > To **gain attention** to gain access to a connection in someone else. To gain **access to common ground**.
- Why do you quickly turn down a grocery aisle when you see someone in the store you don’t like? > To **escape/avoid** a social situation with them.
- Why do you **erase chores on your to-do list** before they are done? > To **escape/avoid** completing them that day.
- Why does your **knee bounce all the time** when you sit down? > Provides internal regulation or comfort **(Automatic/Self-stim)**
- Why do you **hum** when you are working on something difficult? > Provides internal regulation or comfort **(Automatic/Self-stim)**
Issues facing kids and behavior

- The wrong behaviors are being reinforced
- Long learning histories of the wrong behaviors being reinforced in multiple settings (home, school, etc.)
- Lack of communication abilities
- Learning or developmental delays or BOTH
How do we help?

1. Find out WHY your child is doing the behavior. If they are verbal, ask them! If not, pay attention to what happens immediately after the behavior (including your own immediate response).

2. Introduce some antecedent interventions (pre-behavior) interventions.

3. Use visuals and brief conversation during episodes of behavior.

4. Follow through with interventions, do not give up when behavior gets worse!

Rinse and repeat! Be consistent. Anytime you change your child’s way of getting what he/she wants, it will make behavior worse before it gets better! **

**Please use best judgement. If your child is engaging in behavior that is an immediate danger to himself or others, please seek professional assistance.
What are some ways we can PREVENT behavior from happening?

- Functional communication training (FCT) & Social Scripting
- Task Analysis & Visual scheduling
- Behavioral momentum
- Choices
Functional Communication Training (FCT) & Social Scripting

- Functional communication training provides the child with training on the appropriate behavior that competes with the inappropriate behavior (Cooper, Heron, Heward, 2007). This is fantastically done with social scripting and practice when behavior is not occurring.

- **Example:**
  - Johnny is engaging in falling to the floor behavior to get out of homework. Instead of trying to pull him off the floor....
  - Create a social script to teach Johnny to say where he wants to complete homework and ask for a break after 2-minutes to prevent falling to the floor behaviors.
  - Practice using preferred tasks, and fade in non-preferred tasks.
Visual Scheduling and Task Analysis

- Visual scheduling provides children and teens a way to visualize what their day looks like and when they get to engage preferred activities or earn reinforcement.

- Visual schedules can be utilized in all settings, it can travel with the child and enhance generalization of behaviors in multiple settings and across multiple providers (Adams, L., Gouvousis, A., VanLue, M., & Waldron, C., 2004).

- Design a visual schedule that is right for your child and for your family. Make it flexible by adding Velcro or keep it static because routine is common, etc.
Sample
Sample Task Analysis
Behavioral momentum

- The goal of using behavioral momentum is to increase compliance by introducing 2-3 actions or easier/preferred tasks before presenting the more difficult task or action (Cooper, Heron, Heward, 2007).

- Think of this in terms of:

  - Easy > more difficult > hard = compliance.

  - Hard > harder > really hard = non-compliance
Behavioral Momentum & difficult task

- Ex: Johnny screams every time you ask him to do something. BEFORE you ask him to do something, try engaging Johnny in some simple directives to gain base compliance:

  Parent to Johnny: “Hey Johnny, what’s your favorite food? What’s your favorite song, which one should we do first, make bed or sweep floor?”

- Ex: Johnny says “No” every time you ask him to pick up his room. Standing in his room, you can say, “Johnny, touch your ears, touch your nose, touch your toes, go pick up everything that is yellow.” repeat until the room is clean or until he is picking up on his own.

**Note that accommodations can be made with children who are physically limited by using light physical prompting to engage in preferred motions or actions.**
Many parents struggle with compliance during homework times.

For example: If Johnny has 20 math problems to do, pick out 3 easy ones you know he can do, then add in more difficult problems and so on.

If Johnny has 10 new site words to read, pick ones that he has mastered from a different list and ask him to read 3 of those first before introducing a more difficult one.
Choices go a long way in preventing behaviors. Allow your child to make a decision about how or where he/she will complete a task.

Example: Johnny hates sitting down during dinner. Provide Johnny a choice before dinner to eat standing at the table or standing on a bumpy cushion.

Example: Johnny has several homework tasks. Allow Johnny to pick which ones he wants to work on first, then write them on a white board or piece of paper, so he has a list to go by.
How do we help? Respond to behavior appropriately for attention and escape behaviors

- Stop and think about what your child wants. Do they want attention? Escape from a non-preferred activity?

- If they want attention, ignore the inappropriate behavior (or withhold the reinforcing behavior, such as looking at him or verbally engaging him) (example: If Johnny is making noises at his little sister, ignore the inappropriate sounds and ask him a direct question or ask him to do something for you).

- If they want out of something non-preferred, use language like: Johnny, FIRST you have to finish homework, THEN you can play outside.
How do we help? Use visuals to promote use of appropriate skills

- While behavior is occurring, presenting a visual can decrease the amount of attention given to that specific behavior, as well as remind during an escape behavior of what they can do to cope with an aversive or non-preferred activity.
- How to use: Visually present > wait 5 seconds > If no response, model, then physically engage child in actions.
How do we help? What do we do when behavior is happening? Stereotypical Behaviors

- The goal is to shape the appropriate emission of the behavior or replace it with something that is more appropriate but provides similar or equal sensory input. This can also be supported by functional communication training (FCT).

- As a general rule, with stereotypical behaviors, interrupt it, replace it, or engage the child (incompatible behavior).

- Example: If your child likes to spin, physically block (response block) the spinning and prompt the child either physically or verbally to spin with your (“I would like to spin please” OR engage in a different physical activity (walk, carrying an object, etc.).
How do we help? Self-injurious Behaviors

Using Functional Skills Training (Prevention)

1. Determine the function the behavior is serving (Ex: Banging head on floor when child to get affections from others (attention seeking). Skin picks when anxious (escape aversive situation/stimulus). Bites hand when alone (automatic reinforcement).

2. Select Communication Mode.

3. Identify when behavior is likely to occur, to pre-teach child response

4. Prompt communication.

Expand communication points and generalize across settings, situations, and people.

Quest, K. (2016).
How do we help? Self-injurious behaviors

When behavior occurs:

- Block attempts to engage in self-injury using physical response blocking
- Reduce the impact of behavior by applying covering to area impacted by SIB (ex: helmet for severe headbanging, hand wraps for hand biting)
- Prompt communication with visual (“I want to leave please.” “I want a hug.” “I want my video game.” “I need to be squeezed.”)
Action Item

- Go back and observe your child. Try and determine what FUNCTION is maintaining your child’s problem behavior.
- Implement 1 antecedent intervention at a time and practice!
- Talk with your BCBA about how you can learn more about what they are doing to help your child become successful and independent.
References


Parent-Mediated Case Studies using ABA


