FUNCTIONAL BEHAVIORAL ASSESSMENT, BEHAVIORAL INTERVENTION PLANS, AND POSITIVE INTERVENTION AND SUPPORTS:

AN ESSENTIAL PART OF EFFECTIVE SCHOOLWIDE DISCIPLINE IN VIRGINIA

The Virginia Department of Education
Richmond, VA

Fourth Edition, 2008

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Note: **The original version of this document was reviewed for consistency with the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (P.L. 105-17) by the U.S. Office of Special Education Programs.**

Production of this monograph was made possible by funds from the Virginia Department of Education and a grant from the U. S. Department of Education, grant number H237T60005. The *Center for Effective Collaboration and Practice: Improving Services for Children and Youth with Emotional and Behavioral Problems* is funded under a cooperative agreement with the Office of Special Education Programs, Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services, U.S. Department of Education, with additional support from the Child, Adolescent, and Family Branch, Center for Mental Health Services, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Administration, of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

An Overview of Functional Behavioral Assessment and Behavioral Intervention Plans and Supports

Today, educators at all grade levels face a growing number of students whose behavior impedes daily classroom instruction. Fortunately, teachers usually are able to rely on standard strategies to address classroom misbehavior, including establishing a limited number of rules that are enforceable (rules that are not enforced are made to be broken), directly and systematically teaching students classroom expectations, being in close physical proximity to their students, and praising and encouraging positive behaviors. Often, classroom behavior problems stem from student academic frustration and failure, problems that teachers can resolve by making curricular changes, instructional changes, or both. For example, teachers can manipulate the complexity of the questions they pose to students to ensure a high rate of correct responses (i.e., 75-80%) or use response cards to encourage more students to actively participate in a lesson. Most of the time, either independently or with the support of colleagues, teachers are able to find solutions to the majority of student behavior problems. However, for some students—both with and without disabilities—these solutions do not produce the desired outcome and may actually worsen an already difficult situation.

School personnel have long known about the negative effect that student misbehavior can have on the teaching and learning process. With the enactment of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, its 1997 amendments, and its 2004 reauthorization, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEIA), schools are mandated to take steps to address behavior problems and other inappropriate classroom behavior that interferes with student learning. In an effort to ensure that schools are safe and conducive to learning, IDEIA includes the use of the process known as *functional behavioral assessment* to develop or revise *positive behavioral intervention plans and supports.*

IDEIA emphasizes not only ensuring access to the "least restrictive environment," but also promoting positive educational results for students with disabilities. The law also highlights the roles of the general education teacher, the general education curriculum, and appropriate classroom placement in helping students to advance academically and behaviorally.

The 1997 Amendments to IDEA were explicit in what is required of individualized education program (IEP) teams when addressing behaviors of children with disabilities that interfere with their own learning or the learning of others.

- The IEP team must consider, when appropriate, strategies—including positive behavioral interventions, strategies, and supports—to address that behavior through the IEP process [see §614(d)(3)(B)(i)].

- In response to disciplinary actions by school personnel described in Section 615(k)(l)(B), the IEP team must, either before or no later than 10 days after the disciplinary action, develop a functional behavioral assessment plan to collect information. This information is to be used for developing a behavioral intervention plan to address such behaviors, if necessary. If the child already has a behavioral intervention plan, the IEP team must review the plan and modify it, if necessary, to address the behavior.

- In addition, states are required to address the inservice training needs and preservice preparation of personnel (including professionals and paraprofessionals who provide special education, general education, related services, or early intervention services) to ensure that they have the knowledge and skills necessary to meet the needs of students with disabilities. This includes enhancing their abilities to use strategies such as behavioral interventions and supports (§653(c)(3)(D)(vi).

> Schools have routinely taken steps to determine whether or not students with significant learning problems are eligible for special education; however, in the past, some schools were reluctant to identify students with serious behavior problems so that they could have more flexibility in disciplining students. Today, there is a growing willingness to identify and serve students who have behavior problems.

The 2004 version of IDEIA requires that positive behavioral interventions must be included in a student's IEP if his or her behavior impedes his or her learning or the learning of others. When the behavior problem is a manifestation of a disability, the IEP team must conduct a functional behavioral assessment. If a plan has been developed, it should be reviewed and modified, as necessary, to address the behavior.

Rationale for Developing Positive Behavioral Interventions

Traditionally, teachers have dealt with student behavior that interferes with classroom instruction by using various kinds of negative consequences (e.g., verbal reprimands, timeout, and in-school or out-of-school suspension). The goal has been to reduce or eliminate the problem. However, experience has shown that these usually are not the most effective or efficient ways to resolve the problem. These so-called "reactive approaches" for dealing with inappropriate behavior do not teach the student more acceptable behaviors. In fact, reactive approaches may actually reinforce the inappropriate behavior. For these reasons, many teachers have begun to take a proactive approach by introducing various programs to teach students more acceptable alternative responses. For example, social skills programs have been an especially popular way to teach appropriate behavior. Unfortunately, decisions regarding which behavior to teach a student, be it academic or nonacademic, usually are based on the program's curriculum, rather than on the particular skills the student should be taught to succeed in school. As a result, the reason why the student misbehaved in the first place is seldom addressed and, as a result, problems may pursist.

Today, there is growing recognition that the success of an intervention hinges on (a) understanding why the student behaves in a certain way and (b) replacing the inappropriate behavior with a more suitable behavior that serves the same function (or results in the same outcome) as the problem behavior. That intervention process begins with looking beyond the misbehavior itself and discovering the uncovering underlying causes of the behavior. When a student struggles academically, teachers use various strategies to identify the reasons for the student's academic problems, such as: informal assessment or error analysis; now, we know that this way of thinking applies to student behavior problems as well.

The following are examples of statements that consider why a student misbehaves:

- Charles swears at the teacher *to get out of completing a difficult assignment*.
- Juan makes jokes when given a geography assignment *to avoid what he perceives as a boring assignment and to gain peer attention.*

Knowing why a student engages in a particular behavior is essential to developing an effective, individualized positive behavioral intervention plan and supports. Often, we can find the answer by looking critically at the teaching/learning process. A common response to Charles's or Juan's behavior might be to impose some kind of negative consequences, such as an disciplinary office referral; however, we now know that learning and behavior problems go hand-in-hand and that it is shortsighted to address one but ignore the other when developing a plan of intervention. The use of a "response-to-intervention" approach is becoming increasingly popular as a way to introduce an evidence-based intervention, evaluate a student's response to that intervention, and use the evaluation information to decide whether to continue with the present intervention or use other strategies.

The 2004 reauthorization of IDEIA included language that strengthened the role of what is variously known as "effective behavior support," "positive behavioral intervention and supports," and "effective schoolwide discipline". Regardless of what it is called, effective schoolwide discipline is a positive approach to dealing with learning and behavior problems. It is a multi-tiered approach that includes proven effective strategies and procedures that are applicable schoolwide, in the classroom, and at the individual student level. As one part of that process, in the following discussion, we focus on ways to address individual student needs by means of functional behavioral assessment.

Generally, the logic behind functional behavioral assessment is driven by two principles. First, practically all behavior serves a purpose: it allows students to get something desirable, escape or avoid something undesirable, or communicate some other message or need. Second, behavior occurs within a specific context. It may occur in certain settings (e.g., in the cafeteria), under certain conditions (e.g., only when there is a substitute teacher), or during different types of activities (e.g., during recess). Because of these two principles, students will change their inappropriate behavior only when it is clear to them that a different response will accomplish the same thing more effectively and efficiently. For this reason, identifying the causes of a behavior—what the student gets, escapes, or avoids or is attempting to communicate through the behavior—can provide the information necessary to develop effective strategies to address behaviors that interfere with learning or threaten school safety. This can be accomplished by means of a functional behavioral assessment.

Addressing Student Problem Behavior Is a Team Effort

Before beginning our discussion on functional behavioral assessment, we want to stress two points, the critical role that teamwork plays in creating a positive learning environment and the fact that functional behavioral assessment is an essential part of a multi-tiered approach to effective schoolwide discipline. In conducting a functional behavioral assessment and developing a behavioral intervention plan, education personnel draw upon a range of communication and interpersonal skills. The IEP team members may need special training in the skills of collaboration, such as time management, group problem solving (including brainstorming strategies), active listening, and conflict resolution processes, to mention a few. Team members may also need training in the skills and knowledge required to conduct a functional behavioral assessment and to select and use behavior-specific intervention techniques. As with other aspects of effective schoolwide discipline, building-level administrative and collegial support is essential to a successful outcome. Student and parent participation are also important. Too often, parents and students are excluded even though they have much to offer to the team.

IEP Team Roles and Responsibilities

As schools explore educational options, many educators are being cast in unfamiliar roles and are acquiring new responsibilities. In the past, special educators mainly were responsible for the classroom instruction of students with disabilities. More recently, their responsibilities, like those of their colleagues in general education, have enlarged to include professional collaboration to support the participation of students with disabilities in the general education curriculum.

The provisions of IDEA and IDEIA place increased emphasis on not only teaching students with disabilities in the general education curriculum, but also assessing their progress by means of appropriate instruments and procedures. In addition, there is an increased expectation that school personnel work together to resolve behavior problems that interfere with student progress. As members of IEP teams, general educators play an ever-increasing role in collaboratively developing comprehensive management and instructional plans for students with disabilities.

Overview of Functional Behavioral Assessment

Functional behavioral assessment (FBA) is a team problem-solving process. The FBA process relies on a variety of techniques and strategies to identify the reasons for student misbehavior and to help IEP teams select appropriate interventions. A major objective is to learn how best to promote student behavior that serves the same function as current behavior but is more socially acceptable and responsible. In conducting a functional behavioral assessment, we look beyond the behavior itself and focus on identifying significant, pupil-specific social, sensory, physical, affective, cognitive, and/or environmental factors associated with the occurrence and nonoccurrence of specific behaviors. This broader perspective offers a better understanding of the function or purpose behind student behavior. Intervention plans based on an understanding of why a student misbehaves are effective in addressing a wide range of problem behaviors.

One step in performing a functional behavioral assessment is to collect information on the possible functions of the problem behavior. In many instances, knowledge of these factors can be obtained through repeated *direct assessments* or observations. While observation may reveal a possible reason behind the misbehavior, several cautions are warranted. First, too few observations can yield an inaccurate explanation. Second, some factors, including thoughts and feelings, such as: distorted perceptions, fear of a negative outcome, or the desire to appear competent, are not directly observable. Even so, they can significantly influence behavior. Fortunately, we can learn about these influences through *indirect assessment* strategies, such as interviews or surveys with the student, teacher, peers, or others who interact frequently with the student. This is why it is best to use a variety of techniques and strategies to gather information on the function of a student's behavior. Once information has been obtained and analyzed and a hypothesis has been made about that function, it can be used to develop proactive function-based interventions that help educators focus on instructional goals, as opposed to simply management goals.

Possible Alternative Assessment Strategies

By using a variety of assessment techniques, IEP teams will better understand student behavior. Each technique can bring the team closer to developing a workable intervention plan. A well-developed assessment plan and a properly executed functional behavioral assessment should identify the contextual factors that contribute to student behavior (e.g., real or perceived skill deficits, poor curricular/instructional alignment, peer/peer conflicts). Determining the specific contextual factors for a behavior is accomplished by collecting information on the various conditions under which the student is most and least likely to be a successful learner. That information, collected both indirectly and directly, allows school personnel to predict the circumstances under which the problem behavior is most likely and least likely to occur.

Multiple sources and methods are used for this kind of assessment, since a single source generally does not produce sufficiently accurate information. This is especially true if the problem behavior serves several functions that vary according to circumstance. For example, making inappropriate comments during lectures may serve to get peer attention in some instances while, in other situations, it may help the student to avoid being called on by the teacher.

It is important to remember that contextual factors are more than the sum of observable behaviors; they include certain *affective* and *cognitive* behaviors as well. In other words, the trigger, or antecedent for the behavior may not be something that anyone else can directly observe; and therefore it must be identified using indirect measures. For instance, if the student acts out when given a worksheet, it may not be the worksheet that caused the acting out. Instead, it may be the fact that the student does not know what is required and thus anticipates failure or ridicule. The only way to obtain this kind of information is to talk with the student.

Since problem behavior can stem from a variety of sources, it is best to examine the behavior from as many different perspectives as possible. Teams, for instance, should consider the student's pay-off for engaging in either inappropriate or appropriate behavior or what the student escapes, avoids, or gets by engaging in the behavior. Accounting for these factors should assist the team in identifying workable techniques for developing and conducting functional behavioral assessments and developing behavioral interventions. When considering problem behaviors, teams might ask the following questions.

✓ ***Is the problem behavior linked to a skill deficit?***

Is there reason to believe that the student does not know how to perform the particular skill? Students who lack the skills to perform expected tasks might engage in behaviors that help them to avoid or escape those tasks. If the team member suspects that the student cannot perform the skills, *or has a skill deficit,* they could devise a functional behavioral assessment plan to determine the answers to questions such as the following:

- Does the student understand the behavioral expectations for the situation?
- Does the student realize that he or she is engaging in unacceptable behavior, or has that behavior simply become a habit?
- Is it within the student's power to control the behavior, or does he or she need support?
- Does the student have all of the skills necessary to perform expected new behaviors—even under difficult or stressful conditions?

✓ ***Does the student have the skill, but, for some reason, not the desire to modify his or her behavior?***

Sometimes, the student may be able to perform a skill but, for some reason, does not do so consistently (e.g., in particular settings). This situation is often referred to as a *performance deficit*. Students who can but do not perform certain tasks may be experiencing consequences that affect their performance (e.g., their non-performance is rewarded by peer or teacher attention; performance of the task is not sufficiently rewarding). If the team suspects that the problem is a result of a performance deficit, it may be helpful to devise an assessment plan that addresses questions such as the following:

- Is it possible that the student is uncertain about the appropriateness of the behavior (e.g., it is appropriate to clap loudly and yell during sporting events, yet these behaviors are often inappropriate when playing academic games in the classroom)?
- Does the student find any value in engaging in appropriate behavior?
- Is the problem behavior associated with certain social or environmental conditions?
    - Is the student attempting to avoid a low-interest or demanding task?
    - What current rules, routines, or expectations does the student consider irrelevant?

Addressing such questions will help to determine the necessary components of the assessment plan and ultimately will lead to a more effective behavioral intervention plan.

Individuals Assessing Behavior

Persons responsible for conducting the functional behavioral assessment vary from district to district and case to case. Some behavioral assessment procedures, such as standardized tests, may require someone with specific training (e.g., behavior specialist, school psychologist). With specialized training, experience, and support, however, other individuals, such as: special or general education teachers, counselors, and administrators, can conduct many components of the assessment. Again, it is important to remember that interventions should not be based on one assessment measure alone or on data collected by a single individual.

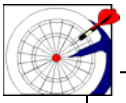
Behavioral Intervention Plans

After collecting data on a student's behavior and developing a hypothesis to explain the likely function(s) of that behavior, the IEP team develops (or revises) the student's behavioral intervention plan or strategies in the IEP. These may include positive strategies, program or curricular modifications, and supplementary aids and supports required to address the disruptive behaviors in question. It is essential to use the data collected during the functional behavioral assessment to develop a function-driven behavioral intervention plan or strategies and to determine the discrepancy between the child's actual and expected behavior.

The input of the general education teacher, as appropriate (i.e., if the student is or may be participating in the general education environment), is especially crucial at this point. The teacher will be able to share with the team not only his or her behavioral expectations, but also valuable information about how the existing classroom environment and/or general education curriculum can be modified to support the student.
Finally, to the greatest extent possible, the student should be an active participate in the selection of the plan of intervention. School personnel should give students an opportunity to make a fixed choice (e.g., "Bill, we have identified three intervention options, each of which we feel will get you back on track. We will use one of these interventions--which one makes the most sense to you?").

In most instances, the IEP team should teach the student—directly and systematically, a more acceptable replacement behavior that serves the same function (accomplishes the same outcome) as the inappropriate behavior. In addition, teams should consider one or more of the following techniques when designing behavioral intervention plans and supports: (a) manipulate the antecedents and/or consequences of the behavior; (b) make accommodations or modifications in curriculum and instructional strategies; (c) modify the classroom environment to decrease the probability that a problem will occur or increase the probability of a more appropriate response—or both. In many cases, it is advantageous to use a combination of these options and to choose those strategies that are most likely to benefit more than one student.

As shown in the following box, we have identified 10 steps that, together, constitute a functional behavioral assessment. In succeeding sections, we will discuss each of these steps.



Method for Conducting a Functional Behavioral Assessment

1. Describe and verify the seriousness of the problem behavior.
2. Refine the definition of the problem behavior.
3. Collect information on possible functions of the problem behavior.
4. Analyze information using data triangulation and/or problem pathway analysis.
5. Generate a hypothesis statement regarding the probable function of the problem behavior.
6. Test the hypothesis statement regarding the function of the problem behavior.

Developing, Implementing, and Monitoring a Behavioral Intervention Plan

7. Develop and implement a behavioral intervention plan.
8. Monitor the faithfulness of implementation of the plan.
9. Evaluate the effectiveness of the behavioral intervention plan.
10. Modify the behavioral intervention plan as needed.

1. Describe and Verify the Seriousness of the Problem Behavior

Most teachers recognize that many classroom discipline problems can be resolved by changing some aspect of instruction, consistently applying standard management strategies, or both. Strategies that have proven effective include: teaching students how to comply with well-defined classroom rules/expectations (along with periodic review); modifying the difficulty level of an assignment; providing evidence-based instruction—using such strategies as: graphic organizers, mnemonics, or scaffolding procedures); increasing the number of opportunities for a student to answer correctly and receive teacher praise—in close physical proximity to the student; providing students clear directions and enough structure in lessons; making strategic seating assignments; and posting a class schedule, to mention a few. The consistent use of these strategies usually will

eliminate the need for more intensive interventions. Today, many teachers learn about these and other possible solutions to the problems they face through teacher assistance or intervention assistance teams. Regardless of the source of this information, school personnel generally should introduce one or more standard strategies before initiating the more complex, and often time-consuming, process of functional behavioral assessment. It is important to understand that a formal assessment usually is reserved for serious, recurring problems that impede a student's learning, have been ongoing, or do not readily respond to disciplinary strategies that are in place at the schoolwide or classroom level.

In addressing student behavior that impedes learning, IEP teams usually work with the referring classroom teacher to define, in concrete terms, the behavior of concern (e.g., Trish on the playground). Using this description of the behavior, the IEP team or other school personnel might observe both the student of concern and one or two classmates selected at random. By observing other classmates, the team can determine the seriousness of the problem and the discrepancy between the student's present behavior and an acceptable level of behavior. These observations may indicate that many students have similar discipline problems and that the solution may actually rest in changes in classroom practices.

In collecting preliminary information about student behavior, the team should take into consideration teacher expectations for student academic performance as well as classroom conduct. It may be that teacher expectations exceed (or fall below) the student's ability to perform them. The resulting behavior problems may stem from a sense of frustration, fear of embarrassment, or even boredom. Given the powerful relationship between classroom learning and behavior problems, it usually is essential to look carefully at both.

Student behavior may vary with regard to cognitive, problem-solving, and/or interpersonal styles. In assessing students, it is important to consider that a particular response may relate to cultural differences or expectations. Remember that no two students (or their families) are the same, regardless of their gender or their cultural or ethnic background. As part of the IEP team, parents can provide valuable information regarding the behaviors of their cultural values. School personnel should understand that differences may exist, respect these differences, and work to adopt the family's perspective when considering student behavior. When making judgments about cultural differences or expectations, the IEP team may need to look to other qualified persons to assess the impact of cultural differences on learning and behavior.

One way for the IEP team to judge the significance of a student's behavior is to ask the following questions:

- Does the student's behavior significantly differ from that of his or her classmates?
- Does the student's behavior lessen the possibility of successful learning for the student and others?
- Have past efforts to address the student's behavior using standard interventions been unsuccessful?
- Does the student's behavior represent a behavioral deficit or excess, rather than a cultural difference?
- Is the student's behavior serious, persistent, chronic, or a threat to the safety of the student or others?
- If the behavior persists, is some disciplinary action likely to result?

If the answer to any of these questions is yes, then the team should proceed with a functional behavioral assessment. The following vignettes illustrate the fact that problem behavior can vary widely and that various factors can influence student behavior. The vignettes also show that not all problems require complex solutions or a functional behavioral assessment.

Vignette I

Mrs. Gambino, the seventh-grade social studies teacher at Havelock Middle School, reported that according to her midterm progress report, Tommy, a student with a learning disability, was in danger of failing. Together with Mrs. Lofties, the special education teacher, they determined that the problem probably stemmed from Tommy's not doing his homework every night, rather than from his not having the knowledge or skills to complete it. Mrs. Gambino explained that although she modifies the homework assignment to help Tommy, whose disability makes it difficult for him to write, he still doesn't complete the assignments. She explained that the homework assignments were given so that the students would have an opportunity to practice using what they learned during class. It was important for them to spend time doing homework so they could keep up with what was being taught.

Mrs. Lofties asked how many other students in Mrs. Gambino's class came to class without their homework. Mrs. Gambino explained that she did not collect the homework or grade it. Mrs. Gambino explained that students kept their homework in their notebooks so they could use it to study. "I don't believe in giving kids grades for homework," she explained. "I don't think you should grade practice work." Mrs. Lofties suggested that for the next 5 days Mrs. Gambino observe Tommy and the other students in his class to see how many had completed homework assignments. Mrs. Gambino said she would watch the students as they were discussing their homework assignments and record (without the students' knowing) which students did not have their homework. They agreed to meet again after the 5 days had passed.

During their next meeting, Mrs. Gambino and Mrs. Lofties looked at the homework data. It seemed that on any given day about 25% of the students did not have their homework. They decided that the problem was more widespread than just with Tommy and worked together to develop a plan to increase the class's homework production. They developed a system whereby Mrs. Gambino could check to see whether each student had completed his or her homework. If everyone in the class came with his or her homework, then she would give the class 1 point. When the class accumulated 15 points, they would be allowed to bring snacks to class the next day and eat while they worked. Mrs. Gambino thought it would be a good idea and decided to try it in all of her classes. Mrs. Lofties and Mrs. Gambino decided to meet again in 2 weeks to see how things were going.

In 2 weeks, Mrs. Gambino reported that it took the students a couple of days to get into the swing of the "game," but now most classes were earning points daily. She said that Tommy's grades were improving, and at this time a functional behavioral assessment was not deemed necessary.

Vignette II

"This is the third time in 2 weeks Trish has been sent to the office for fighting on the playground! Something has to be done!" Ms. Osuna's tone showed her exasperation with her student's behavior. Ms. Frey, the principal, agreed with Ms. Osuna but explained that her options were limited. "We've tried keeping her in during recess, but that does not seem to help. We also tried to reward her for playing nicely on the playground, but that didn't work either. I agree that this is getting out of hand. No other student in this school has had so many office referrals for problems on the playground. I am willing to listen to any suggestions you might have." Ms. Osuna suggested they include Mr. Church, Trish's LD resource room teacher, in their discussion.

After speaking with Ms. Osuna and Ms. Frey, Mr. Church realized that Trish's behavior was significantly different from that of the other third-graders on the playground, had been going on for some time, was possibly a danger to other students, and didn't change when the usual interventions were tried. "I suggest we call a meeting of her IEP team and discuss conducting a functional behavioral assessment to try to determine what might be causing Trish to behave this way. I'll ask the secretary to call Trish's parents and set up a meeting time that would be convenient for them."

At the meeting, Trish's mother, Mrs. Wilson, explained that Trish was the same way with her brothers when she was at home. "They hit each other a lot. I yell at them, but they don't listen to me." Mr. Church explained to the IEP team about functional behavioral assessment and suggested they do an assessment to find out more about why Trish was being physically aggressive. Mrs. Wilson was relieved: "I was so afraid you were going to tell me that she was going to be suspended or sent away to a different school." Mr. Church explained that Mrs. Wilson could help with the functional behavioral assessment, too. He explained that he would like to talk to her more about Trish's behavior at home and he could give her some questions that she could ask Trish to help them with the functional behavioral assessment. After deciding what each person could do to contribute to the assessment, the team agreed to meet again in 2 weeks to discuss their findings. Meanwhile, playground supervision would be increased to make sure that no one got hurt.

The vast majority of classroom problems can be resolved through the kind of collaborative efforts illustrated in Vignette I. School personnel should try to distinguish between problems that can be eliminated through informal assessment and universal interventions (i.e., interventions designed for use with the entire group) and those that demand functional behavioral assessment and individualized positive behavioral intervention plans and supports.

2. Refine the Definition of the Problem Behavior

Before deciding which techniques to use to collect information about a student's behavior, the IEP team must identify specific characteristics of the behavior that is interfering with learning. This way, it is possible to narrow the definition to make it easier to observe and record the behavior. If descriptions of behaviors are vague (e.g., "poor attitude" or "aggressiveness"), it is difficult to measure these behaviors and determine appropriate interventions. Simply put, if we can't measure it, we can't manage it. Even behavior as unacceptable as aggression may mean different things to different people. For example, some may feel that a threatening gesture represents aggression; others may not. A precise definition, one that includes examples (and non-examples) of the behavior of concern, should eliminate measurement problems stemming from an ambiguous description of behavior.

In collecting information to refine the definition of the behavior, it may be necessary to observe the student in various settings (e.g., classroom, cafeteria, playground, other social settings), during different types of activities (e.g., individual, large-group, cooperative learning), and to discuss the student's behavior with other school personnel or family members. This will help the IEP team to determine the exact nature of the behavior and to narrow the scope of the examination of the problem situation. These multiple observations increase the likelihood that the IEP team will be able to accurately assess relevant dimensions of the behavior and its context(s), thereby allowing the team to write accurate behavior intervention plans. Information should be collected on:

- Times when the behavior does and does not occur (e.g., just prior to lunch, during a particular subject or activity)
- Location where the behavior takes place (e.g., classroom, playground)
- Conditions when the behavior does and does not occur (e.g., when working in small groups, structured or unstructured time)

- Individuals present when the problem behavior is most and least likely to occur (e.g., when there is a substitute teacher or with certain other students)
- Events or conditions that typically occur before the behavior (e.g., assignment to a particular reading group)
- Events or conditions that typically occur after the behavior (e.g., student is sent out of the room)
- Common setting events (e.g., during bad weather)
- Other behaviors associated with the problem behavior (e.g., a series of negative peer interactions).

Once the behavior of concern has been identified, it is important to complete the definition of the behavior. For example, initial observations enabled the IEP team to more accurately define Trish's aggression as "Trish hits, kicks, or uses threatening language (e.g., I'm going to kill you!) with other students during recess when she does not get her way." Other examples of well-defined behavior include defining verbal off-task behavior as "Charles makes irrelevant and inappropriate comments during reading class (e.g., 'This is dumb' or 'Anyone could do that.')" and unproductive as "Jan leaves her assigned area without permission (e.g., walks around class, goes to reward area of class), completes only small portions of her independent work (e.g., 3 of 10 problems), and blurts out answers without raising her hand." While it may seem insignificant, experience tells us that it is useful to avoid "ing" words (e.g., hitting, swearing, pushing) because it is easier to separate and count the occurrence of one "hits," then another and another.

We know that students often evidence multiple rather than single behavior problems. When defining problem behavior, IEP teams may group several problem behaviors together. For example, Charles's call-outs, put-downs of classmates, and vulgar comments made about a lesson might be defined as disruptive acts. However, if an intervention plan fails to change these behaviors, it may be necessary for the team to separate, individually define, and assess each of these behaviors. Also, the team may need to prioritize the behaviors and decide which to address first (e.g., the most disruptive behavior, the easiest behavior to modify, a problem behavior that several students evidence).

3. Collect Information on Possible Functions of the Problem Behavior

By collecting and analyzing various kinds of information about the student behavior that significantly disrupts the teaching/learning process, school personnel are better able to select the most appropriate interventions. Information on the social/environmental context, antecedent events, consequent events (i.e., events preceding or following the behavior, respectively), and past events that may influence present behavior assists teams in predicting when, where, with whom, and under what conditions certain behavior is most and least likely to occur.

While IDEA calls for a functional behavioral assessment approach to determine the specific factors that contribute to problem behavior, it does not recommend specific assessment techniques or strategies. Experience tells us that information from a variety of assessment techniques should lead the IEP team to better understand the problem behavior. Depending on the nature of the behavior of concern, it is crucial that multiple means be used to collect information about the behavior. This might include a review of the student's records (educational and medical), along with an evaluation of samples of the student's academic products (e.g., in-class assignments, tests, homework). In addition, teams often use various observation procedures; questionnaires; and interviews with parents, teachers, and other school personnel (e.g., bus driver, cafeteria workers, playground monitors) as well as interviews with the student and perhaps seek medical consultation.

This should allow teams to collect enough information to understand the causes of the specific problem behavior.

Ways to Categorize Student Behavior

There are several ways the IEP team can categorize student behavior for purposes of behavioral intervention planning. One way is to characterize student behavior according to its function, separating actions that get something that is positively reinforcing for the student (e.g., peer attention, adult approval) from behavior intended to avoid (or escape) something that is aversive to the student (e.g., academic assignments that are too demanding, interactions with specific peers). For example, the IEP team may determine that Mandy makes wisecracks to her peers during class lectures because she finds their laughter rewarding. On the other hand, Bill, who is not prepared to participate in class discussion, may make wisecracks to be sent out of the room and thereby avoid being called upon to answer questions. Often, the student's misbehavior stems from multiple sources rather than a single source. Mandy's wisecracks, while resulting in peer attention, may also serve to draw attention away from the fact that she does not know the answer.

In addition to categorizing behavior by function, the team should attempt to distinguish between behaviors that stem from a *skill deficit* and those that result from a *performance deficit*. Skill deficits involve an inability to perform the appropriate behavior. For example, Bill does not have the sight word vocabulary necessary to read his social studies text aloud; Trish does not have the social problem-solving skills to interact appropriately with her peers on the playground.

Behavior that is linked to a performance deficit reflects the fact that the student is able to engage in the desired behavior but fails to do so when specific conditions are present. Performance deficits are manifested in various ways. For example, Jeff generally is able to control his temper when confronted by a peer ("What's your problem, jerk?"). Sometimes, however, outside factors influence his behavior, as when hunger, fatigue, or extreme frustration will serve to override self-control. In contrast, Juan may not be able to discriminate exactly what behavior is expected of him within a particular social context; Juan may not see any relationship between what is expected of him (e.g., to be verbally supportive of a classmate he really dislikes) and what he wants to get out of the situation. Or, Ali may be unable to deal with competing emotional responses (e.g., anger or frustration). While categorizing behavior by function is integral to functional behavioral assessment, recognition that problems can also relate to either skill or performance deficits or both can contribute significantly to development of a sound behavioral intervention plan. Finally, we also know that the way a student responds to a particular situation may influence the way the student behaves at other times.

Direct and Indirect Measures of Student Behavior

A functional behavioral assessment can be accomplished very quickly or it can be a relatively time-consuming process. In any event, it is a process that usually is best accomplished in stages. As discussed in Step 2, the functional behavioral assessment process may begin with a combination direct and indirect observations (e.g., using a scatterplot), along with discussion with adults who have witnessed the behavior (e.g., functional interviews). An examination of the information from these observations and interviews may suggest specific times and settings in which to conduct more thorough observations (e.g., during a specific academic subject or class period). These observations often begin with an ABC chart and/or scatterplot. Data collected using these instruments can be used to determine subsequent observations would lead the IEP team to develop a hypothesis statement regarding the factors that are most predictive of the student's behavior (e.g., a science lesson that requires lengthy silent reading of technical material). Both direct and indirect measures of student behavior are described more thoroughly in this section.

Direct assessment consists of observing repeatedly the problem behavior and describing the conditions that surround the behavior (its context). This context includes events that are *antecedent* to (i.e., that occur before)

and *consequent* to (i.e., that occur after) student behaviors of interest. There are several tools to select from when recording direct assessment data. Each has its particular strength. IEP teams should consider what they

want or need to know about the presenting behavior and select direct observation strategies and recording tools accordingly. A description of the most commonly used tools and the kinds of data they are useful in collecting follows. Samples of these forms are provided in the appendixes.

✓ Scatterplots. Often, initial observations can be accomplished through the use of a scatterplot. The purpose of a scatterplot is to identify patterns of behavior that relate to specific contextual conditions. A scatterplot is a chart or grid on which an observer records single events (e.g., number of student call-outs) or a series of events (e.g., teacher requests and student responses) that occur within a given context (e.g., during teacher-led reading instruction, at lunch, on the playground). Scatterplots take various forms, depending on the behavior of interest and its social and physical context. Some require observers to sequentially record various events (by category) (e.g., format of instruction, teacher behavior, student/peer responses, likely purpose of student reaction).

✓ ABC charts. Another way to observe student behavior is with an antecedent-behavior-consequence (ABC) chart (also referred to as an antecedent-response-consequence or ARC chart). This approach allows an observer to organize anecdotal or descriptive information on the student's interactions with other students and adults in such a way that patterns of behavior often become clear. A modified ABC chart might be individualized to contain several predetermined categories of teacher or peer antecedent behaviors, student responses, and consequent events, along with space for narrative recording of classroom observations.

✓ Using scatterplots and ABC charts together. When the ABC procedure is used, the student may be observed in settings and under conditions where the behavior is most likely and least likely to occur. A scatterplot to chart the relationship between specific types of instruction and the student's appropriate and inappropriate responses may also be developed.

A scatterplot can be developed to observe and record the relationship between a specific set of classroom variables (e.g., teacher lecture and student off-task behavior) or playground behaviors and to analyze a particular situation. For instance, out-of-seat behavior might be measured in one-minute intervals, while fights on the school bus may be recorded daily (e.g., critical incident reports). Furthermore, student behavior may be a function of specific teacher-pupil interactions (e.g., there may be a relationship between teacher reprimands and student outbursts). By observing and recording teacher-pupil interactions, we may get a better understanding of the relationship between teacher behavior and student behavior. The IEP team should keep in mind that some behavior is a by-product of specific interactions, with peers or with the teacher. For example, Mitch's non-compliant behavior is directly linked to teacher requests—the fewer the number of requests, the less likely it is that Mitch will be non-compliant. In this case, the IEP team should collect data on both teacher and pupil behavior. Both the ABC and scatterplot procedures are useful to identify environmental factors (e.g., seating arrangements), activities (e.g., independent work), and times of the day (e.g., mornings) that may influence student behavior.

Both ABC and scatterplot recording procedures are useful for identifying a student's problem behavior and the classroom conditions that may either trigger and/or maintain the behavior. It is also important to observe situations in which the student performs successfully so that IEP teams can compare conditions and identify situations that may evoke and maintain appropriate rather than inappropriate behavior (e.g., in science class as opposed to language arts class). In this way, it is possible to get a clearer picture of the problem behavior, determine the critical dimensions of the behavior, write a precise definition of the behavior, select the most appropriate assessment tools, and develop an effective intervention plan for changing the behavior.

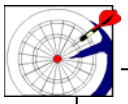
As we mentioned previously, multiple measures of student behavior and its social and environmental contexts usually produce more accurate information than a single measure. This is especially true if the problem behavior serves several functions (or purposes) that vary according to circumstance. In our earlier example of

Mandy's wisecracks, making inappropriate comments during class lectures may, in some instances, get her something (e.g., peer attention). In another classroom, the same behavior may help her to avoid something (e.g., being called on by the teacher). Information gathered through repeated observations of Mandy across settings will enable the IEP team to distinguish among the various purposes for her inappropriate remarks.

✓ Amount versus quality of behavior. Different types of behavior may require different data-collection techniques. For example, it may be most important to know how often a behavior occurs (e.g., call-outs); in this case, a system that yields the number of behaviors, or *frequency measure*, is appropriate. At other times, knowing how long the behavior occurs (e.g., out-of-seat) is more relevant, so that a *duration measure* becomes more useful. Furthermore, the usefulness of documenting the severity or intensity of a behavior may become evident when the IEP team tries to measure other disruptive behaviors. To say that Charles was upset two times yesterday may not reflect the fact that he succeeded in disrupting instruction in the entire middle school wing for a total of 45 minutes.

In some cases, it is useful to report the *severity* or *intensity* of a behavior using a rubric to capture the magnitude and/or amount of variation in the behavior. This is true with regard to both student and adult behavior. That is, a student tantrum may be minor or extreme and of short or long duration. Teacher reprimands might be insignificant except when they are delivered to the student repeatedly and loudly for an extended amount of time. The following rubric could be used to observe and record the severity of a student's disruptive behavior.

While demanding schedules and competing responsibilities make it tempting for school personnel to limit the number of observations, too few observations and too little data can lead to mistakes in identifying the likely reasons behind the problem behavior. Without an accurate assessment of the problem situation, the IEP team may develop a plan of intervention that does not address appropriately the real problem. Unfortunately, every time a plan fails to produce a positive outcome the problem behavior becomes more difficult to eliminate (i.e., treatment resistance).



Rubric for Rating the Severity of Disruptive Behavior

1. The behavior is confined only to the observed student. It may include such behaviors as refusing to follow directions, scowling, crossing arms, pouting, or muttering under his or her breath.
2. The behavior disrupts others in the student's immediate area. It may include slamming the textbook closed, dropping a book on the floor, name calling, or using inappropriate language.
3. The behavior disrupts everyone in the class. It may include throwing objects, yelling, openly defying teacher directions, or leaving the classroom.
4. The behavior disrupts other classrooms or common areas of the school. It may include throwing objects, yelling, openly defying school personnel's directions, or leaving the school campus.
5. The behavior causes or threatens to cause physical injury to the student or others. It may include displaying weapons or assaulting others.

Accuracy of Behavior Measurement

There are a number of ways in which accuracy in observing and recording student behavior and the social and environmental conditions that surround it can be jeopardized. Common problems include the following:

- A vague definition of the behavior (e.g., Charles sometimes gets upset)
- Untrained or inexperienced observers
- Difficulty observing multiple student behaviors (e.g., out of seat, angry remarks, and rude gestures)
- Potential observer bias regarding the student's behavior (e.g., the observer is subjected to repeated teacher complaints about the severity of the student's classroom conduct)
- Difficulty precisely capturing classroom interactions (e.g., observing a group learning activity in which students move about the classroom).

In the end, the usefulness of functional behavioral assessment depends on the skills and objectivity of the persons collecting the information. Accordingly, if the information about the behavior is to be helpful to IEP teams, it must be reliable and complete. Those conducting the functional behavioral assessment must: (a) clearly define the behavior of concern and regularly review that definition, (b) have sufficient training and practice to collect observation and interview data, (c) select the most appropriate assessment procedure(s) for both the behavior and the context, (d) collect information across time and settings using multiple strategies and individuals, and (e) conduct routine checks of the accuracy of observer scoring and recording procedures.

4. Analyze Information Using Triangulation and/or Problem Pathway Analysis

Once the team feels that enough information has been collected, the next step is to compare and analyze all the information that has been compiled. Such an analysis helps to determine which specific social, affective, and/or environmental conditions are associated with student behavior. For example, in recalling Vignette II, an analysis of Trish's behavior might lead the team to conclude that whenever Trish does not get her way she reacts by hitting someone. Analysis of the information gathered can be accomplished through techniques called *data triangulation* and *problem pathway analysis.*

Use of a *data triangulation chart* allows IEP teams to pull together and visually compare information collected from various sources (e.g., functional interviews, observations using a scatterplot, student questionnaires). Using a data triangulation chart, team members may literally spread information out on the table and attempt to identify possible patterns of behavior, conditions that trigger the behaviors, consequences that maintain or continue the behaviors, and finally, the likely functions the problem behavior serves for the student.

Problem behavior pathway charts also allow the team to organize information by recording it in columns under four headings: Setting Events, Antecedents, The Behavior Itself, and Likely Maintaining Consequences for the behavior of concern, and then identifying one or more classroom variables that should be changed. In analyzing information using these techniques, the IEP team can develop a hypothesis statement about the probable function of the behavior and identify one or more variables that may be starting or continuing the behavior (e.g., maintaining consequences of teacher behavior).

5. Generate a Hypothesis Statement Regarding Probable Function(s) of Problem Behavior

Using the information that emerges from data triangulation and/or pathway analysis, the team can develop a *hypothesis statement* regarding the likely function(s) of the student behavior. The hypothesis statement can then be used to predict the social and environmental conditions (the context) within which the behavior is most and least likely to occur. For instance, should a teacher report that Charles swears during reading class, the

reason for the behavior might be to (a) gain attention, (b) avoid instruction or a social interaction, (c) seek stimulation, (d) control a particular situation, or (e) some combination of these functions.

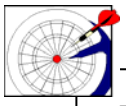
Only when the function(s) of the behavior is (are) known is it possible for the IEP team to establish an effective behavioral intervention and support plan that addresses Charles's needs. Following are several examples of hypothesis statements written in such a way that IEP teams can draw specific information from them to develop an individualized behavioral intervention plan.

- Charles disrupts reading class when he swears at the teacher when he is asked to read aloud. He is most likely to disrupt the class if he has not had breakfast or if there was a problem at the bus stop. Charles stops swearing after he is told to leave the group.

- When she does not get what she wants from her peers, Trish calls them names and hits them until they give in to her demands.

- Juan verbally threatens the teacher when he is given a math assignment that he sees as too lengthy and too difficult, but he stops after he is told to find something else to do.

The hypothesis statement is a concise summary of information collected during the assessment phase, a statement that explains or represents a "best guess" regarding the reason(s) for the behavior. A well-written hypothesis statement gives clear direction to the persons who are responsible for developing a behavioral intervention plan. IEP teams should keep in mind that there may not always be a simple linear relationship between a student's misbehavior and the social/environmental events that influence the behavior. In other words, team members may need to look closely and repeatedly before generating a hypothesis statement.



The hypothesis statement allows the IEP team to spell out a threefold contingency—under *X* conditions, the student does *Y*, in order to achieve *Z*—and to translate that knowledge into an individualized behavioral intervention plan, including what replacement behavior to teach.

6. Test the Hypothesis Statement Regarding the Function of the Problem Behavior

Because of the obvious difficulties associated with student behavior problems, you may be tempted to begin designing a behavioral intervention plan immediately. However, in most cases, it is important to take the time to make sure that the hypothesis is accurate. To do so, IEP team members should systematically manipulate certain instructional variables to determine whether the team's assumptions regarding the likely function of the behavior are correct. For instance, after collecting data, the team working with Charles may hypothesize that, during reading class, Charles swears at the teacher to escape an aversive academic situation. Thus, the teacher might change aspects of instruction to ensure that Charles gets work that is within his capability and is of interest to him. If these accommodations produce a positive change in Charles's behavior, then the team can assume that its hypothesis was correct and a behavioral intervention plan can be fully implemented. However, if Charles's behavior remains the same following this change in classroom conditions, a new hypothesis should be formulated.

A procedure known as *analog assessment* is one way to verify the IEP team's assumptions regarding the function of a student's behavior. Analog assessment involves use of a contrived set of controlled conditions to test the accuracy of the hypothesis. This procedure allows school personnel to substantiate that a relationship exists

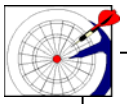
between specific classroom events (e.g., an aversive task) and the student's behavior (e.g., disruptive behavior). While this strategy has proven to be every effective in identifying the function(s) of a behavior, it is most useful in highly controlled settings with a limited number of students. A more realistic option is for teachers to manipulate specific instructional variables (e.g., complexity of learning tasks, oral or written student responses, giving the student a fixed-choice), introduce or withdraw variables (e.g., teacher attention, physical proximity), or make other changes in teaching/learning conditions assumed to trigger the occurrence of problem behavior (e.g., student seating arrangement, desk placement). In this way, the IEP team may be able to determine precisely the conditions under which the student is most and least likely to behave appropriately.

There are times when it is not realistic to make changes in classroom variables and observe their effects on student behavior. A prime example is when a student begins to engage in acting-out or aggressive behavior. In these instances, the IEP team should immediately develop and implement a behavioral intervention plan (before any disciplinary action is required). Then, the team should directly and continuously evaluate the impact of the plan against any available information about the level or severity of the behavior prior to the intervention. IEP teams can, however, continue to consider information collected through a combination of interviews and direct observation.

There may also be times when the IEP team cannot identify the exact mix of variables that cause the student to misbehave (e.g., composition of the learning group, the academic subject area, teacher expectations) or the exact amount of a specific setting or antecedent variable that serves to trigger the behavior (e.g., repeated peer criticism). Since problem behavior can have multiple sources that can change across time, the IEP team should continue to evaluate the student's behavior even after an initial intervention plan has been implemented. The nature and severity of the behavior will determine the necessary frequency and rigor of this ongoing process.

7. Develop and Implement Behavioral Intervention Plan

After collecting and analyzing enough information to identify the likely function of the student's behavior, the IEP team must develop (or revise) the student's positive behavioral intervention plan. This process should be integrated, as appropriate, throughout the process of developing, reviewing and, if necessary, revising the student's IEP. The behavioral intervention plan will include, when appropriate: (a) strategies, including positive behavioral interventions, strategies, and supports; (b) program modifications; and (c) supplementary aids and services that may be required to address the problem behavior (see Functions of Problem Behavior).



Functions of Problem Behavior

If we wish to gain insight into the functions of a student's behavior, we need only to examine the functions of our own behavior. Efforts to resolve conflict, express anxiety, gain access to a social group, maintain friendly relationships, avoid embarrassment, and please others are all completely normal behaviors. However, we all might remember situations in which we, or someone else, sought these outcomes through inappropriate means.

What distinguishes functional behavioral assessment is the shift in focus from the student's behaviors themselves to the need the student is trying to meet with those behaviors or the function(s) the behaviors serve. Here are some examples of functions that fall into five general categories:

- **The function is to get:**
  - social reinforcement (e.g., a response from an adult for calling out during a social studies lecture) or
  - tangible reinforcement (e.g., a classmate's workbook or access to a preferred activity).
- **The function is to escape or avoid:**
  - an aversive task (e.g., a difficult, boring, or lengthy assignment) or
  - situation (e.g., interaction with adults or certain other peers).
- **The function is both** (e.g., get the attention of classmates and escape from a boring lesson).
- **The function is to communicate something** (e.g., that the student does not understand the lesson or does not like having to answer questions in front of peers).
- **The function is to exert control over the situation** (e.g., the student seeks to undermine adult authority and manipulate a peer/peer interaction).

In addition, the student may find that engaging in a behavior to accomplish one purpose might lead to the realization of a completely different function. For example, a student who fights to try to escape teasing could discover that fighting itself is reinforcing (e.g., the physical excitement associated with fighting). These things should be considered when developing a behavioral intervention plan.

To fully understand the motivation behind student problem behavior, it is important to remember that problem behavior may be linked to skill deficits (e.g., Charles cannot do double-digit addition), performance deficits (e.g., Calvin has the ability but does not comply with the cafeteria rules), or both (e.g., Mary cannot read maps and is unsure how to ask for help during cooperative activities, although she is able to do so during independent seatwork). Our discussion of behavioral intervention plans and supports is based on these overlapping perspectives on problem behavior in school.

Intervention plans and strategies emphasizing skills students need in order to behave in a more appropriate manner or plans providing motivation to conform to required standards are more effective than plans that simply serve to *control* behavior. Interventions based on *control* often fail to generalize (i.e., continue to be

used for long periods of time, in many settings, and in a variety of situations); often they serve only to *suppress* behavior, which results in the child's meeting the same needs in other, usually equally inappropriate ways. Proactive, positive intervention plans that teach students new ways of behaving, on the other hand, address both the source of the problem, by serving the same function, and the problem itself.

ELEMENTS OF A BEHAVIORAL INTERVENTION PLAN

If an IEP team determines that a behavioral intervention plan is necessary, the team members generally use information about the problem behavior's function gathered from the functional behavioral assessment. The IEP team should include strategies to (a) teach the student more acceptable ways to get what he or she wants, (b) decrease future occurrences of the misbehavior, and (c) address any repeated episodes of the misbehavior. The resulting behavioral intervention plan usually will not consist of just one intervention; it will contain a number of interventions designed to address these three aspects of a student's problem behavior. The forms provided in Appendices B, C, D, E, and F can help guide IEP teams through the process of conducting a functional behavioral assessment and writing and implementing a positive behavioral intervention plan. We encourage you to refer to these forms as you read the following sections.

In developing a plan of intervention, it is important for the team to not concentrate only on decreasing or eliminating the problem behavior. It is essential that the team gives equal attention to teaching the student a more acceptable behavior, one that replaces the inappropriate behavior but serves the same function (e.g., ways to gain peer approval through positive social initiations, ways to seek teacher attention through nonverbal signals). Since most plans require multiple intervention options rather than a single intervention, IEP teams may want to consider one or more of the following:

- Teach more acceptable replacement behaviors that serve the same function as the inappropriate behavior, such as asking to be left alone or using conflict-resolution skills or alternative skills, such as self-management techniques, tolerating delay, or coping strategies

- Teach students to deal with *setting events* (the things that make the desired behavior more likely to occur), such as the physical arrangement of the classroom, management strategies, seating arrangements, or the sequence of academic instruction

- Manipulate the *antecedents* to the desired behavior (the things that happen before the behavior occurs), such as teacher instructions or directions or instructional materials

- Manipulate the *consequences* of the desired behavior (the things that happen after the behavior occurs), such as precise praise or feedback--keeping in mind the principles of shaping and reinforcing incompatible behaviors

- Implement changes to the classroom curriculum and/or instructional strategies; for example, providing multilevel instruction or encouraging oral rather than written responses

- Include intervention components that offer reinforcement for appropriate behavior, such as student performance contracts or group motivational strategies.

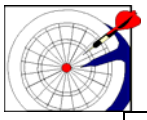
Using these strategies, school personnel can develop a plan to both teach and support replacement behaviors that serve the same function as the current problem behavior. At the same time, incorporating these techniques into the behavioral intervention plan can yield interventions that decrease or eliminate opportunities for the student to engage in the inappropriate behavior. For example, a student may be physically aggressive at recess because he or she believes violence is the best way to end a confrontational situation and that such behaviors help accomplish his or her goals. However, when taught to use problem-solving skills (e.g., self-control or

conflict resolution) to end a confrontational situation *and* accomplish his or her goal, the student may be more likely to deal with volatile situations in a nonviolent manner (e.g., defusing the situation by avoiding threatening or provocative remarks or behavior).

In the next section, we discuss strategies to address different functions of a student's behavior and how to select the appropriate interventions, skill deficits and performance deficits, student supports, and reinforcement considerations and procedures. We also address special considerations, such as the use of punishment and emergency/crisis plans, all of which the IEP team should know about as it develops and implements the behavioral intervention plan.

Strategies to Address Different Functions of a Student's Behavior

As we described previously, students' misbehavior often is motivated by their desire to get something or to escape or avoid something. These motivations can be external, internal, or a combination of both. For example, Patrick might grab a basketball in order to get a chance to play with his peers (external or "public"), or Heather might study her vocabulary list so she will get a good grade (external) and a feeling of success (internal or "private"). Mike might complain of being sick so he can avoid giving his oral report (external) and the bad feeling that he gets when he has to speak in front of a group (internal). And Elsa neglects to do her homework so she can stay in at recess and avoid getting beat up on the playground (external). It is shortsighted to develop and intervention that focuses entirely on external or observable behavior when we know how powerful internal or non-observable forces can be with regard to both acceptable and unacceptable behavior. Constructing a table like the one that follows is often helpful in determining the possible motivation for a student's behaviors.



	Internal	External
Obtain Something		
Avoid Something		

Even when behaviors look the same, we may need different interventions depending on the motivation behind the behavior. In this section, we use two examples to illustrate the kinds of strategies IEP teams can use to develop interventions that address attention-seeking behavior and escape-motivated behavior. Strategies for Dealing with Attention-Seeking Behavior

The desire for attention is a common reason given for student misbehavior; however, attention is often a by-product of misbehavior and not the primary function. Students seldom seek attention that could include ridicule, abuse, and assault. It is more likely that students want adults and peers to like them, to be attentive, and to value them and their work.

Most teachers can attest to the fact that students sometimes use inappropriate or problem behavior to get the attention of their teacher and/or peers. These behaviors usually stem from the notion that they are not likely to get attention any other way. Common examples include calling out, swearing, yelling at a classmate or teacher, having a tantrum, and ignoring an adult request. Interventions that focus on teaching the student appropriate ways to get attention usually are successful in ending these inappropriate behaviors. For example, the student might be taught various ways to obtain positive peer social interactions or get a teacher's verbal praise. Once the conditions under which the behavior occurs have been identified, role-play exercises might be introduced to teach the student appropriate things to say (e.g., "I'm really stuck on this problem."). It is important to remember that understanding the amount of time students will wait for the attention they need is critical and should be a major consideration when developing such a plan. Students may need to be systematically taught to tolerate longer and longer wait times. Other intervention options include giving teacher attention following appropriate student behavior and taking away attention (e.g., ignoring, placing a student in timeout, assuming the teacher can get the student into timeout without drawing the attention of peers) following inappropriate behavior. Finally, for some students, any kind of attention is better then no attention. Reprimanding students usually is ineffective in dealing with attention-seeking behavior, probably because it is a form of attention.

A more effective intervention plan for attention-seeking behavior combines strategies to (a) keep the student from engaging in the original problem or inappropriate behavior (e.g., verbal threats); (b) teach replacement behavior; (c) ensure that the student gets enough opportunities to engage in the new replacement behavior (e.g., request assistance); and (d) offer opportunities for the student to be reinforced for the new behavior (e.g., verbal praise from adults or peers). For the reinforcement to work, it has to be available more often and be a better pay-off than the pay-off from the problem behavior. In a later section, we discuss reinforcement of student behavior more fully.

Strategies for Dealing with Escape-Motivated Behavior

Inappropriate or problem behavior often stems from a student's need either to escape or avoid an unpleasant task or situation or to escape *to* something, such as a desired activity or location. Examples include the following:

- Difficult, irrelevant, lengthy, or unclear classroom assignments
- Working in groups with others that they do not like or fear
- Negative peer or adult interactions
- Wanting to be removed from class to be with friends in another class.

Behavior that the student uses to avoid or escape a difficult academic task might be addressed by teaching the student a socially acceptable escape behavior (e.g., asking for help, which must be available once the student asks for it). If the student is unable to complete the assignment because he or she does not have the skills necessary to do so, the original assignment should be replaced with one that is more appropriate (i.e., within the student's skill level), or strategies and supports should be provided to assist the student (e.g., direct instruction, manipulatives, work with peers).

The IEP team might address behavior that is meant to escape an unpleasant social interaction with an adult by allowing the student to leave only after he or she has made an acceptable bid to leave that situation (e.g., "I want to be by myself for awhile."). Finally, it may be useful to devise a multi-step plan in which the student is taught and encouraged to make an appropriate verbal request (e.g., ask to be excused for short periods of time during difficult math assignments). An incentive can be used to reward the student for gradually spending more time at the undesirable task, thereby accepting "successive approximations" of the desired behavior. It is important to keep in mind that this approach would be both time-limited and part of a larger plan to promote—through a step-by-step approach—the desired student behavior.

Other interventions for dealing with escape-motivated behavior include the following:

- Placing some kind of demand on the student (e.g., using the correct behavior to ask for additional help or to be temporarily excused) when facing a frustrating task or difficult situation
- Using signal responses (e.g., the teacher signals the student to use a predetermined alternative behavior)
- Making curricular accommodations or instructional modifications to boost student interest in and/or ability to successfully complete the assignment.

While timeout often has been used as a consequence for escape-motivated behaviors, it might be reinforcing because it allows the student to escape or avoid the situation. Accordingly, timeout may actually increase rather than decrease the inappropriate behavior.

Sometimes, student noncompliance stems from a need to exert control over a situation—to pressure others to "give up" or "back off," as when a teacher makes academic demands that the student sees as too difficult. Recognizing that the function of the student's behavior is to escape from this uncomfortable situation by controlling it, the teacher might begin by modifying the assignment, as well as the manner with which he or she interacts with the student regarding the assignment.

CASE STUDY

What happens if you discover that the same behavior occurs in different students for different reasons? It is unlikely that there will be only one solution that works for both students. This highlights the point that the interventions the IEP team chooses need to be carefully aligned with the results of the functional behavioral assessment. When this alignment occurs, the desired behaviors that a student will be taught or encouraged to use will fulfill the same function as the inappropriate behavior, yielding more positive behavioral outcomes. Following is an illustration:

	Function	Behavior
Susan	Wishes to avoid looking dumb in front of others	Ignores teacher requests to participate in a group discussion by looking away and failing to respond
Larry	Wants to be with his friends who are in another group	Ignores teacher requests to participate in a group discussion by looking away and failing to respond

Choosing from the following interventions, which is likely an inappropriate intervention for each student?

(a) Assigning the student to be a discussion leader
(b) Allowing the student to pick any discussion group
(c) Sending the student to timeout.

Assigning Susan to be a discussion leader would exaggerate her fear and probably escalate her attempts to escape. Allowing group selection would not work, although allowing her to select the topic might. Timeout, for Susan, would meet her function, but probably in a punitive way. In contrast to Susan, Larry would like to pick his own group to be with his friends; therefore, that choice would reinforce his ignoring behavior. Being appointed a discussion leader could go either way, depending on the group he was leading. Timeout might reduce the behavior, but it would not be a proactive solution.

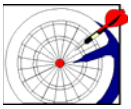
As we can see, the two students are engaging in the same behavior for different reasons, so there cannot be a single intervention that works for any one behavior regardless of the student. Having knowledge of the function of the behavior tells us that we may need to accommodate Susan by placing her in groups that discuss topics she knows about. Meanwhile, Larry needs to be taught the instructional, not the social, value of group discussions. The key to these intervention decisions is that IEP teams must learn to align interventions with assessment information about the function of behavior. This means that teacher actions, instructional materials, and monitoring systems should all complement the desired learning outcome as well. This will require IEP teams to develop a plan that emphasizes high-quality instruction rather than behavioral control.

Skill Deficits and Performance Deficits

Sometimes, a student does not perform the desired appropriate behavior because he or she does not know how to do it (a skill deficit). Other times, a student may have the skills needed to perform the appropriate behavior but either chooses not to do so or, for reasons such as anxiety, anger, frustration, or a medical condition, cannot perform the behavior (a performance deficit). It also is possible that a student has both a skill *and* a performance deficit. In other instances, outside factors can negatively effect student behavior, such as when a student has not had enough to eat, enough sleep, or has been confronted with a highly charged emotional situation—which might diminish a student's ability to cope with a particular problem. This section describes strategies that can be considered for addressing these deficits.

Addressing Skill Deficits: Working with Students Who Lack Skills

A functional behavioral assessment might indicate that the student engages in the inappropriate behavior because she or he lacks the appropriate alternative skills and/or believes the inappropriate behavior is effective in getting what she or he wants (e.g., allows the student to escape or avoid an unpleasant task or situation). If the team concludes that the student does not know what behaviors are expected, an intervention plan might be developed to teach the student to sort positive and negative examples of what is expected. A plan should also include the supports, aids, strategies, and modifications necessary to accomplish that instruction. If the student does not know *how* to perform the expected behavior, the intervention plan should include instruction to teach the student the skills. Sometimes, the plan may require teaching both behavioral and cognitive skills and may call for a team member to conduct a task analysis (i.e., break down the skill into its component parts) of the individual behaviors that make up the skill. Regular behavior management techniques may not be appropriate.



Breaking Down Skills into their Components

If the student is to be taught to think through and solve social problems, the individual skills may include the following components:

- Recognize the social problem
- Determine whether or not the problem requires action
- Observe what is going on and ask
  - "What do the participants want?"
  - "What is the conflict?"
  - "How might the conflict be resolved?"
- Develop a plan to solve the problem
- Evaluate the plan by judging its potential for success
- Implement the plan
- Monitor the impact of the plan.

In other instances, a student may not be able to respond appropriately to the aggressive verbal behavior of a classmate. The student may need to be taught to recognize those words (or actions) that usually lead to aggression and to discern whether the behavior is or is not provoked by the student. Then, a series of role-play sessions might teach the student ways to defuse the situation (e.g., avoid critical remarks, put-downs, or laughing at the other student), along with when to walk away or seek assistance from peers or adults. For example, Helen may be able to read a problem situation accurately, but lacks the impulse control to self-regulate her behavior and respond appropriately. Overt teacher modeling of self-control, along with guided and independent practice (behavioral rehearsal) and individual or small-group discussion of "when and how to" strategies may prove effective. Other options include instruction in the use of mnemonic devices that enable teachers to directly and systematically teach Helen a step-by-step approach to handling a problem situation in a positive manner (e.g., Stop, Size-up the Situation, Sort out possible responses, Try it out).

Addressing Performance Deficits: Working with Students Who Have Skills but Do Not Use Them

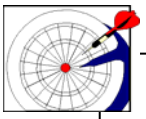
The IEP team may find that the student knows the skills necessary to perform the behavior, but does not use them consistently. In that case, the intervention plan should include techniques, strategies, and supports designed to increase the student's use of the behavior. The functional assessment may show that the student is engaging in the problem behavior because he or she believes that this behavior is more desirable than the alternative appropriate behavior. In that case, the intervention plan should include techniques for addressing that belief. For example, a student might think that acting quickly is best because she values resolution. This belief might be countered by generating a list of additional problems that a faulty but quick solution can produce (e.g., dismissal from an athletic team, school club, parental grounding, or loss of various privileges).

Sometimes, a student does not perform the behavior simply because he or she sees no good reason to do so. For instance, if Trish can avoid feeling ridiculed by threatening or hitting her classmates on the playground, she may not see the advantage of interacting positively with others. Therefore, the behavioral intervention plan may include strategies to increase her use of existing skills to interact appropriately with peers. Finally, because of her aggressive behavior, it may be necessary to prompt classmates to initiate play with Trish and to reinforce both Trish and her classmates for engaging in positive social exchanges.

Selecting and Implementing Interventions

As we mentioned in our discussion on creating behavioral intervention plans, IEP teams draw upon information collected through the functional assessment process to develop individualized plans. Next, this information is analyzed and possible interventions are identified. Then, the IEP team needs to select options for the behavioral intervention plan and consider the most effective method of implementation. Increasingly, school personnel are being asked to demonstrate a clear relationship between the function of the behavior and the way in which the team has chosen to deal with it.

As a general rule, IEP teams will stay with a plan for at least five to seven lessons, to distinguish between behavior changes stemming from the novelty of any change in classroom conditions and those changes related specifically to the intervention. It is important to remember that the inappropriate behavior has probably served the student well for some time and that it will be resistant to change. Similarly, just about any behavior (appropriate or inappropriate) that is repeated over time comes more easily and requires less and less thought—in other words, sometimes, "practice makes imperfect". This explains why it can be so frustrating to talk with a student about a more appropriate way to respond to a particular situation only to see that student engage in the exact same (inappropriate) behavior again and again. Just because a student is able to tell us what constitutes acceptable behavior, it does not always mean that they can readily engage in it; affect is stronger than cognition.



Guidelines for Selecting Intervention Options

Once some ideas about positive behavioral interventions have been generated for a student's behavioral intervention plan, the IEP team should consider the following questions:

- Which intervention aligns with the function of the behavior?
- Which intervention is appropriate given the student's need and current levels of performance?
- Which intervention directly teaches the target behavior?
- Which is the least intrusive and least complex intervention likely to produce positive changes in student behavior?
- Which aligned intervention (or combination of interventions) is most likely to positively change the student's behavior quickly and easily?
- Which aligned intervention (or combination of interventions) is least likely to produce negative side effects?
- Which intervention has shown evidence of effectiveness with the targeted behavior?
- Which intervention is most acceptable to the team member(s) responsible for Implementing the plan?
- Which intervention is most likely to be acceptable to the student?
- Which intervention is most likely to benefit other students?
- Which intervention is most likely to promote a replacement behavior that will occur and be reinforced in the natural environment?
- For which intervention is there the most system-wide support?

Putting Interventions into Routine Contexts

Increasingly, IEP teams are learning that incorporating interventions into daily instruction is an effective way to (a) teach students appropriate behavior before problems arise and (b) promote replacement behaviors. A technique known as *curricular integration* is useful when teaching students a range of academic and nonacademic skills. The concept of curricular integration is based on the premise that a skill is more likely to be learned when taught in the context in which it is to be used. The technique involves integrating positive strategies for changing problem behavior into the existing classroom curriculum. For instance, instruction of social skills and problem-solving strategies might be incorporated into a history lesson by means of a group activity designed to solve historic problems in nonviolent ways (e.g., Boston Tea Party). Well-structured cooperative learning lessons are one way to create opportunities to teach and reinforce a wide range of behavioral objectives while also addressing academic objectives.

Student Supports as Part of the Behavioral Intervention Plan

A commonly overlooked provision in Federal legislation that relates to behavioral intervention plans is the concept of *supports.* In some cases, an intervention plan is incomplete unless additional supports are provided to help students use appropriate behavior. Although supports and the interventions that have been discussed work in tandem with one another, supports can be thought of differently than interventions. Supports generally are designed to address factors *beyond* the immediate context in which the inappropriate behavior occurs. The student, for example, may benefit from work with school personnel, such as counselors, school psychologists, or school social workers, to help him or her address academic or personal issues that may contribute to the problem behavior. Other people who may provide sources of support include the following:

- *Peers,* who may provide academic or behavioral support through tutoring or conflict-resolution activities, thereby fulfilling the student's need for attention in appropriate ways
- *Families,* who may provide support by, for example, setting up a homework center in the home and developing a homework schedule or by positively reinforcing their child for appropriate behavior in school
- *Teachers and paraprofessionals,* who may provide both academic supports and curricular modifications to address and decrease a student's desire to avoid academically challenging situations
- *Language specialists,* who are able to increase a child's expressive and receptive language skills, thereby providing the child with alternative ways to respond to stressful situations
- *Other school staff,* including custodians, cafeteria workers, or volunteers with whom students sometimes feel more comfortable
- *Community agency service providers,* including mental health, juvenile justice, Big Brother or Sister organizations, or other agency personnel who are involved in providing broad-based and long-term student and family intervention and support
- *Other community organizations,* such as churches, religious groups, cultural/ethnic organizations, YMCA or YWCA, recreation centers, and others, which can be quite influential and therapeutic.

It is important to realize that in some instances, for biological or other reasons, a student may not be able to control his or her behavior without supports. Although it is never the place of the IEP team to make medical diagnoses, it is appropriate for the team to make referrals and to obtain medical evaluations so that all support options can be considered.

Reinforcement of Appropriate Student Behavior

A critical component of the intervention plan is the pattern of reinforcement for using the appropriate replacement behavior selected by the IEP team. The team can use information that was collected during the functional behavioral assessment (i.e., baseline data) to determine the frequency with which the problem

behavior occurred and was reinforced. Using this information, the IEP team can develop a plan whereby the student is reinforced far more often for engaging in the replacement behavior than he or she was for the problem behavior. Finally, it is important to identify both the source of the current reinforcement (e.g., peer pressure, desire to "save-face" with classmates) and the degree to which it influences a student's behavior. Drawing on that information, a team is more likely to develop an intervention plan that is powerful enough to positively influence a student's behavior.

As a general rule, school personnel should reinforce appropriate behavior at least twice as often as they reinforced the problem behavior. Let us assume that data collected on Charles indicate that, on average, he disturbs instruction two times during each 55-minute math class. This indicates that Charles is being reinforced for his inappropriate behavior about every 30 minutes, so his behavior intervention plan should call for a rearrangement of his instructional environment so that Charles has an opportunity to engage in and be positively reinforced for appropriate behavior at least every 15 minutes. It is important that the IEP team carefully regulate the amount of time between reinforcers. Charles should neither get too much reinforcement nor wait too long for reinforcement. Finally, the team should make sure the academic expectations are consistent with his skill levels so he can be successful academically as well as behaviorally.

When trying to determine the best reinforcer to use, knowledge of student preferences and strengths is useful in developing a plan. We might ask a student what types of things he or she likes (e.g., time on the computer, being allowed to run errands), watch for and record any preferred activities, or use an informal survey of reinforcement preferences. It is important to be consistent in the frequency of the delivery of the reinforcer, but it is also good to vary the reinforcers routinely, so that the student does not tire or become bored with a particular reinforcer. The amount of reinforcement, in relationship to the amount of effort required of the student to get it, is also an important variable for the IEP team to consider when developing a behavioral intervention plan.

In some cases, it may be necessary to initially offer a student noncontingent access to a reinforcer (e.g., with no strings attached), especially if the reinforcer is something the student has never had before. Called *reinforcer sampling*, this is one way to let the student know that it is reinforcing. For example, we might allow a student to participate in a highly preferred activity with a classmate (e.g., a computer-based learning activity). If the student enjoys it, we would later make access to that activity dependent on the student's engaging in the desired behavior.

Sometimes, the desired response may call for too dramatic a change in the student's behavior (i.e., a change the student is unable and/or unwilling to make all at once). If that is the case, the IEP team will need to accept *successive approximations* or gradual changes toward the desired behavior. For example, John may not be able to handle the pressure that stems from a highly complex academic assignment—especially when he has had too little sleep. A first step might be to teach John to ask politely to be excused temporarily from a particular activity (i.e., replacement behavior that achieves the same outcome as the problem behavior). However, the long-term plan would be for the student to develop increased self-control, to master and complete complex academic assignments, and to solicit peer support for desired behaviors. In this case, we would also encourage the family to find ways for John to get more sleep.

A final consideration in using reinforcers is the process of *fading* or gradually replacing extrinsic rewards with more natural or intrinsic rewards on a realistic or natural time schedule. Of course, fading should occur only after the student has repeatedly shown an increased ability and willingness to engage in the desired behavior. The process of fading may be easier if teachers pair the extrinsic reward with an intrinsic reward. For example, when rewarding David with points for completing a homework assignment, the paraprofessional also could say, "David, you've finished all your homework this week, and your class participation has increased because you are better prepared. You must be very proud of yourself for the hard work you have done."

Ways to Maintain Positive Changes in Student Behavior

The success of any behavioral intervention plan rests on the willingness and ability of the student to continue to use the appropriate behavior without excessive outside support (i.e., the intervention). The most basic way to ensure maintenance of behavior change is to be sure that the intervention *teaches* the student a set of worthwhile skills. This will require the IEP team to include strategies in the behavioral intervention plan to teach the student in such a way that promotes the *maintenance* (i.e., lasting over time, even when the extrinsic reinforcers are faded) and *generalization* (i.e., using the behavior in other appropriate settings) of replacement behaviors. One strategy for doing this is to restructure the social environment to make use of the power of peer relationships to promote positive behavior. Many teachers have taught their students to encourage or reinforce the appropriate behavior of a classmate and to ignore or walk away from negative provocations of their classmates. Positive behaviors are then maintained through the natural consequences of having and being with friends. Once peers have been taught to serve in the role of behavior change agent, simply being in the physical presence of classmates may be enough to encourage the student to behave more appropriately. However, before training classmates to serve in this role, it may be necessary to gain parental approval.

Another practical and proven effective way to promote long-lasting changes in student behavior is to use strategies based on *cognitive mediation* (i.e., thinking through a situation before acting on emotion) and *self-management* (i.e., using techniques to control one's own feelings and behavior, such as anxiety and angry responses). For example, we might teach students to apply various problem-solving strategies by engaging in "positive self-talk" (e.g., telling themselves, "I know how to get out of this argument without using my fists.") or "self-cueing" (e.g., the student recognizes that her jaw is clenched, she is getting upset, and she needs to ask to be excused). Students also can be taught to:

- Self-monitor—count the frequency or measure the duration of their own behavior.
- Self-evaluate—compare the change in their behavior to a certain standard to determine whether or not they are making progress.
- Self-reinforce—give themselves rewards when their behavior has reached a predetermined criterion.

For example, someone might teach Gloria to count and record the number of times she appropriately raises her hand and waits to be called on during class discussion. She can then determine whether she has met the daily criteria of at least three hand-raises. Next, she can look at her record of hand-raises for the week, determine if she is making progress toward her goal, and collect points to use for free time later in the week.

Some interventions should be implemented indefinitely, while eventually others will need to stop. For instance, Bruce is learning to use social problem-solving skills instead of getting into fights on the playground or in the hallway (an intervention that we hope Bruce will use forever). He is learning to ask for adult support when he feels like he might get into a fight, and his team has decided that he can earn special recognition when he seeks help appropriately rather than fighting (an intervention that must end at some point).

Knowing that Bruce cannot get points for the rest of his life, the team has decided to use the technique of *fading* once he has reached criterion. Bruce's teachers will gradually decrease the use of points or other tangible rewards when he asks for help instead of fighting. This could be done in several ways. First, his teacher could increase the amount of time Bruce has to remain fight-free to receive a reward. For example, initially he may receive rewards daily, but as he reaches criterion it could be increased to every other day, then once a week, and so on. Another way to fade the intervention is for his teacher to award him fewer points until he is receiving no points at all. For instance, Bruce initially could earn 50 points per day for not fighting. This could be reduced to 40, then 30, and so on until he earns no points at all. It is important to note that the social reinforcement should continue and eventually replace the tangible rewards completely. If this process is gradual and Bruce realizes the advantages of using appropriate social problem solving, remaining fight-free will become intrinsically rewarding to him.

The success of these strategies may depend on providing the student with periodic "booster" training which consists of a scaled down version of the original intervention plan. Some students also may need to receive self-advocacy training to teach them how to appropriately ask for positive recognition or appropriately call attention to positive changes in their behavior ("see, I've completed the entire assignment"; "I've not called out once today"). This is especially important for students who have such bad reputations that adults and peers do not recognize when their behaviors are changing. Finally, school personnel can support changes in student performance by accepting "just noticeable differences," or incremental changes that reflect the fact that the student is taking positive steps toward the desired goal.

Special Considerations

IEP teams may need to consider two more things when creating a positive behavioral intervention plan. One is understanding the use of punishment as an intervention into problem behavior. The second is considering a crisis/emergency component of the plan if it seems warranted. Both are discussed below.

Use of Punishment as an Intervention

Many professionals and professional organizations agree that it is usually ineffective and often unethical to use aversive techniques (e.g., corporal punishment) to control student behavior. Punishments such as suspension should be considered only in extreme cases when the student's behavior severely endangers his or her safety or the safety of others. In addition, IEP teams should try every possible positive intervention (for an appropriate length of time, remembering that behavior may get worse before it gets better) before considering punishment. If all options prove ineffective, and the student's behavior severely limits his or her learning or socialization or that of others, then a more aversive intervention might be necessary to reduce the behavior. It is important to consider all positive interventions *before* considering punishment as an option, because punishment often makes behavior worse. Furthermore, punishment does not address the function of the behavior, so there is no generalization of the effect of punishment. Punishment may also engage the student (and possibly the teacher) in a revenge-seeking cycle or increase avoidance behaviors. Finally, punishment is only punishment if it serves to reduce the targeted behavior.

When the IEP team decides to introduce punishment as part of an intervention, the team should develop a plan to use positive interventions concurrently with punishment and/or a timetable to return to using positive interventions as soon as possible. Use of punishment may necessitate the development of a crisis or emergency component to the behavioral intervention plan as well.

Crisis or Emergency Component of a Behavioral Intervention Plan

In some cases, the IEP team may need to develop a crisis or emergency plan to address a severe or dangerous situation. That plan would be a part of the student's behavioral intervention plan. The crisis or emergency plan would still emphasize the use of proactive and positive interventions to teach the student alternative skills, even in the midst of a crisis or emergency. A crisis can be defined as a situation that requires an immediate, more intrusive or restrictive intervention to (a) protect the student or others from serious injury, (b) safeguard physical property, and/or (c) deal with acute disturbance of the teaching/learning process.

We recommend that teams spell out the conditions under which a crisis or emergency plan can be used. This plan also should include frequent evaluations to limit the duration of any intervention that does not produce positive changes in behavior and a schedule for phasing out the plan. IEP teams also should carefully monitor the plan and make sure it is in compliance with any district policies or procedures regarding the use of behavior-reduction strategies. Crisis or emergency steps are appropriate only when less intrusive or restrictive interventions have been unsuccessful. As with all components of the behavior intervention plan, parental input and approval should be obtained before setting up a crisis or emergency plan.

If a crisis or emergency plan is introduced, the team should take steps to minimize and control the amount of time necessary to manage the behavior. The crisis or emergency interventions should be replaced with less intrusive and intensive intervention options as soon as possible. Parents, guardians, and school personnel should be notified regarding any incident that requires the use of the emergency plan. A thorough evaluation should be part of the plan so that the team can assess both its impact and possible negative spillover effects. Finally, following an incident, the team should write an emergency or crisis report that includes ways to *prevent* future occurrences of the behavior.

As you consider all of these elements of a behavioral intervention plan (i.e., strategies to address different functions of behavior, skill and performance deficits, interventions and supports, reinforcement, and special considerations), we encourage you to refer to the sample forms included in the Appendices.

8. Monitor the Faithfulness of Implementation of the Plan

It is good practice for the IEP team to include two evaluation procedures in the behavioral intervention plan. One evaluation procedure should be designed to monitor the consistency and accuracy with which the intervention plan is implemented. This will be easier if the team precisely spells out the various components of the intervention plan, along with the individuals responsible for implementing each component. The team then can create a direct observation system, a self-check or checklist to correspond with each component. Another option is to develop written scripts or lists that detail the responsibilities of each person involved in implementation of the plan. The script might specify both verbal and nonverbal responses organized according to setting events, antecedent events, and consequent events. In either case, monitoring should occur about every 3 to 5 days to assess the faithfulness with which the plan is implemented. The team should collect information to show that each member has carried out their respective roles and responsibilities regarding a plan of intervention—both because courts now require it and because it is important information with which to judge the overall effectiveness of an intervention.

9. Evaluate the Effectiveness of the Behavioral Intervention Plan

The second evaluation procedure is one that is aligned with the function of the behavior and designed to accurately measure changes in the behavior itself. For example, the IEP team should measure the behavior prior to starting the intervention (baseline). This is done during the direct observation stage of conducting a functional behavioral assessment. The team should then continue to measure the behavior (e.g., direct classroom observation of Charles' disruptive acts) once the intervention has been implemented. These progress checks need not be as detailed as the initial functional behavioral assessment observations. However, they should be sufficiently detailed to produce enough information for the IEP team to begin to evaluate the impact of the intervention plan. The team does this by using the baseline information as a standard against which to judge subsequent changes in student behavior as measured through progress checks. Team members may see positive changes, negative changes, or no changes at all. Data on student behavior should be collected and analyzed about every 2 to 3 days; more complex or intrusive intervention plans may necessitate more frequent measurement.

When a severe problem behavior is resistant to change, more complex, intrusive intervention packages may be required. The more complicated the intervention plan, the more likely it is that its impact will go beyond the behaviors the IEP team has identified for intervention. That is, the plan may have an effect on non-targeted behavior (e.g., it could "spill over" and reduce or eliminate other inappropriate or appropriate behaviors). For this reason, it may be necessary to collect information on non-targeted behavior (e.g., positive social interactions with classmates and adults, appropriate classroom behavior). Throughout this process, the IEP team must determine

when reassessment will take place and specify the ultimate goal of the behavior change. Finally, if a student already has a behavioral intervention plan, the IEP team may simply elect to review the plan and modify it.

10. Modify the Behavioral Intervention Plan

Federal legislation stipulates that a plan of intervention must be reviewed at least annually; however, to be effective, the plan should be reevaluated whenever any member of the student's IEP team feels that a review is necessary. Circumstances that may warrant such a review include the following:

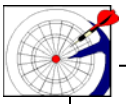
- The data show that the student has reached his or her behavioral goals and objectives, and new goals and objectives need to be established
- The situation has changed and the interventions no longer address the current needs of the student
- There is a change in placement
- The data show that the original behavioral intervention plan is not producing positive changes in the student's behavior.

In the end, the process of functional behavioral assessment is complete only when the IEP team produces positive behavioral changes in student performance.

Obstacles to Effective Functional Behavioral Assessment and Behavioral Intervention Plans and Supports

Before concluding, we would like to share 10 common obstacles to the development and use of behavioral intervention plans and supports (see box on next page). School personnel may need to address one or more of these obstacles to ensure the full and complete implementation of a positive behavioral intervention plan and supports. We encourage IEP teams to keep these and other possible obstacles in mind when grappling with the sometimes time-consuming and often complex problem-solving process of conducting a functional behavioral assessment and developing a positive behavioral intervention plan and supports.

At a more basic level, IEP teams can be frustrated in attempts to conduct and interpret a functional behavioral assessment because of student absences due to illness, suspension, or expulsion; an inability to meet with key team members or parents; school holidays or school cancellation due to bad weather; and so on.



Obstacles to Effective Functional Behavioral Assessment and Behavioral Intervention Plans and Supports

1. A definition of the behavior(s) of concern that is too vague.
2. Incomplete measurement/data collection regarding the behavior(s) of concern and the interventions selected.
3. Incorrect interpretation of the functional assessment data collected by the IEP team or others.
4. Inappropriate intervention (e.g., too weak to deal with the complexity or magnitude of the behavior problem; not aligned with the assessment data).
5. Inconsistent or incorrect application of one or more parts of the intervention plan.
6. Failure to adequately monitor the implementation of the intervention plan or to adjust the intervention plan over time, as needed, based on ongoing monitoring and evaluation, and to adequately evaluate the impact of the intervention plan.
7. Inadequate system-wide support to avoid future episodes of the behavior problem (e.g., too many initiatives or competing building-level priorities that may interfere with the time and commitment it takes to develop and implement behavioral intervention plans).
8. Targeting behavior that is an issue of tolerance rather than being something that distracts the student or others (e.g., a specific minor behavior, such as doodling).
9. Lack of teacher skills and support necessary to teach behavioral skills.
10. Failure to consider environmental issues, cultural norms, or psychiatric issues/mental illness outside of the school/classroom environment that are impacting the student's behavior.

Throughout our discussion, we have emphasized that IEP teams should develop multi-step programs that capitalize on existing student skills and that knowledge of the functions of the original misbehavior can help us to select more appropriate alternative behavior. When this is done, emphasis is on building new skills rather than on simply eliminating student misbehavior. Again, it is important to understand that the problem behavior may have worked very well for the student for some time. For this reason, patience is essential to implementing successful behavioral intervention plans and supports.

Conclusion

Across the country, school personnel are working to better understand the exact conditions under which to implement the various provisions of IDEA 1997 and IDEIA 2004, including functional behavioral assessment. Educators and others are looking for ways to transform a process of proven clinical success into high-quality practices that can be applied realistically and effectively in classroom situations. An increasing number of IEP teams are developing intervention plans that are both effective and efficient in producing positive academic and behavioral changes for students with and without disabilities. Many times, these interventions flow from either an informal or a formal functional assessment of the behavior and its context(s). At the same time, school personnel are exploring ways to promote long-term classroom-level and building-level changes that increase the range of academic and behavioral supports for all students. In fact, Effective Schoolwide Discipline is in place in a growing number of Virginia schools in which administrators, faculty, and staff are changing both the structure and the culture of schools and witnessing dramatic improvements in student behavior. Finally, this multi-tiered model is consistent with an emerging Response to Intervention (RtI) approach to assessment and instruction.

As we have suggested, few student behavior problems require a formal functional behavioral assessment. Some but not all, functional assessments require the expertise of persons with extensive prior training and experience. We have also encouraged schools to adopt a "best practices" approach to addressing the diverse learning and behavioral needs of their students. That means that school personnel should look for ways to deal with minor problems before they escalate and become major challenges. Rather than simply trying to suppress the problem behavior, positive behavioral intervention plans allow school personnel to not only eliminate inappropriate behaviors, but also promote behaviors that allow students to get the most from classroom instruction. That requires schools to acknowledge the reciprocal relationship that exists between learning and behavior *and* to consider both in developing high-quality interventions.

IDEA 1997 and IDEIA 2004 mandates that, under certain conditions, schools must conduct a functional behavioral assessment and develop behavioral intervention plans and supports for students with disabilities. The most recent changes in that legislation place even more importance on systemic approaches to creating a positive teaching/learning environment. Furthermore, there is growing evidence that the use of a multi-tiered approach that includes school-wide, classroom-level, and pupil-specific academic and behavioral supports are an effective way to help *all* students to perform well in school.

We, at the Virginia Department of Education, believe that students will be most successful in an educational environment where:

- Safety and security are maintained and mutual respect is nurtured
- School-wide and classroom-level academic and behavioral supports are routinely available
- Emphasis is on prevention of and early intervention for academic and behavioral problems
- Administrators, faculty, and parents assume a collaborative relationship in addressing the teaching/learning process
- A school/home partnership promotes positive academic and behavioral outcomes for all students.