Practical Solutions for Addressing Challenging Behaviors

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Outline

• Purpose of functional assessment
• The common functions of behavior
• Indirect assessment
• Descriptive assessment
• Experimental functional analysis
• Function-based treatment
• Differential reinforcement
Purpose of Functional Assessment

• Purpose: To figure out the source of reinforcement for challenging behavior
• Knowing the cause of the challenging behavior will help you eliminate it
• Why?
  – Because ALL proven treatments basically boil down to:
    • Not giving that reinforcer for challenging behavior
    • And GIVING that same reinforcer for a more appropriate behavior
What is Functional Assessment?

• Any procedure which attempts to determine the function of a behavior
• There are many terms for functional assessment:
  – Functional assessment
  – Functional analysis
  – Functional behavioral assessment
  – Functional behavior analysis
Function vs. Topograph

• **Topography** = what the behavior looks like (e.g., hitting)
  • Lets you know it when you see it but doesn’t tell you WHY the behavior is happening

• **Function** = source of reinforcement that maintains the behavior
  • Tells you WHY the child continues to do the behavior

• Diagnoses do not cause behavior – behaviors occur because they help the child get something he/she wants
Causes of Challenging Behavior

• Autism does not cause challenging behavior
• Research has shown that more than 95% of challenging behavior in children with developmental disabilities is caused by:
  – Getting something they want
  – Getting out of something they don’t want
• Challenging behavior is like language
• Challenging behavior is the child telling you they want something
Functions of Challenging Behavior

• **Common in research**
  – Attention
  – Tangible
  – Escape from demand
  – Automatic

• **Less common**
  – “Control”
  – Access to stereotypy or rituals

• **95% of the time, your child’s behavior has one of these functions**
The ABCs

• What do the ABCs stand for?
  – Antecedent – Behavior – Consequence

• What is an antecedent?
  – Events that precede behavior are called antecedents

• What is a behavior?
  – Anything anyone says or does

• What is a consequence?
  – Events that follow behavior are called consequences
The ABCs

• Why do we care about antecedents and consequences?
  – Because they help us figure out the function

• Particular antecedents may be related to particular functions

• Particular consequences might be the actual reinforcers maintaining the behavior – the function
Three Types of Functional Assessment

• Indirect
  – Interviews with caregivers, record review, etc.

• Descriptive
  – Direct observation and recording of the problem behavior in the natural environment

• Experimental
  – Systematic manipulation of antecedents and consequences
Indirect Assessments

• Discuss the challenging behavior with someone who has seen the behavior a lot (teacher, parent, therapist)

• Unstructured: ask open-ended questions

• Structured: ask specific questions with “multiple choice” answers

• QABF, MAS, FAI, etc.

• Summarize answers according to functions
Indirect Assessments

• Advantages
  – Does not require direct observation of behavior
  – Can be fast and inexpensive
  – May include important information from caregivers who know the behavior well

• Disadvantages
  – Depends on recall - Caregiver report may be inaccurate or incomplete
  – Research shows they are often inadequate or unreliable
Descriptive Assessments

• There are many types, we are only going to talk about ABC recording

• Unstructured or “narrative” recording
  – Write down everything that you see happen before and after behavior

• Structured
  – Each time behavior happens, classify antecedent and consequence according to categories (“multiple choice”)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Antecedent</th>
<th>Behavior</th>
<th>Consequence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sitting by himself</td>
<td>Hit teacher</td>
<td>Teacher asked him to calm down</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doing a worksheet</td>
<td>Threw worksheet</td>
<td>Teacher scolded and gave him a timeout</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Sample Structured ABC Data Sheet

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Antecedent</th>
<th>Behavior</th>
<th>Consequence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Low attn / Demand / Denied</td>
<td></td>
<td>Attn / Escape / Access granted / None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Access / None</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low attn / Demand / Denied</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Analyzing ABC Data

- Summarize according to function
- Make a graph
- Look for patterns according to function
Sample ABC Data Graph

Johnny Aggression FBA

Antecedents

Consequences

Frequency

- Low Attn
- Demand
- Item Remove
- None
- Attention
- Escape
- Tangible
- None
Interpreting ABC Data

• Aggression and property destruction are rarely automatically reinforced

• Attention is the most common reaction to problem behavior in our culture
  – Not necessarily the function just because it happens a lot

• Staff are likely on their best behavior when you observe

• Observe a representative sample including all contexts in which behavior might occur (e.g., school work, play, downtime, etc.)
Interpreting ABC Data

• If you honestly are not able to construct a reasonable functional hypothesis from the indirect and descriptive, an experimental functional analysis may be needed.

• If you don’t know how to do an experimental, you may need to consider referring out to someone who does.
Descriptive Assessments
Pros / Cons

• **Advantages:**
  – Direct observation of behavior
  – Involves natural environment
  – Safe: observer doesn’t have to deal with behavior

• **Disadvantages:**
  – Correlational
  – Behavior might not occur
  – Research shows they are not entirely reliable
Experimental Functional Analysis

• Arranges conditions to intentionally evoke the behavior

• An individual is exposed to a variety of predetermined conditions and data are collected on how the individual behaves
  - Attention
  - Demand
  - Alone
  - Play
  - Tangible

- Sessions are ~ 10 minutes in duration and are alternated randomly
Experimental Functional Analysis

Sample FA Graph

Sessions
Responses per Minute
Attention
Demand
Toy Play

- □ Attention
- △ Demand
- ○ Toy Play
Experimental Functional Analysis

• Advantages
  – Produces clear results
  – Can be rapid
  – Demonstrates reliable reinforcement relations

• Disadvantages
  – You are intentionally evoking and reinforcing challenging behavior (like an allergy test)
  – Requires specialized training
• We don’t have time for a comprehensive workshop on function-based treatments
• Let’s briefly hit the most basic, practical treatments
• Everything in applied behavior analysis comes down to reinforcing behaviors we want and not reinforcing behaviors we don’t want
• This is called differential reinforcement of alternative behaviors (DRA)
DRA for Attention

• DRA is extinction for problem behavior and reinforcement for alternative behavior

• Extinction
  – don’t pay attention to the behavior any more

• Train alternative behavior:
  – Prompt alternative behavior frequently
  – Reinforce immediately and intensely
  – Fade out prompts
DRA for Tangible

• Extinction
  – don’t ever give the client the item/activity for at least 30 seconds since the last occurrence of target behavior

• Train alternative behavior:
  – Prompt alternative behavior frequently
  – Reinforce immediately
  – Fade out prompts
DRA for Escape from Demands

• Extinction
  – Do not discontinue, postpone, or negotiate any aspect of demands contingent on target behavior
  – Demands have to continue at the same rate and difficulty as though target behavior did not occur
  – Do not decrease the number of demands when target behavior is occurring

• 2 good choices for alternative behavior:
  – Asking for break and/or help
    • You will need to fade this out to a reasonable level
  – Compliance with demand
DRA for Automatic Reinforcement

• Extinction
  – You may or may not be able to do this
  – Response blocking
    • physically prevent the response from occurring, WITHOUT restraining client
  – Sensory extinction
    • alter the environment so that it does not produce the sensory input the child wants (pad a table so it doesn’t make a banging sound when the child bangs it)
• Alternative behavior
  – Choose something that will become automatically maintained once it occurs enough

• Toy play

• Object manipulation

• Other forms of automatically reinforced behavior that are more appropriate and/or less harmful to self
Picking Good Alternative Behaviors

• Good alternative behaviors
  – Communicating for reinforcer (FCT)
  – Communication is good because it:
    – Gives the client what they wanted to begin with
    – Is likely to be reinforced in the client’s natural environment

• Examples:
  – Vocal, sign, picture card
  – Make it easy to be successful at first!
Picking Good Alternative Behaviors

- **Bad choices for alternative behavior**
  - Behaviors that aren’t functional or useful in the client’s natural life
  - Behaviors that aren’t likely to be reinforced in his/her natural life

- **Examples:**
  - Hands in pockets
  - Clasping hands together
  - Sitting on hands
  - Having “hands down”
Prompting Alternative Behaviors

• Don’t prompt alternative behavior as a response to problem behavior
• You need to remind the child to do the alternative behavior BEFORE he does the challenging behavior
Without Extinction

• Sometimes extinction is impossible
  – Severe SIB
  – Severe aggression
  – Any aggression to peers
  – Severe property destruction
  – PICA

• Tips
  – Minimize reinforcement for target
  – Maximize reinforcement for alternative
  – VERY frequent prompting for alternative
Other Tips

• Demand Fading
  – *Don’t do so much work all at once*
  – Start with one demand and then a break
  – Then increase number of demands to break gradually

• Task Modification
  – Change some aspect of the task so that work is less aversive
  – Do easier demands
  – Intersperse maintenance tasks with acquisition tasks
  – Incorporate more client choice
Noncontingent Reinforcement

- When in doubt give more reinforcement!
  - For attention: Give attention frequently, regardless of behavior
  - For tangible: Give access to the item(s) frequently, regardless of behavior
  - For escape: Give frequent breaks

- NCR is not a complete behavior intervention plan – it doesn’t help teach alternative behavior

- Watch out for adventitious reinforcement – don’t give the reinforcer right after the occurrence of challenging behavior
Evaluating Effectiveness

• Evaluating effectiveness
• If the treatment is going to work, you should see a change in behavior very rapidly
• Do not continue to “see how it goes” for months, with no sign of behavior change
• If treatment is being implemented accurately, 2 weeks is plenty of time to see at least some change in behavior
Accountability

• Don’t blame the diagnosis
• Don’t make excuses
• If the behavior is still happening, it’s our responsibility to change the strategy till we find something that works
Conclusion

• Identify function
• Extinction for target behavior, if possible
• Train a replacement behavior
• Prompt replacement behavior frequently
• Use LOTS of reinforcement
• Make alternative behavior easier than target behavior
• Gradually fade out contrived reinforcement
• Train all relevant caregivers and supervise their implementation