Real-World Strategies for Behavior Intervention Plans for Children with Autism

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Real-World Strategies Outline

• Purpose of function-based treatment

• Basic function-based treatments for:
  – Attention
  – Escape
  – Tangible
  – Automatic
Purpose of a Functional Approach

- Function-based treatment: To get rid of the problem behavior and replace it with more appropriate behavior that serves the same function
- Knowing the cause of the problem behavior will help you eliminate it
Basic Functional Treatments

• 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

• DRA procedures can be used to treat most all problem behaviors
• We will briefly look at DRA for each function
• And then briefly consider what to do when you can’t implement extinction
• Let’s look at each function…
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
• 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
  – Compliance with demand
Asking for a Break

• If this works, the client will probably not get any work done!
• That’s fine at first, then you need to fade it out
• Fixed time schedule: Client needs to work for XXX seconds before asking for a break
• Fixed ratio schedule: Client needs to complete a certain number of demands before asking for a break
• Break “coupons”: Give client fixed number of demand coupons, can trade them in whenever he/she wants
• Start easy and only fade when client is successful!
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)
DRA for Automatic Reinforcement

• 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

• **Topographies:**
  – Vocal, sign, 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 Behavior

• Don’t prompt alternative behavior contingent on problem behavior
• It’s okay to reinforce alternative way too much at first, then if it works, thin out reinforcement very gradually
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
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
  – Let client decide order of tasks
  – Do work in another location (e.g., on floor instead of at table)
  – Enrich the environment (e.g., music, preferred work materials, etc.)
“Behavioral Momentum”

- High-P Low-P Sequence
- Assess which demands client complies with and do not evoke challenging behavior ("High-P") and which are the opposite ("Low-P")
- Present demands in sequences of several
- High-P first, then one Low-P
- Gives client a “running start” before presenting non-preferred tasks
- May help but is not good enough by itself
Antecedent Modifications: NCR

• When in doubt give more reinforcement!
• Noncontingent reinforcement (NCR) is a great supplemental antecedent manipulation
• Easy to implement
• Does not require monitoring of contingencies
• Decreases EO that makes reinforcement for problem behavior valuable
• But it’s NOT a complete behavior intervention plan – it doesn’t help teach adaptive behavior, in itself
NCR for Attention

- Give attention frequently, regardless of behavior
- Determine how often by seeing how often the behavior occurs in baseline
  - If it occurs every 5 minutes, on average, then make sure to give attention MORE frequently than that
- Be careful not to give attention when the behavior is actually occurring because you might accidentally reinforce it
NCR for Tangible

• Give frequent access to the item or activity the kid wants
  – Schedule it the same way as you would schedule NCR for attention maintained behavior
  – Example: every hour, give 5 or 10 minutes of computer time

• Again, watch out for adventitious reinforcement
NCR for Demand

- Provide frequent breaks, regardless of behavior
  - Example: every 5 or 10 minutes, take a break
- Generally, if the kid is doing tons of work without a break, give more breaks!!
- Watch out for adventitious reinforcement
- No bargaining with the kid! Set the rules beforehand and stick to them
- When the child is NOT having the behavior, allow him her to help set his own goal for the next session / day / etc.
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
Conclusion

- Identify function
- Extinction for target behavior, if possible
- Train a replacement
- Prompt replacement 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