

# Functional Behavioral Assessments & Positive Behavior Intervention Plans Guide



**NORTH DAKOTA DEPARTMENT OF  
PUBLIC INSTRUCTION**

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The Department of Public Instruction appreciates the time and effort spent by the task force members in contributing to the development of this guidance document.

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Special Note

“Unless otherwise specified, citations to “section” or “sec.” are citations to federal regulations implementing IDEA found in the Code of Federal Regulations at 34 CFR Part 300, which consists of 34 CFR secs. 300.1 through 300.818 and appendices A through E.”

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# Introduction & Overview

## **Purpose of this Document**

This document provides guidelines to assist in completing a functional behavior assessment using requirements set forth by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA 1997/2004). A North Dakota workgroup examined the literature to identify critical issues and to provide recommendations relating to proactively addressing the needs of students with behavioral challenges. This document provides the information, tools, forms, and examples that will allow educators to conduct a Functional Behavioral Assessment (FBA) in various settings and develop a Positive Behavior Intervention Plan (PBIP) for the student that appropriately addresses problem behaviors.

This document represents a combination of current literature and best practice in the use of FBA and PBIPs. The material comes from local, state, and national resources. Much of this guide was adapted from a copyright-free document prepared by The Center for Effective Collaboration and Practice.

## **Supporting Positive Behavior in ALL Students**

Behavior and discipline are major concerns of administrators, teachers, parents, and even students. Teaching and learning in a safe environment is an important priority. Sometimes, our students demonstrate behavior that interferes with their own learning environment or the learning environment of others. Some challenging behavior may be externalizing behavior, such as hitting, biting, tantrums, self-injurious behavior, throwing items, or inappropriate language. Equally challenging are internalizing behaviors, such as isolation from peers, avoidance, withdrawal, or preoccupation with certain interests. In addition, some challenging behavior is problematic because it occurs in excess, meaning that it occurs over long durations or at high frequencies (e.g., complaining to a teacher or perseveration on a topic). Other behaviors are challenging because they are deficits, meaning that they are absent or occur with lower duration or frequency than expected (e.g., difficulty requesting help or infrequent self-control). Regardless of the type, the challenging behavior becomes problematic when it interferes with the learning environment of that student or of other students.

Educators have long understood that behavior difficulties can keep students from functioning productively in class. In fact, the 2004 amendments to the IDEA state that the relationship between behavior and learning must not only be considered, but acted upon. Educators at all grade levels face a growing number of students whose behavior challenges the success of daily classroom instruction. In most cases, teachers are able to find a successful solution to the problem. However, for some students, both with and without disabilities, these strategies fail to produce the desired outcome and they sometimes worsen an already difficult situation. Having a clear plan in place that states expectations and delineates procedures for handling problem behavior will go a long way toward addressing the relationship between behavior and learning.

# Shifting the Focus

## **The Reactive and Punitive Model**

Often times, when a student's behavior disrupts classroom instruction, it results in (1) removing the student from the environment (school or classroom) or (2) providing strong negative consequences to the student (detention, suspension, etc.). The traditional response to challenging behavior tends to be a more reactive and punitive discipline model. That is, educators focus on applying negative or punitive consequences in order to make the student stop engaging in a problem behavior. This type of reactive approach tends to focus on a student's inappropriate, undesirable behaviors more than their appropriate behaviors. This model focuses on what the student is doing wrong and resorts to aversive coercive or punitive strategies to reduce problem behavior.

This traditional discipline model is based on the assumption that students should know how to behave appropriately, that they willingly choose to engage in problem behavior, and that external controls are necessary to prevent these behaviors from occurring again. However, this model fails to teach the student acceptable behaviors that are expected and appropriate. Even though the student may respond to the negative consequences at that moment, the effects are typically short-term. Unless a student's problem behavior is easily corrected by brief, periodic discipline, teachers and administrators will find themselves spending large amounts of time and energy focusing on managing problem behaviors rather than instruction. As a result, students fall increasingly further behind in their academics as the school year progresses. Relying on the reactive and punitive model can actually exacerbate challenging behavior in many students. For example, if a student engages in a problem behavior in an effort to get out of doing an academic task, then discipline that involves removing the student from the situation provides the result that the student was anticipating (i.e., not having to complete the academic task). Although the intention is not to reinforce or strengthen the problem behavior, the use of a reactive and punitive discipline model can produce these unfortunate results.

## **The Proactive and Instructional Model**

The proactive and instructional model focuses on recognizing and reinforcing the appropriate behaviors that the student exhibits. The occurrence of inappropriate behavior is recognized as a need to teach appropriate behavior. When a student has an academic deficit, teachers do not resort to punishment procedures to correct academic errors; however, we often use punishment as a first resort when the student's deficits are behavioral. The proactive and instructional model suggests that behavioral problems can be addressed instructionally using the same process used to teach new academic, social, motor, or life skills.

Teaching appropriate behavior is especially important if students do not know the appropriate behavior that is expected of them in certain settings or circumstances. The proactive and instructional model assumes that students who produce challenging behavior should be taught more productive replacement behaviors rather than referred to other services or removal from the environment. This means that educators would teach the students the skills expected of them rather than punish students for their skill deficits. In addition, this model of addressing behavior involves assessing and identifying the reason why the student engages in challenging behaviors.

## What is a Functional Behavioral Assessment?

A **Functional Behavioral Assessment (FBA)** is a comprehensive and individualized, problem-solving process that addresses challenging behavior. It incorporates a variety of techniques and strategies to gather information as a means of understanding the specific reasons for the student's problem behavior and how a student's behavior relates to or is affected by his/her environment. An FBA looks beyond the form of the behavior (i.e., what the behavior looks or sounds like), and focuses on identifying what causes and maintains the behavior (i.e., the function). This type of assessment leads the observer beyond the "symptom" (the behavior) to the student's underlying motivation (escape, avoid, or gain something).

An FBA is complete when four main outcomes are achieved:

1. A clear description of the problem behavior
2. Identification of the events, times, and situations that predict when the problem behaviors will and will not occur
3. Identification of the consequences that maintain the problem behaviors
4. Development of one or more summary statements or hypotheses

These outcomes should provide a confident prediction of the conditions in which the problem behavior is likely to occur and not occur. When there is agreement about the factors that appear to maintain the problem behavior, a PBIP should be developed to be used by the teachers and support staff in that student's school. As a result, the use of function-based interventions can often reduce the severity of the behavior, thus reducing the number of students referred for changes in school placement.

## What does "function of behavior" mean?

### Form of Behavior VS. Function of Behavior

All behavior serves a specific function, or purpose. Students learn to behave in ways that satisfy a need or that result in a desired outcome or "pay-off". Although the form of behavior (i.e., what the behavior looks like or sounds like) among many students may be similar, the purpose, or "function", of the behaviors may be very different. For example, Heather and Terri both make inappropriate comments to the teacher. However, Heather is seeking peer attention while Terri is trying to escape using a negative teacher-student interaction. Even though both students engage in the same behavior, the behavior serves a different function for each student. If we focus only on what the behavior looks or sounds like, that type of assessment will not help identify the underlying cause(s) of the student's behavior (e.g., what the student "gains" or "avoids").

### Common Misconceptions about Behavior

There are two common misconceptions about behavior in educational settings. The first misconception is that a student's behavior is always attributed to a student's disability. For instance, if a student engages in a problem behavior, one might think that the student is unable to control it and that the behavior is attributed to the student's mental or physical condition. This will often lead to inappropriate hypotheses about the behavior, such as "This student hits himself

because he is autistic” or “That student is aggressive because she has an emotional or behavioral disability.” Another misconception involves asserting that the student is engaging in problem behavior deliberately and willfully due to laziness, stubbornness, or disobedience. Although physical and mental conditions do at times contribute to problem behavior and some students do choose to make bad decisions, the challenging behaviors exhibited by the majority of students will not appropriately be addressed under these two assertions. Problem behavior should be viewed as an inappropriate way of getting attention from adults, and peers, getting things they want, doing what they like, and escaping or avoiding things they do not like. Fortunately, the majority of students use appropriate ways to meet these needs. Unfortunately, there are some students who, for differing reasons, get their needs met in ways that are disruptive and harmful to themselves or others.

Behavior occurs in contexts, not in students. By context, we mean the variables that contribute to the behavior, such as antecedents and consequences. Antecedents are events or conditions that occur immediately before the behavior and consequences are events or conditions that occur after the behavior. For example, Josh is not a lazy student; rather, Josh will tear up his paper when he is given a writing assignment. If problem behaviors are viewed as occurring in students, it is logical to try to change the student. If problem behaviors are viewed as occurring in contexts, it becomes logical to change the context. “Behavior change occurs by changing environments, not changing people.”

### **Don’t Blame the Function!**

The reason for the behavior is usually not considered inappropriate. Rather, it is the behavior itself that is judged appropriate or inappropriate. It is okay for the students to experience certain emotions and feelings; however, the behavior they choose to use as a means of expressing those feelings may not always be appropriate. For example, Tyler might be angry that he cannot sit with his friends during lunch. The anger is an appropriate feeling, but the behavior of swearing and throwing his lunch tray is not an appropriate behavior to express that feeling. In addition, the function of the behavior might be appropriate, but the behavior exhibited by the student to achieve the “pay-off” could be inappropriate. For example, volunteering for a class project and talking back to the teacher may serve the same function (i.e., gaining attention from adults), yet, the behaviors that are involved with volunteering are typically considered more appropriate than those that are involved with talking back.

### **Getting to the Root of the Problem**

Students will change their behavior only when it is clear that a different response will more effectively and efficiently result in the desired outcome. When the function of the behavior is identified, it enables educators to develop interventions that reduce or eliminate problem behavior by replacing it with acceptable behavior that serves the same purpose or function for the student (e.g., teaching a student more acceptable ways to gain peer attention). Reactive procedures, such as suspending each student as a punishment for inappropriate behavior, will only address the symptoms of the problem, and will not eliminate the student’s desire for peer approval. Therefore, the behavior is likely to occur again, regardless of punishment, unless the root of the problem is addressed. For example, when de-weeding a garden, one must pull the entire root out of the ground to prevent the weed from growing again. If the top of the weed is cut, but the root remains, the weed may temporarily disappear, but it will likely return. The same

is true for behavior. We must address the function, or the “root”, of the behavior in order to develop instructional strategies and supports to eliminate behaviors that interfere with successful classroom performance. Consider the following example:

Terry, a 10-year old who finds fractions difficult, becomes frustrated and throws academic materials when asked to complete worksheets requiring him to find the least common denominator. If the team determines through an FBA that Terry is seeking attention by throwing the materials, they can develop a plan to teach him more appropriate ways to gain attention, thereby filling the student’s need for attention with an alternative behavior that serves the same function as the inappropriate behavior (e.g., teaching Terry to calmly tell the teacher when he feels frustrated, and to ask for assistance when he finds a task too difficult to accomplish). At the same time, strategies may be developed to decrease or even eliminate opportunities for Terry to engage in behavior that hinders positive academic results (e.g., making sure that Terry’s assignments are at his instructional level).

### **What is a Positive Behavior Intervention Plan?**

A **Positive Behavior Intervention Plan (PBIP)** is a specific plan of action that designs effective positive behavior interventions to teach the student more acceptable behavior(s) to replace the inappropriate behavior. The purpose is to teach the student more acceptable behaviors that meet the same function, or purpose, as the inappropriate behaviors previously exhibited. When a PBIP is implemented, progress monitoring (data collection) occurs to determine if there are reductions in the inappropriate behavior(s) and increases in the appropriate behavior(s). In order to develop a more effective and efficient behavior intervention plan, we must use the information from the FBA that describes when, where, and why problem behavior occurs. Intervention plans based on an understanding of “why” a student engages in problem behavior are extremely useful in addressing a wide range of problem behaviors.

If interventions are developed without a functional assessment, they may make a problem behavior worse. We have all witnessed or experienced situations in which a student was disruptive in order to avoid a work assignment. In order to achieve the desired outcome, the student would be so disruptive that the teacher would send him/her out of the room for their behavior. In these cases, the prescribed intervention or solution was not an effective intervention because it actually reinforced the problem behavior (i.e., the student did not have to do the work), instead of eliminating it. A functional assessment not only helps us develop effective intervention plans, but it also helps us avoid providing ineffective interventions.

## **The FBA Process**

### **When should we conduct an FBA?**

In general, an FBA and PBIP should be completed when a student’s behavior is sufficiently disruptive that it interferes with his or her learning or the learning of others. It is recommended best practice to complete an FBA before a behavior issue escalates to a point where discipline procedures such as suspension or expulsion are used.

Most teachers recognize that many classroom discipline problems can be resolved by consistently applying standard management strategies. Strategies proven to be effective include teaching students how to comply with well-defined classroom rules and expectations,

providing students more structure in lessons, implementing classroom reward systems, making strategic seating assignments, and posting a class schedule. These proactive procedures can sometimes even alleviate the need for teachers to require more intensive support. School personnel generally should introduce one or more classroom and/or individualized interventions before seeking to initiate the more complex, and often time-consuming, process of an FBA. A formal assessment usually is reserved for serious, recurring problems that do not readily respond to intervention strategies, or classroom management techniques and impede a student's learning, or are ongoing.

## **What are the legal requirements for an FBA?**

The legal requirements below are part of the Regulations for Part B of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).

### **Developing an Individualized Education Program (IEP)**

When a child's behavior impedes the child's learning or that of others, the IEP team must consider the use of positive behavioral interventions and supports, and other strategies, to address that behavior (IDEA 34 CFR §300.324(a)(2)(i)). Additionally, the team may address the behavior through annual goals in the IEP (IDEA 34 CFR §300.320(a)(2)(i)). The child's IEP may include modifications in his or her program, support for his or her teachers, and any related services necessary to achieve those behavioral goals (IDEA 34 CFR §300.320(a)(4)). If the child requires a PBIP to improve learning and socialization, the PBIP can be included in the IEP and aligned with the goals in the IEP. The FBA can be incorporated into the IEP process to help the team gain information needed to develop a plan or include strategies in the IEP.

### **Removals that Constitute a Change in Placement**

If disciplinary removals constitute a change in placement (removals cumulate to more than ten school days in a school year) or if a disciplinary removal occurs under special circumstances (e.g., weapons offense, drug offense, or serious bodily injury inflicted on someone), the Local Education Agency (LEA) must convene a meeting to determine whether the conduct in question was caused by, or had a direct and substantial relationship to the student's disability (i.e., manifestation determination).

If the student's IEP team determines that the student's behavior was a manifestation of his or her disability, then an FBA and PBIP are required (IDEA 34 CFR §300.530 [f]). The team will need to conduct an FBA of the student, unless one has already been conducted. If the FBA, does not exist, the team should immediately develop a plan to gather information and data for the FBA. The team must meet within ten school days of developing the plan to review the data, complete the FBA, and develop a PBIP. If a PBIP already exists, then the IEP team will need to review the plan and modify it, as necessary, to address the behavior.

If a student's IEP team determines that the student's behavior was not a manifestation of the student's disability and the behavior is a recurrent problem, an FBA and PBIP should still be completed as a proactive step in addressing the student's behavior, if they have not already been completed (IDEA 34 CFR §300.530(f)). If an FBA and PBIP already exist, the team should review and modify the PBIP to address the behavior. It makes a great deal of sense to attend to the behavior of students with disabilities if the behavior is interfering with their education or that

of others. In fact, IDEA emphasizes a proactive approach of addressing the student's behavior in the IEP by incorporating the use of positive behavioral interventions and other strategies to address the behavior. This provision should ensure that children who need behavioral intervention plans to succeed in school receive them (71 Fed. Reg. 46721).

### **Removals that DO NOT Constitute a Change in Placement**

If the disciplinary removals have not cumulated to ten or more school days in a school year, but the student is exhibiting a behavior that is consistently disruptive and has already resulted in some type of disciplinary action or removals that cumulate to at least five days, it is recommended to go ahead and conduct an FBA and develop a PBIP. Notably, if the school is considering any type of discipline-based change of placement and/or the behavior is judged to be related to the child's disability, then an FBA must be conducted and a PBIP must be implemented prior to considering the change in placement. If a PBIP was already in place, it must be reviewed prior to considering the change in placement.

### **Disciplinary Removals for Special Circumstances**

School personnel may remove a student to an interim alternative educational setting (IAES) without regard to whether the behavior is determined to be a manifestation of the child's disability if the student has committed a weapons violation, drug violation, or inflicts serious bodily injury upon another person (IDEA 34 CFR §300.530(g)). The school has the authority to first act to restore safety and protection and then proceed to address the variable related to the behavior through the FBA and PBIP process.

If the student is being placed in an IAES and it is a first-time offense for the student, the team must still complete an FBA and develop a PBIP to address the behavior offense so that it does not recur (IDEA 34 CFR §300.530(d)(1)(ii)). For a first-time offense, the sources of information gathered to complete the FBA will likely be limited to indirect methods, such as record reviews, interviews, and questionnaires. The team should complete the FBA and develop the PBIP as best as possible with the information they have gathered. When a student returns to their home school from the alternative setting, the team should meet to discuss the transition and to review the PBIP and make any necessary modifications to ensure the PBIP is appropriate for the setting.

### **Emotional/Behavioral Disabilities Eligibility**

An FBA may be an excellent component to determine eligibility for the Emotional/Behavioral Disabilities. The FBA is then used to develop effective interventions to address problem behaviors.

### **Is an FBA only for students with disabilities?**

This guide provides comprehensive information and guidance for ensuring that procedures for students identified as having disabilities under the IDEA are carried out with compliance with federal laws and regulations. Although there are legal circumstances in which an FBA must be conducted, there is nothing in the law that prevents a team from concluding that an FBA and PBIP are appropriate supports for any student. Best practices suggest that an FBA be conducted for any student whenever behavior appears to be significantly interfering with the

learning process and well before behaviors reach crisis proportions. All students can benefit from the use of consistent positive behavior interventions and supports.

Consider two identical students who are exhibiting the same exact behaviors in the classroom resulting in the same amount of disruption. The only difference between the two is that one is identified with a disability and the other is not. Regardless of whether or not they happen to have a disability, if a student demonstrated a pattern of interfering behavior and multiple classroom and individualized interventions have been tried and unsuccessful, then an FBA and a related PBIP would likely be the most appropriate course of action. Although used largely with special education students, an FBA and PBIP can play a major role in explaining and redirecting the academic and social behaviors of all students, including students with a 504 Plan and general education students.

### **If Utilizing North Dakota Multi-Tier System of Support (ND MTSS)**

ND MTSS focuses on providing high-quality instruction and interventions matched to student need, which includes monitoring progress frequently to make decisions about changes in instruction or goals. Data is used to allocate resources to improve student learning.

ND MTSS Essential Components include:

1. Assessment
2. Data-Based Decision Making
3. Multi-Level Instruction
4. Infrastructure and Support Mechanisms
5. Fidelity and Evaluation

For detailed descriptions and clarity, NDDPI has adapted the American Institutes of Research (AIR) Fidelity Rubric and Worksheet and created a summary document outlining the Essential Components. ND MTSS –SPDG information and resources can be found on the NDDPI website.

### **Who should conduct and participate in an FBA?**

A successful FBA requires a team approach comprised of the persons who know the student best. Collaboration between all relevant education personnel should occur to resolve behavior problems that may interfere with academic progress. As with other collaborative efforts, building-level administrative support, parental involvement, and student input (when appropriate) are also essential to a successful outcome.

The team approach is not a group of people who meet to complete required forms. A team approach is a problem-solving process that requires shared responsibility for the solution of the problem. Efforts to resolve problem behavior should not be seen as a requirement to complete before a student can be placed in another school or program. In addition, lack of improvement should be a cue for adjustment and revision, not a reason to abandon effort or refer the student elsewhere for assistance. With an FBA, one should expect that preliminary interventions will need revision and that lack of success can provide essential information about the behavior and its function.

Persons responsible for conducting the FBA will vary from school to school, depending upon the supports available at the school. To coordinate the effort, each school should have at least two individuals available to serve as school-based FBA facilitators. The facilitators should have knowledge and experience conducting an FBA. They will provide assistance and support to the IEP team members during the FBA process. However, a facilitator(s) are no more responsible for the evaluation and implementation than any other team member. In addition to the facilitator(s), district/unit support should be available for assistance (i.e., school psychologists, occupational therapists, behavior analysts).

With training and support, many components of the assessment can be conducted by individuals on the student's team. Personnel who may be able to fill this role at varying levels of expertise may include special education or general education teachers, guidance counselors, school psychologists, intervention specialists, school administrators, and behavior analysts. Some behavioral assessment procedures, such as standardized tests or experimental functional analysis, may require an individual with specific training (e.g., behavior analyst or school psychologist). Although only certain members of the team or may have the training to conduct the FBA, anyone who knows the student or has direct knowledge of the situation and/or is a direct contributor to the situation should participate in providing information for the FBA. These participants may include the teacher(s), guidance counselor, bus driver, school psychologist, intervention specialist, and administrator(s). The parent (and the student, as appropriate) should also be included in the FBA process.

### **How long is an FBA considered valid?**

Determining whether an FBA is considered "valid" or "current" is not a function of the amount of time that has passed. Instead, it depends upon whether the results of the FBA have been used to make socially meaningful changes for the student. The function of the behavior that was identified in the FBA may change over the course of a day, week, month, year, etc. An FBA is no longer considered "valid" if the results of the FBA fail to result in intervention strategies that produce positive results (i.e., reductions in the problem behavior and increases in appropriate behaviors).

To ensure the FBA remains current, the FBA should be reviewed by the team, at least annually, to determine if the results are still reliable and relevant. During the review of the FBA, the IEP team should determine:

- 1) Does the FBA address the current problem behavior that is occurring?
- 2) Is the hypothesis statement, regarding the function of the behavior, still appropriate?

If the answer is "no" to either one of these statements, the team should conduct another FBA to help develop a more appropriate PBIP.

### **Is an FBA considered an evaluation?**

An FBA is generally understood to be an individualized evaluation of a child in accordance with IDEA (34 CFR §300.301 through 300.311) to assist in determining whether the child is, or continues to be, a child with a disability. The FBA process is frequently used to determine the nature and extent of the special education and related services that the child needs, including the need for PBIP. In addition, the Office of Special Education (OSEP, 2007), stated that an

FBA is considered an evaluation when information is systematically collected and analyzed for the express purposes of determining behavioral function and the development of a PBIP for a student with a disability.

### **Is parental consent required for an FBA?**

As with other individualized evaluation procedures, and consistent with IDEA (34 CFR §300.300(a) and (c)), parental consent is required for an FBA to be conducted as part of the initial evaluation or a reevaluation. If an FBA is being completed for a student with a disability or a student with a 504 Plan, parental consent must be obtained. If an FBA is being completed for a student who is not identified with a disability, a “selective screening” consent form should be completed prior to completing an FBA.

Parental consent allows you to collect new data, but consent is not needed to initiate, design, and implement an intervention. Without a parent’s consent, you can begin the FBA process by looking only at existing data. However, no new information can be collected. Although the PBIP can be developed by using the existing data, the limited information obtained for the FBA may not identify the appropriate function of the behavior. As a result, the interventions in the PBIP may not appropriately address the problem behavior. The quality of the FBA and PBIP would be higher if the new data were collected and analyzed, such as parent and student interviews, behavioral observations, baseline data, and other function-based assessment tools.

For situations in which parental consent is necessary, it should be attempted when initiating an FBA. If a parent does not consent, or if you have documented multiple failed attempts to reach a parent, no new information or data can be collected. However, if no new data is collected, the reason must be documented. The list below describes the type of existing data you are allowed to gather without a parent’s consent:

- Documents in the student’s record review, such as attendance records, grades, citizenship, referral records, etc.
- Teacher/Administrator Interviews
- Any functional assessment observations or parent/student interviews previously conducted, if they were completed to gather information on the current target behavior. If not, then these particular assessments must be conducted as part of the FBA and they are considered “new data”.
- Any instrument you routinely use with ALL students (data collection or monitoring)

## **Conducting an FBA**

### **What are the components of an FBA?**

The process of conducting an FBA involves collecting assessment data to provide answers to the following questions:

- What behavior do we want to change?
- At what level does the target behavior exist (e.g., frequency, duration, etc.)?
- What circumstances or events are likely to trigger the behavior?
- Is the problem behavior influenced by certain events or conditions?
- What function does the problem behavior serve?

- What replacement behavior should be taught?
- Is the problem behavior a performance deficit or a skill deficit?

## **The Functional Behavior Assessment can follow a Simple Four Step Process**

### **Step 1: Identify the Problem Behavior**

Before an FBA can be conducted, the team must pinpoint the behavior causing learning or discipline problems. The team must “identify the behavior” that needs to change.

Consider the following when identifying the behavior:

- When identifying the problem behavior, it may be necessary to objectively observe the student’s behavior in different settings and during different types of activities in order to pinpoint the specific characteristics of the behavior.
- Consider the teacher’s expectations for student academic performance as well as classroom conduct. It may be that the expectations exceed or fall below the student’s ability to perform. As a result, problem behaviors may stem from frustration, fear of embarrassment, or boredom.
- Consider whether a behavior relates to cultural differences or expectations. For example, in some cultures, making eye contact is considered rude. Remember that each of your students and their families are different, depending on their cultural or ethnic background. Parents can often be a valuable source of information regarding the behaviors and their cultural values. We must be aware that these differences may exist and respect these differences as we consider student behavior.
- The following questions can be used to determine the significance of the behavior:
  - Does the student’s behavior significantly differ from that of his/her peers?
  - Does the behavior interfere with the learning of the student and/or others?
  - Have past efforts to address the behavior using standard interventions been unsuccessful?
  - Does the behavior represent a skill or performance deficit, rather than a cultural difference?
  - Is the 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?

Once the behavior of interest is identified, the team must create a “behavioral definition”. A behavioral definition is a statement that specifies exactly what behavior to observe.

Consider the following when creating behavior definitions:

- The definition should be in specific terms that are easy to communicate and simple to measure and record. If the behavioral definitions are vague, it can be difficult to determine appropriate interventions.
- Precise definitions lead to accurate data collection, reliable measurement, and confidence in educational decision making. A description of behavior should be precise or descriptive enough so that a stranger can observe and determine if the behavior is or is not occurring.
- The following table shows how vague, generalized descriptions can be stated as specific, concrete definitions:

Bad	Better	Best
Brenda loses control.	Brenda cries and tantrums.	Brenda's tantrum is defined as crying, flopping to the floor, kicking, or pounding objects or fists on the floor.
Bob is disruptive.	Bob make inappropriate comments during class.	Bob curses, talks excessively, and delivers verbal insults to peers during class.

### Step 2: Gather Sources of Information

Once the team has defined the problem behavior, they can begin to devise a plan for conducting the FBA. This plan should involve procedures for gathering information to complete the FBA, deciding who will handle various parts of it, and ensuring that it is completed in a timely manner (i.e., approximately 10 school days). Various kinds of information about behavior should be collected and analyzed to determine the likely causes of the behavior. A well-developed assessment plan and properly executed FBA should include sources of information that identify the contextual factors that contribute to the behavior.

Since problem behavior can stem from a variety of causes, it is best to assess the behavior from many different angles. Depending on the nature of the behavior of concern, it is essential that multiple sources of information be used to gather information about the behavior. A single source of information typically does not produce sufficient or accurate information, especially if the problem behavior occurs for many different reasons (e.g., leaving the assigned area may serve to get peer attention in some instances, while in other situations it may occur to escape an instructional activity). Often times, the temptation to rely solely on interviews and record reviews alone is alluring. After all, these methods are relatively efficient and cost-effective. However, one should keep in mind that filling out a form that is titled a "functional behavioral assessment" does not necessarily constitute an adequate FBA and in many cases is not a best practice assessment approach. A poorly designed FBA relying only on interviews and record reviews may result in inaccurate assessment results, faulty hypotheses, and ineffective interventions. It is important to incorporate various procedures for assessing behavior, which can include, but are not limited to, a review of the student's records, samples of academic products, various observation procedures, questionnaires, interviews with parents, interviews with teachers or school personnel, and interviews with students. The sources used should gather information on most or all of the following circumstances:

- Times when the behavior does/does not occur (e.g., during reading, prior to P.E.)
- Specific location of the behavior (e.g., bathroom, classroom)
- Conditions when the behavior does/does not occur (e.g., independent work, unstructured times)
- Individuals present when the behavior is most/least likely to occur (e.g., certain peers, presence of a certain teacher)
- Antecedents: Events or conditions that occur before the behavior (e.g., presented with a specific task, told "no")

- Consequences: Events or conditions that occur after the behavior (e.g., reprimand, sent out of the room)
- Common setting events (e.g., hungry, tired, headaches)
- Other behaviors that are associated with the problem behavior (series of negative peer interactions)

## **Types of Sources**

Although many activities and procedures may be considered in an FBA, there are three categories of an FBA into which all procedures fall:

- 1) Indirect Functional Assessment Methods
- 2) Functional Assessment Methods
- 3) Experimental Functional Analysis (this method should only be completed by individuals with specific training, such as a Certified Behavior Analyst)

### **Indirect Functional Assessment Methods**

Indirect functional assessment methods involve gathering information regarding antecedents and consequences and other critical variables indirectly through informants or records. Indirect methods are often the first procedures used in an FBA because they allow the team to plan for more meaningful observations and to begin developing hypotheses about the function of behavior. Indirect methods involve a variety of procedures including:

#### **Record Reviews**

A record review should be completed during the early stages of the FBA process. This involves looking at existing documentation for information that could help determine the function(s) of the behavior. The table on page 19 can serve as a guide for information that is typically contained in a student's cumulative record and how that information may be pertinent to the FBA process.

#### **Behavior Rating Scales or Questionnaires**

Behavior rating scales and questionnaires are useful for identifying behaviors of concern, but may not be the most reliable method of determining behavioral function. They can be given to multiple raters and compared for differences or similarities in results. The following should be considered when using a behavior rating scale or questionnaire:

- They should always be supplemented with direct observations
- They can reflect perceptions about students which could account for difference between raters
- Care should be taken so that information about the student is not skewed toward the negative

#### **Checklists or Assessments**

This can include, but are not limited to, curriculum-based assessments, setting event checklists, social/emotional checklists, classroom management checklists, reinforcer assessment checklists, adaptive behavior scales, or social skill assessments. These are useful in identifying skill deficits, environmental variables that may trigger or maintain the problem behavior, and potential reinforcers for appropriate behavior. In addition to the reinforcer assessments

provided for you in the guide, an online reinforce assessment can be generated at [www.interventioncentral.org](http://www.interventioncentral.org) under “On-line Tools.”

### Interviews

Interviews should be conducted not only with teachers, support staff, related services staff, parents and family members, and other relevant persons who work with or know the student well, but also with the student who is exhibiting the behavior. The purpose of the interview is to collect information about events that influence problem behavior. It helps to identify settings, events, and activities that can be targeted through direct observation. It is also an opportunity to collect information about a range of other factors that could be helpful in developing intervention plans for a student, such as the student’s learning styles, strengths, interests, and prior successes.

The information obtained through informal functional assessment methods can produce valuable information, but are generally not considered reliable due to their subjectivity. Teams should be cautious of the information obtained through these methods alone. Typically, the information gathered through the indirect methods will inform and guide the more direct, observational methods of gathering data.

## Record Review Guide

CATEGORY	WHAT TO LOOK FOR	IMPORTANCE FOR FBA
Attendance history	Patterns of absences and total number of absences	Identify antecedents for problem behavior and possible skill deficits from a lack of opportunity to receive instruction
Educational history & standardized test scores	Current and historical results of state testing, achievement data, and retentions	Indicates academic subjects and activities that are most difficult for the student and identifies what age/grade the deficits became more pronounced
Developmental/Social history	Frequent changes in address, foster home placement, recent occurrence of stressful events (e.g., parents' divorce, remarriage of parent, death in family, schools attended) and social emotional adjustments	Indicates possible setting events that may be impacting school behavior
Disciplinary history	Types of problem behaviors, times and locations in which they occurred, disciplinary actions taken, and referrals	Helps identify patterns of behavior, effective or ineffective disciplinary strategies, and possible consequences that are maintaining the behavior
Previous FBA, PBIP, diagnostic evaluations, or related assessment results	Other assessments that have been conducted that focus on academic skills, behavioral functioning, language skills, etc.	Possible changes in function of behavior, previous antecedents, history of behavior and interventions, and programming decisions
Previous interventions, intervention data/graphs, or classroom logs/notes	Formal and informal interventions that are documented in some manner	Identify interventions that have been successful or unsuccessful and why they were or were not
IEP	Instructional goals and objectives, how/if they are being taught, how/if they are being monitored, accommodations and modifications, previous referrals and placements	Provides information on the degree to which the behaviors of concern are being addressed in the classroom and on the extent to which the teacher collects and records behavioral data

## **Functional Assessment Observation Methods**

Functional assessment observation methods are the most powerful tools in a school-based FBA. They consist of actually observing the problem behavior and describing the conditions that surround the behavior (its context). Antecedent-Behavior-Consequence (ABC) Analysis and Scatterplot are the two most common functional assessment observation methods.

### **ABC Analysis**

This type of assessment is done by observing the student and recording anecdotal information over the course of several observation periods. As the problem behavior occurs, the observer records events that occurred right before the behavior (antecedents) and events that occurred just after the behavior (consequences). The information gathered in an ABC analysis helps to identify events that are maintaining the challenging behavior, appropriate behaviors that are not reinforced, social skills that need to be learned, and environmental conditions that need modification.

### **Scatterplot**

A scatterplot is a chart or grid on which an observer records single events (e.g., number of times out of seat) 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). It provides a pattern of analysis for determining which situations are associated with the problem behaviors. The purpose is to discover if the problem behavior correlates with time of day, a particular physical setting, the presence of a particular person, a certain activity, or some combination of these factors.

When conducting a functional assessment observation, follow the guidelines below:

- The problem behavior being observed should be the behavior defined in Step 1 of the FBA.
- If several people are conducting observations, each person should be familiar with the definition of the problem behavior as well as the procedures being used for data collection.
- Observations should be carried out in the most natural settings for the student.
- Observations should be carried out over a period of several days until clear patterns have emerged, which is generally a minimum of three to five days for observation periods. Behaviors and environmental conditions change over time, so the length of data collection time may vary. However, the team should conduct at least two separate observations as part of the FBA and one of those observations must be from someone other than the classroom teacher.
- It is important to keep in mind that the observer is attempting to observe and record behavior within the context of naturally occurring situations, so the observer should be as unobtrusive as possible when observing and recording the behavior.

There may be times when the assessment team will not be able to directly observe all of the events that bring about behavior. These may have occurred previously within the classroom (e.g., Tara was moved to a different seat during reading last week) or they can be far removed from the classroom but still exert powerful influence over student behavior (e.g., Tara had an argument with another student at the bus stop before school). Even though they may not be

observable, they could increase the likelihood of behavior occurring in the classroom. In other cases, the behavior may be serious but not occur frequently enough to be readily observed. In these instances, the behavior must be assessed primarily through the indirect assessment methods.

### **Baseline Data**

Baseline data is information gathered about the target behavior before a program begins. It is used later to provide a comparison for assessing the success and progress of subsequent interventions. At this point, an observable, measurable, and specific definition for the target behavior should already be established. The next step is to decide which method of data collection will be used. The data collection method and observation tools depend on the identified challenging behavior. The type of behavior, strength of behavior (e.g., intensity, frequency, duration), and context of the behavior (e.g., when and where it occurs) should be considered when deciding on a data collection method. In addition to collecting data on the targeted student, the FBA should also collect comparative data on one or more students.

#### Who collects the data?

Data can be collected by anyone who is with the child frequently enough to be present when the behavior occurs. They must also be trained to identify the occurrence of the behavior and procedures for recording the behavior. The observer must also be able to record or document the occurrence of the behavior immediately. Typically, the daily data is recorded by the teacher or support staff.

#### Which method should we use?

Different recording methods are used to most effectively record relevant information about a behavior. For example, if a student exhibits tantrum behavior (screaming, throwing toys, and slamming doors), does the team want to know the number of tantrums per day (frequency), how long the tantrums last (duration), or when the tantrums are occurring most often during the day (scatterplot or interval)? Unless the right dimension of the behavior is measured, the team may not be able to obtain an accurate representation of the behavior. The common behavioral data collection methods are:

- Frequency
- Rate
- Duration
- Intervals
- Opportunities
- Latency
- Time Sampling
- Permanent Product
- ABC Analysis
- Scatterplot

The data collection methods used to gather information about the level and strength of the behavior (e.g., frequency, duration, etc.) are typically different from the assessment methods to determine function. However, ABC analysis, a functional assessment observation method, can be used to determine baseline data, but the observer must be willing to continue with this type of data collection method throughout the implementation of the PBIP, which can sometimes be burdensome. Data collections from this point forward must be a continuous, ongoing process. The data collection method chosen for baseline will also need to be used as an evaluation tool in the PBIP in order to determine the effectiveness of the interventions.

Prior to data collection, the observer should review his/her resources and daily schedule to determine what forms of data collection are feasible. If the observer works with other staff, more time-consuming forms of data collection are possible. When working alone, the observer needs to consider what pieces of data are vital and what data systems can be successfully implemented in light of the circumstances.

#### How long should we collect baseline data?

If an FBA was initiated for a one-time incident, no baseline data is required. If the behavior is a “recurrent” behavior, it is recommended that a minimum of three to five days of data be collected to obtain a baseline of the target behavior. It is recommended that the observer start collecting data as soon as the FBA process begins. That way, the team will at least three to five days of data, and maybe more, to gather a baseline average. For example, over a week, the designated observer could record the number of aggressive behaviors and find the daily average. This would quantify the scope of the problem for others, such as students, parents, teachers, administrators, school-based intervention specialist, and/or IEP teams. Once the observer starts collecting data, they or someone else should continue to collect data while a PBIP is being implemented.

#### When and where should data be collected?

The observer should record behavior when it is likely that the behavior will occur. The information from others or previous experiences may indicate the best times to observe. Observe and record the behavior in natural settings in which the target behavior typically occurs (e.g., classroom, playground, cafeteria, etc.). The observer should strive to observe and record behavior in as many settings and periods of time as possible in order to accurately capture the occurrence of behavior. In most cases, the teacher or observer collects the data throughout the day in various settings. Once the times for data collection have been established, it is important to stick to the schedule. If data are to be representative of a student’s performance, it must be collected on a consistent basis over time. Only then can the data be considered accurate baseline data.

### **Recommended Sources**

Although multiple sources of information are recommended, the following sources are particularly helpful when completing an FBA:

- Record review
- Structured interview with the “parent” or primary caregiver
- Structured interview with a school-based teacher, staff, or administrator
- Three functional assessment observations (one observation must be from someone outside of the classroom)
- Baseline data

If these sources cannot be gathered, the team should document the reason.

### **Step 3: Summarize Assessment Data**

Once the team is satisfied that enough data have been collected, the next step is to compare and analyze the information. This analysis will help the team to determine whether or not there are any patterns associated with the behavior (e.g., whenever Heather is told “no”, she reacts by

hitting someone). If patterns cannot be determined, the team should review and revise (as necessary) the functional behavioral assessment plan to identify other methods for assessing behavior.

The summary of assessment data requires the team to discuss, analyze, and document the following variables:

- Strength/Skills- When is the student most successful (academically, socially, and behaviorally)? What qualities and strengths does the student possess that help him or her to be successful? Identifying times when the student is most successful provides information about what the student enjoys, what the student values, and how the student becomes successful. This information will be helpful to determine types of behavioral interventions to use and how to make the student successful with the chosen interventions.
- Settings Events- What events or conditions affect how the student responds to situations? Setting events can be environmental, physiological, social, or related to learning and self-regulation. The purpose of identifying setting events is to determine if there are events or conditions, not directly related to the behavior, which can be addressed to reduce the probability of it contributing to the occurrence of the targeted behavior.
  - Examples: illness, medication effects, crowded environments, pain, stress from home/community, medical conditions, etc.
- Antecedents- What is most likely to “trigger” or immediately precede the target behavior? The purpose of identifying antecedents is to determine preventative and proactive strategies to minimize or eliminate triggers for the target behavior. In order to identify all possible antecedents, the team must consider the following questions:
  - When is the target behavior most likely to occur?
  - Where does the target behavior usually occur?
  - During what subject area or activity is the target behavior most likely to occur?
  - Who is present when the target behavior usually occurs?
  - Are there any EVENTS or CONDITIONS that immediately precede the target behavior?
- Consequences- What is most likely to immediately follow the occurrence of the target behavior? The team must consider common consequences that typically follow the problem behavior, such as verbal reprimands, peer reactions, or removal from the room. The purpose of identifying common consequences is to help determine if certain consequences are maintaining the behavior and to help identify the function of the target behavior.
- Previous Interventions- What has been tried thus far to change the targeted behavior? The team must discuss and consider all previous interventions that have been implemented, such as reward systems, prompting techniques,

conferences with a parent, and curriculum modifications. The purpose of identifying previous interventions is to determine if certain interventions should or should not be used, depending upon how consistently they were implemented in the past.

- **Preferences-** What school-related items and activities are most enjoyable to the student? Are there special items, activities, privileges, or social interactions that could serve as special rewards for appropriate behavior (e.g., praise, hug, stickers, line leader, breaks from work, computer time, homework credit coupons, positive notes home, candy, etc.)? The purpose of listing preferences and interests is to identify potential reinforcers to include in the PBIP to increase appropriate behavior.

**Step 4: Formulate Summary Statements**

Once the team has identified the behavior and gathered data about when, where, and how it is demonstrated, the team must determine “WHY” the behavior may be occurring. There are two basic ways to categorize why a behavior is occurring: 1) determine the function or “pay-off” and 2) determine the type of deficit.

**Determine the Function**

Function refers to why the student is demonstrating the behavior. Most human behavior, including the challenging behavior of our students, has one or two functions: 1) the student gains (GET) something or 2) the student avoids or escapes (GET OUT OF) something. The following table includes specific functions that fall into these two functional categories.

<b>The Student GAINS (GETS)...</b>	<b>The Student AVOIDS or ESCAPES...</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Attention from Adults/Teachers</li> <li>• Attentions from Peers</li> <li>• Desired Items</li> <li>• Preferred Activities or Privileges</li> <li>• Control Over Others/Situations</li> <li>• Sensory Stimulation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Attention from Adults/Teachers</li> <li>• Attention from Peers</li> <li>• Non-preferred Activities</li> <li>• Instructional Tasks</li> <li>• Non-preferred Setting</li> <li>• Non-preferred Social Interactions</li> <li>• Transitions</li> <li>• Aversive Physical Sensations</li> <li>• Sensory Stimulation (Reduction)</li> </ul>

**Examples**

**The Student Gains (GETS)...**

- **Attention (from teacher or peers):** Attention can include talking, physical contact, eye contact, or nearly anything that acknowledges the student’s presence. The attention does not necessarily need to be positive attention to serve as a reinforcer. For many students, any attention at all, even harsh or negative attention, serves to maintain the problem behavior. In addition, attention from adults can be very different than attention

from peer groups. Some students will value the attention of peer groups more than adults. It can often be a way for the student to gain peer acceptance.

- Desired Items, Preferred Activities, & Privileges: The student's behavior is occurring in order to get access to something that they want. This can include desired items (e.g., food, money, personal belongings), activities (e.g., hanging out with friends, playing on computer, toys), or privileges (e.g., line leader, sitting at a special lunch table, taking materials to the office). This type of behavioral function can be witnessed best at a supermarket when a child is screaming and crying for candy. When the parent gives the child the candy in order to quiet the child, the behavior results in the "pay-off" and the child gains access to the desired item. In school, challenging behavior that serves this function can often occur when a desired activity is terminated or when a student is told "no".
- Control over Others/Situations: The student's behavior is occurring in order to gain control over certain interaction with someone else or to have control over their environment. This may be the case in situations when a child is engaging in a verbal power struggle with a teacher or peer. Although not always the case, it may also be the function when a child is defiant and refuses to do anything that a teacher or adult requests.
- Sensory Stimulation (Input): The student's behavior is occurring in order to obtain sensory feedback, such as tactile, auditory, smell, taste, or visual. The sensory input produced by one's behavior can be reinforcing to that student, even though we may not be able to observe the reason why. For example, a student may make loud noises, engage in self-injurious behavior, or make certain physical movements in order to obtain a certain sensory input.

#### **A Student AVOIDS or ESCAPES (GET OUT OF)...**

- Attention (from teacher or peers): The student's behavior is occurring to avoid or escape attention from others. For example, a student may isolate himself from peers if they do not like physical contact or social interactions.
- Non-preferred Activities or Tasks: The student's behavior is occurring in order to avoid or escape a certain task that may be boring, repetitive, difficult, or frustrating. For example, this may occur when a student's academic instruction is not meeting his or her needs, such as when a student requires more challenging curriculum. Another example of this type of function is when a student engages in behavior (e.g., hiding under a table) in order to avoid or escape an activity or work task.
- Non-preferred Settings or Social Interactions: The student's behavior is occurring to avoid or escape a certain setting, such as the lunchroom or bathroom. In addition, students may perceive social interactions with others as aversive. They may not like physical contact or they may feel uncomfortable in social situations. Some students engage in behavior to escape people with whom they are unable to cope. For example, a student may avoid or escape an adult because the student and adult have a history of

disciplinary interactions. In these circumstances, these students have learned that their problem behavior will result in being removed from an unpleasant interaction with the adult. In another example, a student may avoid or escape a peer because they may find that peer annoying or unpleasant due to peer pressure, teasing, verbal insults, accusations, or criticism. In these circumstances, these students have learned to engage in problem behavior to get away from these peers.

- Transitions: The student's behavior is occurring in order to avoid transitioning to another activity or setting. Often times, students will engage in challenging behavior when they are faced with a situation that requires them to switch activities. Transitions may produce challenging behavior because they have to leave a preferred activity and go to a non-preferred activity. Some students respond negatively to transitions when they are not in the normal routine or if they are unscheduled transitions. The transition might also produce anxiety, depending upon what may be occurring in the environment during the transition.
- Aversive Physical Sensations: The student's behavior is occurring to escape or avoid unpleasant physical sensations, such as heat, fatigue, illness, restlessness, boredom, or pain. For example, children sometimes cry or whine excessively in attempt to escape pain or discomfort. A non-verbal student may engage in self-injurious behavior to communicate or alleviate pain. Examples of escape from boredom may include off-task behavior or daydreaming. Examples of escape from restlessness may include getting out of one's seat, moving around without permission, or excessive talking.
- Sensory Stimulation (Reduction) The student's behavior is occurring to escape or avoid unpleasant sensory stimulation. Examples of sensory stimulation that may produce challenging behavior include crowded environments, extreme temperatures, extreme lighting, and loud environments.

## **Determine the Type of Deficit**

When assessing behavior, the team must not always assume that a student exhibits a behavior by choice (i.e., the student does the behavior even though they know better). The student may or may not be aware that there are appropriate, alternative ways to get the same "pay-off".

When determining why a behavior occurs, the team must consider whether the behavior relates to either a skill deficit, a performance deficit, or both.

- Skill Deficit- The student does not know how to perform the appropriate behavior/skill. For example, a student engages in physically violent behavior toward another student because he does not know other strategies for conflict resolution. Identifying a skill deficit will help the team identify strategies in the PBIP that will address teaching the skill and how to support the student while learning it.
- Performance Deficit – The student is capable of performing an appropriate behavior/skill, but chooses not to do so consistently. For example, a student is chronically late for the class she does not "like". Identifying a performance deficit will help the team identify strategies to increase motivation to perform the behavior.

Overall, the team must consider if it is likely that the student “can’t” behave differently because he or she does not know differently, or if he or she does know differently and just “won’t”. Usually, “can’t” indicates a skill deficit and “won’t” indicates a performance deficit.

## Hypothesis Statement

Based on the information from the assessment, the team can establish a hypothesis regarding the function of the behavior in question. The hypothesis statement predicts the general conditions under which the behavior is most and least likely to occur (antecedents), as well as the consequences that serve to maintain it. Only when the team has all of the necessary information to identify these variables can the team formulate a possible explanation, or

### HYPOTHESIS STATEMENT

For example, if Heather yells out during instruction, an FBA might reveal that the function of the behavior is to gain attention (e.g., verbal approval of peers), avoid an instructional task (e.g., difficult assignment), or both.

A hypothesis is formed by using the following format:

<b>When...</b>	<b>...the student...</b>	<b>..in order to...</b>
(describe antecedents)	(describe target behavior)	(describe the function/ “pay-off”)

Based on the information obtained during the FBA for Heather, the team may propose the following hypothesis:

**“When the teacher is providing instruction, Heather will yell out during class in order to gain peer attention.”**

hypothesis, for the student's behavior.

Based on the above hypothesis, Heather’s team might make accommodations in the environment to ensure that Heather gets the peer attention she seeks as a consequence of appropriate, rather than inappropriate behaviors. If the intervention changes Heather’s behavior, the team can assume that their hypothesis was correct. If Heather’s behavior remains unchanged following the intervention, a new hypothesis may need to be formulated using the data collected during the FBA.

## Reviewing the FBA

To ensure the FBA remains current, the FBA should be reviewed by the team, at least annually, to determine if the results are still reliable and relevant. It is encouraged to review the FBA during annual IEP or if applicable, as needed to discuss the student. An FBA may also be reviewed if the PBIP progress note indicates a need for change.

During the review of the FBA, the IEP team should determine:

- Does the FBA address the current problem behavior that is occurring?
- Is the hypothesis statement, regarding the function of the behavior, still appropriate?

If the answer is “yes” to both of the questions, the team would document that the FBA remains current. If the answer is “no” to either one of these statements, the team should document that the FBA is no longer current or valid and a new FBA will be developed.

## The PBIP Process

What is the purpose of a PBIP?

Intervention plans and strategies that emphasize the skills students need in order to behave in a more appropriate manner will be more effective than plans that simply serve to *control* behavior. Traditional methods for dealing with student behavior are typically reactive and punitive strategies (e.g., reprimands, time-out, and suspension). The goal has always been to reduce or eliminate the immediate problem. However, experience and research has shown that these interventions are not the most effective or efficient means to eliminate problem behaviors. Often times, these reactive approaches do not consider why the student misbehaved in the first place, therefore failing to teach the student acceptable behaviors and further sustaining the problem behavior. In addition, interventions based upon *control* often fail to generalize (e.g., continue to be used for long periods of time, in many settings, and in a variety of situations) – and many times they serve only to suppress behavior – resulting in a child seeking to meet unaddressed needs in alternative, usually equally inappropriate ways. The use of positive, proactive interventions tend to be more effective and efficient than the traditional and reactive method of attempting to eliminate problem behaviors. Proactive, positive intervention plans that teach new ways of behaving, on the other hand, will address both the source of the problem, by serving the same function, and the problem itself. Knowing what compels a student to engage in a particular behavior is integral to the development of effective, individualized PBIP’s and supports.

The primary purpose of conducting an FBA is to identify the causes of a behavior and develop more effective intervention strategies. There should always be a logical connection between the information that was gathered and analyzed during the assessment process and the development of behavior intervention plans. The development of effective PBIP’s that are positive in nature (i.e., proactive and educative) relies upon data collected during the FBA process. PBIP’s are effective when they produce meaningful outcomes. That is, they should result in:

- Increases in the acquisition and use of new appropriate, replacement skills
- Decreases in problem behavior
- General improvements in the quality of life of the individual

Comprehensive and effective PBIP's have the following characteristics:

- Hypothesis-driven – address the function of the student's behavior
- Student-centered – respect personal preferences and the goals are tailored to the student's typical daily routine
- Consist of multiple intervention or support strategies – including prevention, teaching, reinforcement, and disciplinary components

### **When should a PBIP be developed?**

A PBIP should be completed when a student's behavior is sufficiently disruptive that it interferes with his or her learning or the learning of others. It should be developed only if a current FBA exists on the target behavior and baseline data is collected. If an FBA has not been conducted, the team must conduct the FBA and then develop the PBIP using the information obtained during the assessment. It is recommended best practice to complete an FBA and PBIP before a behavior issue escalates to a point where discipline procedures such as suspension or expulsion are used.

### **What are the legal requirements for a PBIP?**

The process to identifying positive behavioral supports and developing and implementing a behavioral intervention plan is legally required under certain circumstances for students with exceptionalities. IDEA requires the team to consider positive behavior interventions and strategies to reduce problem behavior and to teach appropriate behavior. Some additional requirements are as follows:

#### **What is the relationship between the PBIP and the IEP?**

In cases involving a student with a disability, documentation of a PBIP must be included in the student's IEP. In addition, the IEP should indicate that the student's behavior interferes with the learning of the student or others. Behavioral goals should be developed and reflect the target and replacement behaviors in the PBIP. If behavioral goals are already created, they should be reviewed to determine if they address the behaviors in the PBIP.

#### **Is it really important that the PBIP be implemented as indicated on the IEP?**

It is not enough merely to have documented that PBIP was designed. If school-based teams do not implement the intervention and supports and do not have evidence indicating that they have done so, they are guilty of failing to provide a "free and appropriate public education" (FAPE). FAPE is one of the cornerstones of the original IDEA and stresses that education must be individualized to meet the unique needs and challenges of the student with a disability.

#### **What about changes in placement? Is a PBIP needed before a change of placement occurs?**

A valid FBA and PBIP are needed prior to moving a child to a more restrictive placement. Before a district wishes to move a student to a more restrictive setting, PBIPs that have been revised and monitored are important elements that should support the district's decision.

## **Is a PBIP only for students with disabilities?**

“All student” can benefit from the use of consistent positive behavior interventions and supports. Like the FBA, a PBIP is strongly recommended for any student whose behavior regularly interferes with their learning or the learning of others – and preferably be done before the behavior requires disciplinary actions. Positive proactive intervention plans that teach new ways of behaving will address both the source of the problem and the problem itself.

## **Who should participate in implementing a PBIP?**

The development of the PBIP occurs as a result of a team process and subsequently becomes an integral part of the student’s IEP. Developing an appropriate PBIP requires collaborative effort for a successful outcome, including the classroom teacher(s), administrative support, parent/guardian, student (if appropriate), and others who know the student best and who will be involved with the implementation of the plan.

As with the FBA, the team approach is not a group of people who meet to complete required forms. A team approach is a problem-solving process that requires shared responsibility for the solution of the problem. Efforts to resolve problem behavior should not be seen as a requirement to complete before a student can be placed in another school or program. In addition, lack of improvement should be a cue for adjustment and revision, not a reason to abandon effort or refer the student elsewhere for assistance. With a PBIP, one should expect that preliminary interventions will need revision and that lack of success can provide essential information about the behavior and its function.

Persons responsible for implementing the PBIP will vary according to the student’s needs and the supports available at the school. When developing the PBIP, the team will determine the persons responsible for implementing and monitoring the PBIP. Participants usually include the teacher(s), intervention specialist, and support staff that interacts with the student daily. However, the team may want to consider training other participants, such as the guidance counselor, bus driver, cafeteria staff, parents, and administrator(s). The parent/guardian at home should also be significantly involved with the implementation of the PBIP, as the connection between school interventions and home support can help ensure the student’s behavioral success. The individuals at the school who serve the role of FBA Facilitator should also provide assistance and support to the IEP team, as needed. However, a facilitator is no more responsible for the implementation of the plan than any other team member. In addition to the facilitator, district support is available for assistance (i.e., school psychologists, behavior analysts).

## **Why is it important that we collect data?**

The purpose of collecting data is to determine if progress is being made to increase the replacement behavior and to decrease the target behavior. Often times, progress is “assessed” subjectively through informal anecdotal notes and statements from persons present in the student’s environment. However, these subjective assessments are not usually accurate and do not provide accurate documentation of interventions and progress. When the team collects data documenting the occurrence or non-occurrence of the behaviors, the team can make data-

based decisions regarding the effectiveness of interventions and supports. The use of data also promotes consistent communication to all parties involved (e.g., school and home) on the progress of the interventions, rather than relying on verbal reports and subjective opinions. Only with data can the team accurately assess and document progress with the PBIP and determine if more supports are necessary.

### **How often should we review the PBIP?**

The PBIP should be reviewed and such documented at minimum the same rate as do school district progress reports to ensure that the strategies that are in place are appropriate and that the student is making progress. However, data can be reviewed or the team can meet at any time to determine the student's progress. The progress report requires the team to summarize and graph daily data, determine progress or lack of progress with the target and replacement behavior, and determine an action to take to ensure continued success or to promote behavioral success.

If an IEP is reviewed, the PBIP may also need to be reviewed and possibly modified if such things occur, such as a setting change, change in staff, or the emergence of a more disruptive behavior.

# Developing a PBIP

## **Elements of a Positive Behavior Intervention Plan (PBIP)**

When a team has determined that a PBIP is necessary, the team members should determine interventions based on information gathered during the FBA. The PBIPs should not include single interventions, but a combination of multiple interventions based on the student, teacher, and environmental needs. The following components should be addressed within each PBIP:

- Prevention Strategies
- Teaching Appropriate Behavior
- Increasing Appropriate Behavior
- Decreasing Inappropriate Behavior
- Crisis Plan
- Progress Monitoring
- Implementation and Support

The following sections are designed to help teams with the process of creating PBIPs. It included strategies to address different functions of a student's behavior, skill deficits and performance deficits, as well as selecting appropriate interventions. This section also addresses special considerations (e.g., crisis plans, restrictive procedures), progress monitoring, implementation, and support.

## **Addressing Behavioral Function**

To effectively redirect behavior, the team must understand the function of the behavior. Student behavior is often motivated by the desire to gain (GET) something or to escape or avoid (GET OUT OF) something. Interventions should not be designed based on the type of behavior (e.g., aggression), but should differ depending on the motivation behind the behavior.

## **Examples of Function-Based Interventions**

If a student's behavior functions to seek attention, the interventions may include:

- Teaching the student appropriate ways to get attention
- Systematically teaching the student to tolerate longer and longer wait times to get attention
- Giving teacher attention following appropriate behavior
- Withholding attention following inappropriate behavior
- 

If a student's behavior functions to escape a difficult academic task, the interventions may include:

- Teaching the student to use socially acceptable escape behavior (e.g., asking for help)
- Providing assignments within the student's skill level (if a skill deficit)
- Provide strategies and supports to assist the student (e.g., direct instruction, working with peers)
- Reinforcing when the student gradually spends more time on the undesirable task

### **What happens if the same behavior occurs in different students for different reasons?**

If two students engage in the same behavior for different purposes, there is probably not just one single intervention that works for the behavior of both students. The interventions that the team chooses need to be carefully aligned with the results of the FBA. When they are aligned, the appropriate behaviors that a student will be taught or encouraged to use should fulfill the same function as the inappropriate behavior.

### **Addressing Type of Deficit**

To fully understand the motivation behind student problem behavior, it is useful to consider that problem behavior may be linked to the type of behavioral deficit. 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 is also possible that a student may be experiencing both a skill and a performance deficit. Identifying the type of deficit will be useful in determining interventions and strategies that emphasize the skills students need in order to behave in a more appropriate manner or interventions and strategies that motivate students to conform to expected behavioral standards. This section describes strategies that can be considered for addressing these deficits.

### **Skill Deficit**

An FBA may indicate that the student engages in the problem behavior because 1) he or she lacks the appropriate skills; or 2) he or she lacks appropriate, alternative skills and truly believes this behavior is effective in getting what he or she wants or needs. The intervention plan should include strategies to teach the student the appropriate skills.

### **Examples of Skill Deficit Interventions**

- If the student does not know what the behavioral expectations are, the PBIP can be designed to teach expectations, and would include the supports, aids, strategies, and modifications necessary to accomplish this instruction, with explanations explained in concrete terms. For example, an intervention plan could resolve the confusion by modeling examples and non-examples to the student, helping the student identify the components of the behavior, and letting the student practice or role-play the behaviors.
- If the student does not know how to perform the expected behavior, the intervention plan should include instruction to teach the needed skills. One method to teach skills is to break the skill down into components/steps (task analysis). For example, a student may engage in physically violent behavior because he believes violence is necessary to efficiently end a confrontational situation. The student may also believe that the violent behavior will effectively accomplish his goals. If the team's interventions are aligned with the type of deficit, the student may be taught to use appropriate problem-solving techniques so that the student will be more likely to approach potentially volatile situations in a nonviolent manner. The

PBIP would include a description of the particular steps involved with problem-solving and how to teach the problem-solving skills needed to support the student.

- If the student does not realize that he or she is engaging in the behavior (i.e., the student is reaching out of habit), the team may devise a plan to cue the child when she or he is so engaged. For example, if Roxanne impulsively talks out during Ms. Smith's class discussions, Ms. Smith and Roxanne may agree that Ms. Smith will look directly at Roxanne and slightly move her right hand in an upward motion to remind Roxanne to raise her hand. If Roxanne does raise her hand, Ms. Smith agrees to call on her.
- Sometimes, for biological or other reasons, a student is unable to control his or her behavior without supports. Although it is not the place of the team to make medical diagnosis, it is appropriate for the team to recommend a referral to obtain medical evaluations (e.g., vision, hearing, and physical impairment).

### **Performance Deficit**

An FBA may indicate that the student knows the skills necessary to perform the behavior, but does not consistently use them. The intervention plan should include techniques, strategies, and supports designed to increase motivation to perform the skills.

### **Examples of Performance Deficit Interventions**

- If the FBA reveals that the student is engaging in a problem behavior because it is more desirable (or reinforcing) than the alternative, appropriate behavior, the intervention plan could include techniques for making the appropriate behavior more desirable. For example, if a student makes inappropriate comments to make her classmates laugh, then the plan might include rewarding, reinforcing her when she uses appropriate ways to gain attention from peers. Token economies, behavioral contracting, and other interventions that include peer and family support may be necessary in order to change the behavior.
- The FBA may also reveal that a student does not perform the behavior simply because he or she sees no value in it. While the relevance of much of what we expect students to learn in school is apparent to most children, sometimes (especially with older students) it is not. For example, a student who would like to go to a technical school to become a mechanic may not understand why he needs to learn about the Pythagorean Theorem, but if attending the technical college (her motivator) is linked to needing to pass Geometry in order to graduate, her motivation will be increased.

## **Combination of Skill and Performance Deficit**

Some student problems are so severe that they require a combination of techniques and supports. For example, if the student finds it difficult to control his or her anger, she or he may need to be taught the appropriate skill (e.g., problem-solving, communication skills, relaxation skills, etc.) and have the added support of school personnel, curricular modifications, and environmental modifications. In addition, the student may need to be provided with external rewards for appropriately dealing with anger.

## **Selecting Appropriate Interventions** **Prevention Strategies**

What strategies can we implement to prevent the problem behavior from occurring and to facilitate success? These strategies typically involve manipulating identified antecedents (“triggers”) and setting events. Types of prevention strategies may include:

- Avoiding or eliminating certain triggers – (Make adjustments to where or when the problem behavior occurs, the subject/activity during which the problem behavior occurs, people present when the behavior occurs, etc. Some examples include avoiding large crowds, avoiding requiring repetitive tasks, avoiding exposing the student to long delays, allow student to take frequent breaks during difficult work activities, provide time alone or time to regroup after a negative event, etc.)
- Adjust the structure – (e.g., provide choices, state clear expectations for student performance, schedule preferred activities in daily routines, scheduling non-preferred activities among preferred activities, etc.)
- Modify the curriculum/task/instruction - (e.g., modifying instruction, modifying curriculum materials, increase lesson pace, change voice intonation, mix difficult work with easy work, etc.)
- Make environmental modifications – (e.g., preferential seating, changing seating arrangements away from an instigating peer, minimizing or eliminating distracting materials, change the lighting, create quiet areas, etc.)
- Design social supports – (e.g., peer mentor/tutor opportunities, parent-teacher communication systems, positive peer reporting interventions, transition supports, etc.)
- Use specialized equipment or materials – (e.g., visual strategies to help provide structure or prompts for appropriate behavior, communication system or books, assistive technology, etc.)

## Teaching Appropriate Behavior

The main purpose of a PBIP is to teach a student more acceptable behaviors that can help eliminate the inappropriate behaviors.

- **REPLACEMENT BEHAVIOR:** A behavior that is either compatible to the target behavior or will serve the same purpose (function) as the target behavior, but in a more appropriate way.

### **Examples of replacement behaviors that serve the same function as the problem behavior:**

- Ways to seek teacher attention through non-verbal signals
- Teaching the student to communicate “I need help” to replace tearing up assignments
- Teaching the student to initiate social interactions (“Play with me”) to replace teasing peers

### **Examples of replacement behaviors that are incompatible to the problem behavior:**

- Instead of lying on the floor, an incompatible behavior would be sitting in a chair.
- Giving a student something to hold or do with his hands so that it is not possible to hit himself in the face at the same time.

### **REPLACEMENT BEHAVIOR**

A replacement behavior should be determined by using the following format:

**Rather than**  
(describe the  
target behavior)

**...I want this student to**  
(describe the replacement  
behavior)

**...in order to...**  
(describe the function/  
“pay-off”)

Example: Based on the hypothesis for Heather (above), Heather’s team might identify the following replacement behavior:

“Rather than yell out during class, I want Heather to participate in a group instruction by raising her hand in order to gain peer attention appropriately.”

### **What replacement behaviors will we teach the student?**

- A PBIP should be designed to teach the student a more acceptable behavior that replaces the inappropriate behavior, yet serves the same function.
- Care should be given to select a behavior that likely will be elicited by and reinforced in the natural environment. For example, using appropriate problem-solving skills on the playground will help the student stay out of the principal's office.

### **When should the student use the replacement behavior?**

- The team should list examples of situations when the use of the replacement behavior is appropriate.
- If the behavior is to seek teacher attention and the replacement behavior is raising a hand, the team may list examples such as anytime he: 1) has a question, 2) needs help, 3) wants to tell the teacher something, and 4) needs to use the restroom.

### **➤ INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES:**

**Necessary Skills:** These may be social, communicative, study/academic, or other skills that should be taught in order to successfully demonstrate the replacement behavior.

#### **Examples:**

- Teaching organizational skills to prevent the student from becoming frustrated when faced with multiple tasks
- Expand social play skills to that the student has more opportunities to make friends
- Teach the student to self-initiate activities using a picture schedule to prevent boredom
- Teach relaxation techniques to use during stressful events
- Teach conflict resolution
- Teach anger management and control

**Teaching strategies and Procedures:** The team should determine types of teaching strategies to ensure the student learns the appropriate behaviors chosen.

#### **Examples:**

- Direct instruction (i.e., active teaching or explicit instruction – teach, show, practice)

- Guided practice (i.e., gradually lead students from easy or familiar examples to new understandings)
- Group instruction
- Reminders (e.g., remind the student about the expected behavior each morning when the student arrives)
- Visual strategies (e.g., put visual prompts on the student's desk)
- Naturally occurring opportunities (e.g., provide a verbal prompt to the student as a reminder to do the appropriate behavior when the teacher notices that the student's behavior is starting to escalate)
- Modeling (e.g., teacher demonstrates the expected behavior)
- Rehearsal (e.g., student practices or role-plays the expected behaviors)

### **Increasing Appropriate Behavior**

Develop procedures to reinforce the occurrence of the replacement behavior and any other appropriate behavior.

- **IDENTIFY POTENTIAL REINFORCERS:** A reinforce is something that is given after the occurrence of behavior that results in an increase in the behavior. The team must determine reinforcers that can be used to motivate the student to engage in the replacement behavior and other appropriate behaviors.

#### **Examples:**

- Specific verbal praise (e.g., "you are fantastic at sharing. I really like the way you let Jimmy help you do that activity.")
- Social interactions (e.g., 1:1 conversations with certain people, talking about their interests)
- Appropriate touch (e.g., high five, pat on the back, hug – if appropriate)
- Certain items (e.g., stickers, toys, books)
- Activities (e.g., computer time, assist with morning announcements, extra social time)
- Privileges (e.g., line leader, visit a teacher or school personnel, "no homework pass")

### Something to Consider:

- The team should use knowledge of student preferences and strengths to define reinforcers.
- The team might ask a student what types of things him or her likes (e.g., computer time, running errands), watch for and record any preferred activities, or use an informal reinforce assessment checklist to identify preferences.
- It is a good idea to vary the type of reinforcers given to the student, so that the student does not tire or become bored with a particular reinforce.

- **REINFORCEMENT PROCEDURES:** Reinforcers should only be delivered contingent upon the occurrence of appropriate behavior. They should never be used as a bribe to get the student to behave appropriately. They are only delivered if the student already exhibited an appropriate behavior. There are many different methods to deliver reinforcers. The team must decide what procedures they will use to reinforce the appropriate behaviors.
- **Establish specific behavior criteria** – What exactly should the student do to earn the above reinforcers?
  - **Determine schedule of reinforcement** – How frequently can the student earn the reinforcers?
  - **Identify delivery system** – What intervention components will be used to monitor the student's behavior and deliver reinforcement (e.g., self-monitoring, behavior contracts, point system, behavior charts, etc.)

### Examples:

- Reinforcing the occurrence of any appropriate behavior that occurs (e.g., respond to all requests for a “break” immediately and consistently)
- Token economy or reward charts
- Behavior contracts
- School/home communication sheets
- Reinforcing low rates of problem behavior (e.g., Timmy usually hits his peers an average of 15 times a day. Timmy can earn a reward at the end of the day if his aggression is less than 2).

### Something to Consider:

- The procedures should detail how the reinforcers will be given, when they will be given, how the student can earn them, and when the student can redeem any awards. It is important to be consistent in the frequency of delivery as well as the amount given.

- Make sure that the student is reinforced more often for the replacement behavior than he or she was previously for the problem behavior (at least twice as often). The team can use information collected during the FBA (i.e., baseline data) to determine the frequency with which the problem behavior occurred and was previously reinforced. This information can then be used to determine how often reinforcement should occur for appropriate behavior

Example: On average, Cameron disturbs instruction two times each 55-minute math class; therefore, the pay-off for his inappropriate behavior occurs about every 30 minutes. So, his behavior intervention plan should call for a re-arrangement of his instructional environment so that he has an opportunity to engage in and be positively reinforced for appropriate behavior at least every 15 minutes.

- The general rule of thumb is to use a ratio of four positive to every one negative to encourage more appropriate and positive interactions and to remain proactive.
- When determining procedures, remember that the reinforcer must be a better pay-off than the pay-off that the student receives from engaging in the problem behavior.
- In some cases, it may be necessary to initially offer a student “non-contingent” access to a reinforcer (e.g., no strings attached), especially if the reinforce is something he or she has never had before. To introduce the reinforcer, they would initially “sample” the reinforcer by letting them participate in the highly preferred activity or interaction. If the student enjoys it, access to that activity would later depend on the student engaging in the desired appropriate behavior.
- Initially set obtainable goals for earning reinforcers. If the goals are set too high, the student will never access the reinforcer and no change will be made. The team will need to define gradual changes toward the desired behavior, giving the student an opportunity to experience success.
- If the student lacks intrinsic motivation (seeing the personal value of performing a behavior), it may be necessary to initially reinforce the behavior with some type of extrinsic reward, such as activities, tokens, or rewards (some type of tangible item). In doing so, we must remember to “fade out” the extrinsic reward, meaning we need to gradually replace it with more naturally occurring rewards such as good grades, approval from others, or the pleasure that comes from success. Of course, fading will only be a consideration once the student has shown an increased ability and willingness to engage in the appropriate, desired behavior. In order to accomplish this fading process, the extrinsic rewards will need to be paired with the intrinsic reward. The purpose of pairing the extrinsic with the

intrinsic is to teach the student that the behavior is a positive behavior so that the intrinsic motivation will become just as valuable as the extrinsic.

Example: A middle school student who has completed all his homework for the week gets to attend a popcorn party. Along with attending the party, the teacher may also say something such as; “Josh, you have completed all your homework this week and you are much better prepared for class. You must feel good about yourself and proud of all the hard work you have done.”

### **Decreasing Inappropriate Behavior**

This section focuses on developing strategies that describe how adults and peers should respond to the student when the problem behavior occurs. When developing these strategies, the team should consider the following guidelines:

- 1) When the behavior occurs, the interventions should not provide the student with the desired “pay-off.” Refer to the hypothesis in the student’s FBA to identify the student’s “pay-off” or the function of the student’s behavior. If the intervention provides the “pay-off” then the behavior will continue to occur and may worsen. For example, if a student’s behavior occurs to escape class, do not develop an intervention that results in the student leaving class.
- 2) The consequences that will be administered should go from least restrictive to most restrictive. This means that the team should not resort to the most punitive consequence as the first intervention to try, but should start with the less intrusive procedures.

### **The following are examples of interventions or consequences to inappropriate behavior:**

- Modify the environment and/or use proximity management
  - Changing seating arrangements
  - Rearranging the room or furniture
  - Moving the student closer to the teacher
  - Eliminating distracting items in the classroom
  - Posting rules or expectations in the classroom
- Ignore occurrences of problem behavior and attend to the appropriate behavior of other students
- Prompt or redirect each occurrence of the behavior by:
  - Giving a verbal prompt/reminder
  - Giving a non-verbal (e.g., gesture, gentle guidance) or visual prompt/reminder
  - Clarifying or re-teaching expectations and rules
  - Utilizing precision requests to ensure follow through
  - Completing a teaching interaction (tell, show, do)
- Apply a structures consequence for the inappropriate behavior, such as:
  - Loss of incentive/privilege
  - In-class break time
  - Positive practice
  - Restitution
  - Parent contact or conference

- Implement a problem-solving or reflection activity
- Implement a level system including a hierarchy of consequences for inappropriate behavior

### **Something to Consider:**

- When ignoring problem behavior or using precision requests to ensure follow through, often times the behavior may get worse before it gets better. Because the “pay-off” is no longer being delivered, the student will often escalate behavior or engage in a different problem behavior in an attempt to receive the “pay-off.” If when the behavior escalates, the “pay-off” is delivered, the student has learned to display the behavior at an even higher level than she or he used before. As a result, the teacher’s attempt to change the student’s behavior was ineffective and the student has actually become more adept at using the problem behavior. To see changes in the behavior, the person implementing the procedure must be consistent and follow through, not eventually giving in to the behavior.

Example: Previously Shay would cry when she could not be the “line leader.” In order to quiet her, the teacher previously would allow her to walk at the front next to the teacher. The teacher realizes that this is only making the behavior worse, as it occurs every day. In order to change the student’s behavior, the teacher decides to try not letting Shay stand at the front of the line today when she cries. Initially, Shay began crying and the teacher did not allow her to move to the front. However, Shay began screaming and falling on the floor, so her teacher ultimately let her walk next to her at the front. In this example, the teacher gave in and allowed Shay to receive the “pay-off.”

- Removing a student from the instructional environment should be avoided and implemented as a last resort. When administration steps in and the student is removed, the teacher relinquishes the right to handle the situation and build a relationship with the student. It can often communicate to the student that the teacher does not have control, which could be a “pay-off” for that student.
- Time-out or removal from the setting should be avoided if the student is engaging in the behavior to escape a task or situation. By using these interventions, the student receives the “pay-off” because they have been removed from the unpleasant task or situation.
- In order to shape behavior, the consequences (positive or negative) have to matter to a student. What may seem like negative consequences may actually be positive to a student.

Example: The teacher may say, “Avery, when you use inappropriate language, you will be immediately removed from the activity.” The teacher

may assume that removal from the activity is a negative consequence, when Avery may think it is a positive consequence – she *wants* to be removed from the activity.

- Is punishment ever appropriate?
  - Positive interventions are far more likely to produce behavior changes than punishment. The team should try positive interventions for an appropriate length of time before considering punishment.
  - Punishment does not address the cause of the behavior and it is usually ineffective in the long-term.
  - Punishment, such as suspension, should only be considered in extreme cases when the student’s behavior severely endangers her or his safety or the safety of others.

### **Guidelines for Selecting Interventions**

After some ideas about positive behavioral interventions have been generated for a student’s PBIP, teams should consider the following questions. Answering these questions as a team should yield an effective and efficient intervention in which the team will adopt and implement as a part of the student’s educational program.

1. Do the interventions align with the function of the target behavior?
2. Are the interventions appropriate given the student’s need and current levels of performance?
3. So the interventions directly teach the replacement behavior and other alternative skills?
4. Did we look at choosing interventions that are “least intrusive” and “least complex” and are they likely to produce positive changes in student behavior?
5. Did we look at choosing intervention that are most likely to positively change behavior quickly and easily?
6. Did we look at choosing interventions that are least likely to produce negative side effects?
7. Do the interventions have evidence of effectiveness with the target behavior?
8. Are the interventions acceptable and practical for the team member(s) responsible for implementing the plan?
9. Are the interventions most likely to be accepted by the student?
10. Are the interventions most likely to promote a replacement behavior that will occur and be reinforced in the natural environment?
11. Is there system-wide support for the use of the chosen interventions?

## **Special considerations**

### **Crisis Plans**

If the student's behavior is severe enough to cause harm to themselves or others, a crisis plan must be written in to the PBIP to address a severe or dangerous situation. The team is still required to implement proactive and positive interventions to continue to teach the student alternative skills, even in the midst of a crisis. A crisis plan is only appropriate if less intrusive or restrictive interventions have been unsuccessful.

The teams should spell out the conditions under which a crisis plan should be used. This plan should also include the exact procedures that participating team members should use if these conditions occur. Examples of crisis procedures include, but are not limited to, redirecting the student to an alternative activity, clearing other students from the area, ensuring a safe environment (moving furniture or possible dangerous items), using gentle physical guidance and protection to prevent injury, blocking attempts of aggression, requesting additional assistance from designated support team staff, creating a safe space between the student and others (proximity and position), and/or using an individualized de-escalation strategy for the student.

### **Progress Monitoring**

The team is responsible for determining two types of progress monitoring procedures. One procedure should be designed to evaluate the effectiveness of the PBIP. The other method should be designed to monitor the consistency and accuracy with which the intervention plan is implemented (intervention fidelity)

### **Behavior Data Collection**

In order to evaluate the effectiveness of the intervention plan, the team must collect behavioral data to accurately measure changes to the target and replacement behaviors. By collecting and analyzing data on a systematic basis, the team will be able to clearly determine whether the program has produced, or is producing, the desired change in behavior. Decisions might then be made to continue or modify the intervention plan.

### **Data on Target Behavior**

Before implementing a PBIP, the team should have collected baseline data on the target behavior. If an FBA was previously completed, the baseline data should have been collected during the observations. If an FBA was not recently conducted, but the PBIP is being revised, then the most current data should serve as baseline data. When choosing the type of data collection method, it is strongly recommended to use the same data collection method (e.g., frequency, ABC, duration, interval, etc.) to assess ongoing behavior as were used to gather the initial baseline data. That way, the baseline data can be used as a comparison to the intervention data to assess changes in the student's target behavior.

### **Data on Replacement Behavior**

Because there is no baseline data for the replacement behavior, the team can only evaluate if the behavior is occurring and how often. The team should select the best method for measuring the occurrence of the replacement behavior. Practical methods include behavior rating scales or documenting the occurrence of non-occurrence at the first opportunity each day.

### **Data Collection and Summary Procedures:**

To provide valid and reliable information regarding a student's performance, data collection must be a continuous, ongoing process. If data is not collected accurately or reliably, the team may conclude that a procedure is working and continue it when in fact it is ineffective and should be modified. On the other hand, the team may also conclude that a procedure is not working and terminate it when in fact it was effective and should have continued to produce greater effects. It is recommended that data be collected frequently and consistently. In order to receive an accurate and reliable measure of the level of behavior, best practice suggests daily data collection on both the target and replacement behavior. In addition, data should be collected at least one or two times a week on a comparison peer to provide information about how the student compares to peer norms.

### **Goals and Desired Outcomes**

The team must set goals/desired outcomes for both the target and replacement behavior. The goal/desired outcome should be reasonable, but still be indicative of significant improvement.

#### **Target Behavior:**

The desired outcome for the target behavior must be a data-based goal that can be compared to the baseline data. For example, if the baseline data indicated that Joshua hit others an average of ten times per day, a desired outcome/goal might be an average of two times per day or less. Even though we want the student to decrease the behavior to zero, we must set reasonable goals that still indicate significant progress.

#### **Replacement Behavior:**

Baseline data is not required for the replacement behavior because, most likely, the replacement behavior is not occurring at all. Based on the difficulty of the behavior and the opportunity to demonstrate the behavior, the team must set a reasonable data-based goal for the replacement behavior. For example, if the replacement behavior is to walk away from an instigating peer, a reasonable goal may be that the replacement behavior occurs during four out of five (80%) of first daily opportunity.

#### **IEP Goals:**

If the student has an IEP, the IEP should indicate that the student's behavior interferes with the learning of the student or others. Behavioral goals should be developed and reflect the target and replacement behaviors in the PBIP. If behavioral goals are already created, they should be reviewed to determine if they address the behaviors in the PBIP.

### **Implementation and Support**

#### **Intervention Fidelity**

Intervention fidelity involves determining if the interventions are being implemented as written. This will be easier if the team is very specific when writing the interventions and strategies and if the team documents the individuals responsible for implementing the interventions. If the student's behavioral data indicate "no improvement," we must be able to determine if the lack of progress is due to insufficient interventions or to lack of intervention fidelity. This will help determine if interventions should be revised or if training and supports need to increase. The

team must determine what procedures they will use to ensure the plan is being implemented and the persons responsible for monitoring.

**Examples of fidelity procedures:**

- “Self-check” or checklist to correspond with each component of an intervention
- Walkthroughs or observations
- Written scripts or lists that detail the responsibilities of each individual participating in implementing the plan
- Student reports about the strategies and intervention
- Review of intervention products (e.g., data collection sheets, completed token economy sheets, reward charts, behavioral contracts)

**Determine Implementation Needs**

Prior to the implementation of any PBIP, the team should determine any training needs, material needs, or environmental arrangements that will be necessary before the PBIP can be implemented.

**Training Needs:**

All participating members should be trained on the procedures in the PBIP, including the interventions, strategies, and progress monitoring procedures. The intensity of training should depend on the level of knowledge of each participant. It may be necessary to involve district support to train personnel on certain interventions and procedures.

**Material Needs:**

The team may need to make materials before certain interventions can begin, such as data collection sheets, reward systems, or visual strategies (e.g., schedules, prompts, signs) before the plan can begin. A list of materials and resources should be made and team members should be assigned responsibilities to prepare the materials.

**Environmental Arrangements:**

Specific changes to the environment may be necessary to promote success, such as seating arrangements, removing distractions, de-cluttering the room, moving furniture, etc.

**Providing Support**

Once the PBIP is implemented, supports should be in place for both the student and the participating team members implementing the plan. Both types of support are important for facilitating success and ensuring proper implementation.

**Supporting the student:**

Sometimes supports are necessary to help students use appropriate behavior. The student may benefit from support from the following sources:

- Peers: Provide academic or behavioral support through tutoring or conflict-resolution activities.
- Families: Provide support through setting up a homework center in the home and developing a homework schedule.

- Teachers and paraprofessionals: Provide both academic supports and curricular modification to address and decrease a student's need to avoid academically challenged situations.
- Language pathologists: Increase a child's expressive or receptive language skills, providing the student with alternative ways to respond to any situation.
- In addition, a variety of adults and students in and around the school and community may contribute support.

**Supporting the team members implementing the plan:**

Often times, the responsibility of implementing a PBIP falls on the shoulders of one person, typically the teacher. However, this can often lead to "burn out." The person often starts out implementing consistently, but tires quickly, resulting in a failure to provide quality services. The implementation of a PBIP should never be a one-man mission, but it should be a team process. Although it is typically the teacher implementing the strategies, the other team members can provide support in other ways such as creating materials or graphing data. When a PBIP is not supported, it will often affect the implementation of the plan. When the implementation of the plan is poor, the interventions are less likely to produce a positive change in the student's behavior.

# Monitoring Progress

## **Data Summary and Analysis**

Once the PBIP is implemented, behavioral data collection should be on-going and continuous. However, for the data to be useful, the information gathered must be summarized and easily readable. Raw data from a data sheet can be difficult to interpret, especially when more than one individual is sharing the information. It is recommended to make time to summarize the data at least weekly. However, it may be beneficial to take a few minutes at the end of each day to quickly summarize and review the daily data to identify anything that might need to be addressed the next day (e.g., What seemed to go particularly well and what can we draw from that to make other activities more successful?).

After summarizing data, take a few minutes to plot the data on a graph and to look for any emerging trends in the behavior. Graphing data provides an easy, systematic way of displaying information about the target behavior. To determine if a program has been effective, it helps to evaluate the graph for trends in performance by focusing on systematic and consistent increases or decreases in performance. Trends are defined as three or more data points in the same direction. Trends in data indicate the effectiveness of programs and assist instructors in determining the need for program changes.

Graphing can often be time consuming if the person does not have the ability of skills. However, creating graphs can also be easy and quick, depending on the method chosen. The following are different methods for graphing behavioral data:

- Microsoft Excel
- Graphing paper by hand
- Free on-line graphing websites
  - Chart Dog:  
[http://www.jimwrightonline.com/php/chartdog\\_2\\_0/chartdog.php](http://www.jimwrightonline.com/php/chartdog_2_0/chartdog.php)
  - Create a Graph: <http://nces.ed.gov/nceskids/createagraph/>

## **Completing Progress Reports**

The PBIP must be reviewed and reported at the same rate as academic progress is within the individual school district to ensure that the strategies in place are appropriate and that the student is making progress. However, data can be reviewed or the team can meet at any time to determine the student's progress.

If an IEP is reviewed, the PBIP may also need to be reviewed and possibly modified if any of the following circumstances occur:

- 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.
- A more disruptive behavior has emerged.
- There is a change of placement (different class or school).
- There is a change in staff.

- It is clear that the original PBIP is not producing positive changes in the student's behavior.

### **Determining Progress**

The daily data must be collected and summarized on the progress for both the replacement and inappropriate behaviors. The inappropriate behavior data should be graphed and the team should evaluate the data to determine if progress has or has not been made during the review period for the target and the replacement behavior. Progress can be described best by the following five levels:

- 1) Behavioral data do not indicate improvement. Revisions are needed.
  - There are negative changes in the behavior or the behavior continues to stay at the same level with no progress.
  - Revisions may be needed if the interventions have been in place for a while and have implemented with fidelity. It is likely that the current interventions are not effective and may need to be revised or replaced.
- 2) Behavioral data do not indicate improvement. More time is needed.
  - There are negative changes in the behavior or the behavior continues to stay at the same level with no progress.
  - More time may be needed if the interventions have not been in place for a while or they have not been implemented with fidelity. It may be that the current interventions have not been effective because not enough time has passed or more training and support needs to occur to implement the interventions reliably.
- 3) Behavioral data indicate minimal improvement.
  - There are slight positive changes in the behavior, although not significant at this point.
  - The team may decide to continue with the current interventions or to make modifications as needed.
- 4) Behavioral data indicate improvement.
  - There are positive changes in the behavior.
  - The interventions and strategies appear to be effective at this point, so the team will most likely continue with the current plan.
- 5) Behavioral data meets desired outcome/goal.
  - The behavior meets or exceeds the desired outcome/goal identified in the PBIP.
  - The team may choose to continue with the interventions to ensure that the behavior will be maintained over time.
  - The team may need to meet to set new goals and outcomes.
  - The team may choose to begin to fade out certain interventions or to include additional supports to ensure that the behavior generalizes to all settings and situations.

- Over time, if the behavior maintains after fading interventions, the PBIP may be discontinued. If the team is discontinuing the plan, there should be a team meeting to document the discontinuation.

## **Making Data-Based Decisions**

Once progress is assessed, the team must determine if any changes need to occur in the student's behavioral supports. The team should only make decisions that are guided by data and the level of progress towards the desired outcome/goal. The following are actions that can be taken by the team to better support the student and PBIP.

**Continue Plan as Written:** There should be no changes made to any of the interventions, strategies, or supports in the PBIP. The plan will continue to be implemented as it is currently written.

**Review FBA:** The FBA may need to be reviewed by the team if they believe that the hypotheses originally developed in the FBA regarding the function of behavior are no longer accurate. If the FBA is no longer valid, a new FBA may be needed to help develop more effective interventions that are aligned with the function of the behavior.

**Revise Current Intervention(s):** If minimal or no progress is made, the team may choose to modify an existing intervention. This could include minor or major revisions.

**Add Intervention(s):** The team may choose to add an intervention to the plan to either support or replace a previous intervention. Interventions can be added regardless of whether progress is made or not, if the intervention helps support the student's behavioral success.

**Remove Intervention(s):** If minimal or no progress is made, the team may choose to remove an existing intervention that has not been effective.

**Fade Out Intervention(s):** If a student has met their desired outcome/goal, the team may choose to fade out an intervention to evaluate how the student's behavior will be maintained.

**Discontinue Plan:** The team may determine, after fading several interventions, that the student's behavior is stable and maintaining at positive levels. If the team chooses this option, the team must meet, with the parents, to discuss the discontinuation of the plan.

## **FADING INTERVENTIONS**

Some interventions should be implemented indefinitely while other will eventually need to stop. For example, Ben is learning to use social problem solving skills instead of getting into fights on the playground (an intervention we hope he 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 points for the class token economy when he seeks help appropriately rather than fighting (an intervention that must end at some point). Knowing that he cannot get points for the rest of his life, the team has decided to use the technique of fading once Ben has reached the desired outcome/goal. Ben'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:

- 1) His teacher could increase the amount of time Ben has to remain "fight free" in order to receive a reward. For example, he may initially receive rewards daily, but as he reaches criterion, it could be increased to every other day, then once a week, and so on.
- 2) His teacher could award him fewer points until he is receiving no points at all. For instance, Ben could initially 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 very important to note that the social reinforcement should continue and eventually replace the tangible rewards completely. If this process is gradual and Ben is helped to realize the advantages of using appropriate social problem solving, remaining "fight-free" will become intrinsically rewarding to him.

### **Important Questions to Consider when Making Decisions**

The teams should consider the following outcomes when considering changes to the PBIP:

- Have there been gains in new skills to enable the student to meet his or her needs in a socially acceptable manner?
- Have there been reductions in the student's problem behavior? Are these reductions satisfactory?
- If there has been little or no increase in new skills, what can be done to enhance acquisition?
- If there has been little or no decrease in problem behavior, are there sufficient increases in new skills? What can be done to better enable the student to decrease problem behavior?

- If there has been little positive development of new skills and/or decreases in problem behavior, has the team:
  - Implemented the support plan in a consistent manner?
  - Reevaluated the FBA hypotheses and PBIP interventions and support strategies?

### **Possible Pitfalls to Effective PBIPs**

The process of FBA and PBIP is complete only when the team produces positive behavioral changes in student performance. The best laid plans may be obstructed by any number of factors. Below are some possible pitfalls to an effective PBIP and supports. To ensure success, teams should avoid these pitfalls.

- Too vague a definition of the behavior(s) of concern and/or incomplete measurement/data collection regarding the behavior(s) and the interventions selected.
- Incorrect interpretation of the functional assessment data collected.
- Inappropriate intervention (e.g., too weak to deal with the complexity or magnitude of the behavior problem; not aligned with the assessment data).
- Inconsistent or incorrect application of one or more parts of the intervention plan and/or personnel lack skills and/or training to correctly implement the interventions.
- Failure to adequately monitor the implementation of the intervention plan or to adjust the intervention plan over time, as needed, based on on-going monitoring and evaluation, and to adequately evaluate the impact of the intervention plan.
- Inadequate system-wide support to avoid future episodes of the behavior problem (e.g., too many initiatives or competing priorities that may interfere with time and commitment needed to develop and implement PBIPs).
- The behavior is an issue of tolerance rather than being something that distracts the student or others (e.g., a specific minor behavior, such as doodling).
- Failure to consider environmental or psychological issues, cultural norms, family, or other situations outside the school that are impacting the student's behaviors.