



Understanding Functional Behavior Assessments

There has been a lot of research to show how challenging behaviors affect classroom learning. Many of the results support educators' concerns that behavior difficulties interfere with the learning of both the child with the challenging behavior and the learning of others around him or her.

In response to this research, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) Amendments of 1997 requires that pupil evaluation teams (PETs) look at the relationship between learning and the behavior of a child with disabilities. After all other disciplinary actions have been tried and there is still no explanation for the behavior, a pupil evaluation team needs to assess both a child's learning differences and behavioral issues using a functional behavioral assessment (FBA). This will help them put a behavior intervention plan (BIP) with positive behavioral interventions and supports in place.

The FBA is a way of gathering information in order to help understand the reasons for a child's challenging behavior. This assessment helps the team look at the actual behavior, and gives a clearer picture of what a child is, or is hoping to, accomplish with this behavior. Perhaps the child is trying to avoid something, or the behavior may be the child's expression of a need for a classroom or academic modification of some kind. The assessment information can help educators develop strategies to decrease or even eliminate opportunities for the child to engage in inappropriate behavior. A behavior plan created by the PET team can help teach a child more effective ways to achieve a desired outcome, as well as how to self-monitor.

Conducting a Functional Behavior Assessment

The exact type of functional behavior assessment will vary from child to child, based on the type of behavior being exhibited. There are, however, some common key steps to most functional behavior assessments:

1. **Verify the severity of the problem.** Some classroom problems can be eliminated with standard, consistent discipline strategies.

2. **Define the challenging behavior in concrete terms.** Ask the educator to specifically describe the child's behavior in a way that can be measured and recorded. Ask them to explain exactly what the child did.
3. **Collect data on possible causes of challenging behavior.** Collect information from parents, students, teachers, and others who have contact with the child (bus driver, school secretary, day-care provider, etc.). Consider this: Is the problem behavior linked to a skill deficit or when a skill is not challenging enough? Is there evidence to suggest that the student does not know how to perform the skill? Does the student have the skill but for some reason not perform it consistently? Ask the student why he or she performs the behavior.
4. **Analyze the data.** Use a system to keep track of the behaviors, what happened before the behavior, the result of the behavior, the length and severity of the behavior, as well as when and where the behavior occurs. After you have enough information, look for themes and patterns to pinpoint specific trouble areas.
5. **Develop a theory.** Using the data, educators can develop a probable explanation that will predict the general conditions under which the behavior is most likely and least likely to occur.
6. **Create a Behavior Intervention Plan (BIP).** Using the data gathered from the FBA, the PET can develop and test a behavior plan designed specifically for the child. The most successful behavioral intervention plans will be those that include positive strategies to handle the situation in the classroom and/or academic environment and ones that focus on teaching skills needed by the student in order for him or her to act more appropriately, rather than simply controlling the student's behavior.
7. **Evaluate the plan.** Is the plan effective? Is it necessary to make changes or adjustments to the BIP?

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