



# Along the Spectrum

## Tazewell Mason Counties Special Education Association

For a variety of reasons, behaviors patterns develop differently in children with autism. This newsletter will focus on two closely related evidence based practices to reduce interfering or problem behaviors, Functional Behavior Assessments (FBA) and Functional Communication Training.

### Steps for developing a Functional Behavior Assessment

1. Identify and define the interfering behavior
  - Is the behavior dangerous to the learner or others?
  - Does the behavior interfere with learning?
  - Does the behavior interfere with socialization or acceptance from peers?
  - Is the behavior disruptive or intense on a frequent basis?
2. Collect baseline data
  - Review previous & current data
  - Interview staff, family, etc.
3. Develop a hypothesis statement
  - “John talks loudly when the teacher is conducting a lesson because he cannot complete his work, and he is then sent to the resource room where he plays with a squishy ball and no demands are placed on him.”
4. Test the hypothesis
  - An important step in the FBA process is to test to hypothesis to ensure that it is correct, as long as there is no risk of injury or damage.
5. Develop interventions
  - Teachers/practitioners should focus on developing comprehensive intervention plans that increase learners’ use of more appropriate behaviors to achieve their goals and reduce the occurrence of the interfering behaviors. As a result, learners will have a larger repertoire of appropriate, adaptive behaviors.
6. Monitor intervention effectiveness
  - Continue to collect data to determine effectiveness of intervention. If problem behavior has not decreased, the plan may need to be revised.

### Teaching Replacement Skills

Problem behaviors can not be extinguished without replacing them with a more acceptable behavior that meets the same need. Replacement skills must be systematically taught to the student.

These replacement skills usually taught initially using external reinforcers. It is important that these reinforcers be highly motivating to the individual and may need to continually change.

Only use reinforcers when student has met criteria and pair with verbal praise.

Don’t allow free access to strong reinforcers to avoid satiation.

### Functions of Behavior

ESCAPE	ATTENTION	ACCESS TO TANGIBLES MATERIALS ACTIVITIES	AUTOMATIC REINFORCEMENT
 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Gets up, walks away and refuses to comply with instructions or directions</li> <li>• Screams when directed to do a non-preferred activity</li> <li>• Kicks furniture and yells, “No” when told to work</li> </ul>	 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hits, kicks or engages in self-injurious behaviors when teacher is attending to other students</li> <li>• Repeatedly yells out when mother is on the telephone</li> <li>• Cries and screams when a peer is playing with someone else</li> </ul>	 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Grabs items from another person</li> <li>• Hits the person who changed the website on the computer</li> <li>• Has a tantrum when he/she wants something</li> </ul>	 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Engages in behaviors during alone time or when no demands are placed</li> <li>• Gets out of seat and touches peers when exposed to over stimulating or unstructured activities</li> <li>• Engages in self-injurious behavior when asked to sit and wait</li> <li>• Frequently gets up and runs around the room</li> </ul>

## Functional Communication Training (FCT)

FTC involves helping a person learn to communicate the function of their behavior in a more efficient way than exhibiting problem behaviors. Once the function of behavior is determined through the FBA, a corresponding FCT alternative for communicating that need can be established. Most problem behaviors are found to have one of the functions listed in the following table:

Function of the Behavior	Communicative Intent	FCT Alternative
Attention	"Hey! Pay attention to me."	Raise your hand and say, "Excuse me." Tap the person on the shoulder.
Escape	"Go away", "I don't want to do this", "Please, not now"	Give a sign for "Time out, please", or request a break
Access to a preferred item	"I want that ."	Request item or activity using alternative communication strategies.

### Maintaining Changes Across Environments:

Maintenance or generalization is important to determine the success of changes in behavior.

It is necessary to plan for maintenance from the beginning:

1. Reinforce an appropriate alternative behavior. It is important to remember that positive reinforcement procedures have longer lasting effects and generalize better than suppressive procedures.
2. Use procedures that are the most natural. Using simple procedures will help when generalizing across a variety of settings.
3. Use the procedure across all settings. It is important to identify how the procedure will be carried out in all settings to determine if it can be used.
4. Once you have reached an acceptable level of the problem behavior, fade the treatment procedure.

### When developing interventions, consider strategies in these three key areas:

Environment: How will staff adapt the environment to reduce or eliminate the setting events and antecedents?	Skill-Building: What new skills will be taught to replace the challenging behavior?	Staff Responses: How will staff respond in order to support positive behavior and reduce the challenging behavior?
Examples: How will we create physical structure? How will we set up schedules? How will we design work systems? How will we add visual structure within tasks?	Examples of ways to teach new skills: Emotional, behavioral or social narratives Functional communication training Role-playing Prompting	Examples: Token systems Cues to use the new/replacement skill Praise or reinforcement when new skill is performed