Why is my student doing *that*, and what the heck am I supposed to do about it???

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About Me
Objectives

- Define challenging behavior
- Define behavior operationally
- Identify 4 main functions of behavior
- Identify empirically supported methods and tools to use to determine the function(s) of challenging behavior
- Use the indicated function(s) to determine effective intervention options
- Choose the most appropriate function-based intervention(s) for individual students
Challenging Behavior

- Behaviors that are unsafe
- Behaviors that are socially inappropriate
- Behaviors that are a problem for the person
Challenging Behavior

- Physical Aggression
- Self Injury
- Inappropriate Sexual Behaviors
- Property Destruction
- Elopement
- Pica
- Verbal Aggression
- Disruptive Behaviors
- Non-Compliant Behaviors
- Stereotypy
Operational Definitions of Behavior

- Must be behaviors
- Must be specific and descriptive
  - Topography
  - Frequency
  - Duration
  - Intensity
- Should be primarily action words
- NO general categories
  - E.g.; defiant, lazy, non-compliant
Operational Definitions of Behavior

- Non-examples
  - X engages in self-injurious behavior
  - Y is non-compliant when given a task
  - Z is aggressive towards staff
Operational Definitions of Behavior

- Examples
  - X hits herself one or more times on the right side of her jaw with a closed fist with enough force to cause red marks
  - When given a task to complete, Y crosses his arms and yells in a voice loud enough to be heard outside the classroom that he will not complete the task
  - Z will push or attempt to push staff members on the upper torso using one or both of her hands with open palms with enough force to cause the staff member to step back, lose his/her balance and/or fall to the ground
But first…

- ALWAYS consider possible medical causes!
  - Behavior is new
  - Severity of a behavior has changed
  - An “old” behavior returns
  - Repetitive gestures or movements towards or with a body part
  - Favoring a body part
  - Eating & drinking patterns change
  - Sleeping patterns change
  - Behavior is occurring even when having free access to favorite things
Possible Medical Causes

- Recent med changes
- Side effects from meds
- Allergies
- Headache
- Earache
- Toothache
- Constipation
- Hormonal changes
- Seizure activity
What is function?

- Purpose a behavior serves for a person
- Reinforcer a person is getting for a behavior
- Maintaining variable

It’s the WHY
Why is function important?

- Legally
  - Requirement in IDEA

- Practically
  - Guides treatment decisions
    - Allows us to stop providing the reinforcer
    - Identifies what to teach
    - Identifies necessary environmental changes
Non-Function Based Interventions

- May be effective at decreasing challenging behavior
- May cause no change in challenging behavior
- May increase challenging behavior
What are the four typical functions?

- Attention
- Escape
- Tangible
- Automatic
Attention
Attention

 Get attention from another person
   Parents, teachers, peers, siblings, pets…
 Doesn’t have to be positive attention!
   Reprimands, yelling, talking to another person about behavior
 Attention does not have to be vocal
   Disappointed looks, eye rolling, clenching teeth, stopping what you are doing
   Putting hands on shoulder, spanking, restraint
I don't want to go to school! I hate it. I'd rather do anything than go to school.
Escape

- Escape or avoid something
  - Task
    - Aversive
    - Difficult
  - Environment
    - Loud
    - Crowded
    - Boring
  - Person
    - Personality conflicts
    - Non-familiar people
No! I want my special plate! I want mine cut up! Not that way!! Waaaaaaa!!!
Tangible

- Want access to something
  - Edible
    - Preferred foods, drinks, snacks
  - Item
    - Money, toy, phone
  - Activity
    - Bike riding, video games
  - Person
    - Mom, dad, grandma, different teacher
  - Place
    - Park, home, store, restaurant
  - Time
    - Additional time to do something
    - Additional time to avoid something
Automatic
There is something pleasurable about how something

- Looks
  - Shiny, while squinting, reflections
- Feels
  - Soft, cold, tight
- Tastes
  - Salty, bitter, spicy
- Smells
  - Strong, spicy, sweet
- Hears
  - High-pitched, muffled, quiet
How do we determine function?

- Indirect methods
  - Rating Scales & Questionnaires
  - Interviews
  - Data Collection

- Direct methods
  - Observation
  - Experimental
Indirect Methods

- Asking other people about the behavior

- Pros
  - Fast
  - Easy

- Cons
  - Tend to be biased
  - Tend to get inconsistent responses
  - Tend to get inaccurate responses
Scales & Questionnaires

- Involves rating the frequency of when a behavior occurs in different situations
- Everyone answers the same questions in the same order
- Examples
  - Functional Analysis Screening Tool (FAST)
  - Motivation Assessment Scale (MAS)
  - Questions About Behavioral Function (QABF)
  - Functional Assessment Rating Scale (FARS)
Interviews

- Structured set of questions
  - Behavior(s)
  - Setting Events
  - Antecedents
  - Consequences
  - Interventions

- Allows the interviewer to ask additional questions throughout

- Examples
  - Functional Assessment Interview (FAI)
Data Collection

- Providing direct staff with data collection forms to gather information
  - Antecedent-behavior-consequence
  - Frequency & duration
  - Temporal patterns

- Examples
  - Descriptive Assessment Cards
  - Interval Recording sheets
  - Scatterplots
Direct Methods

- Watching the behavior when and where it occurs

Pros
- Objective
- See behavior first hand
- Can better define behavior(s)

Cons
- Time consuming
- Need trained observer
- May not see the behavior
- May not identify subtle or intermittent variables
Observation

- Trained observer watches the behavior occur in the natural environment
  - Gathers data and information about the behavior and contexts it occurs in

Examples
- Narrative
- Structured
Experimental Method

- Set up conditions to test which reinforcer maintains the behavior

Pros
- Objective
- High degree of control over behavior
- High reliability and validity

Cons
- Need multiple highly trained people
- Not appropriate with all challenging behaviors
- Time intensive
So how do we choose method?

- Look at the behavior
  - High frequency or low frequency
  - Severity
- Look at the environment
  - Level of disruption to others
- Look at staff
  - Accuracy of reporting
  - Availability of trained staff
Best Practice?

- Research says experimental
  - Most reliable and valid
  - May be necessary if more than one function is identified or function isn't clear
- Short versions or mini-EFA's be used

But…
- Must have the resources required to implement this type of assessment
Best Practice?

- Can use a combination, but always include direct observation by trained observer.

- Use indirect assessments:
  - To gather more information
  - To identify when to observe
  - To identify staff that may need support/training
  - To evaluate environments
  - To develop data collection
Multiple Functions Identified

- Need more data!
  - Additional direct observation sessions
  - Structured ABC data sheets for staff
- Experimental functional analysis
Multiple Behaviors

- If same function
  - Often can treat multiple behaviors the same or a similar way

- If different functions
  - Sometimes can treat both simultaneously
  - If treatments are contraindicated
    - Focus larger problem behavior first
    - Focus on the primary function first
Intervention Options

- Start with prevention strategies
  - Most are one size fits all
  - Rarely will these be contraindicated
  - Often are essential components of function-specific treatment
Prevention Intervention Options

- Reinforcer assessment
  - Formal assessment quarterly
  - Preference checks daily

- Increase engagement
  - More variety of activities at appropriate level
  - Less downtime

- Catch appropriate behavior at 4-1 ratio
  - Allocate attention to appropriate behavior
  - No response to inappropriate behavior
Prevention Intervention Options

- **Differential reinforcement**
  - Provide higher quality reinforcement for behavior other than targeted challenging behavior
    - Alternative behavior (DRA)
    - Anything except for challenging behavior (DRO)
  - Put challenging behavior on extinction
    - Withhold the reinforcer
Prevention Intervention Options

- Functional Communication Training (FCT)
  - Often is an indicated function-based treatment
  - If student cannot ask for what they need/want and get it…
    - In any environment
    - With any materials
    - With any person/people
    - With NO prompts
  They NEED functional communication training!
Intervention Options: Attention

- Provide attention non-contingently
- Catch them being good
- Differential reinforcement
- Planned ignoring
- Functional communication training
- Teach to wait
- Teach independent leisure skills
- Teach to accept when attention is unavailable
Intervention Options: Escape

- Activity choice
- Curriculum/Instruction revision
- Demand fading
- Non-contingent escape
- Differential reinforcement of alternative
- Functional communication training
- Differential reinforcement of zero rates
- Escape extinction
- Teach to wait
- Teach coping skills
Intervention Options: Tangible

- Functional communication training
- Teach to wait
- Teach to accept unavailable
- Non-contingent access
Intervention Options: Automatic

- Environmental enrichment
- Teach independent leisure skills
- Replace with more appropriate behavior
- Teach when behavior is okay
- Extinction
Choosing Specific Interventions

- Consider
  - Ethical issues
  - Safety
  - Practicality
  - Organizational issues
- Look short term, but think long term
Choosing Specific Interventions

- Look at the environment
  - Set up conducive to the intervention
  - Effective teaching
- Look at the staff
  - Training
  - On board
  - Amount of effort required
- Look at the person
  - Skills already in repertoire
  - Amount of effort required
Questions?
Contact Information

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Data Sheet Examples
References