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## Instructions for Functional Behavior Assessment

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### **Functional Assessment:**

The best way to design treatments for specific behaviors is to look at the cause(s) of those behaviors. That is, what *function* do those behaviors serve? Do they serve to gain attention to the child? Do they serve to allow the child to escape/avoid tasks or demands? Or, does the child simply get what he/she wants by “misbehaving?”

Understanding the function of behavior is important because it can have a dramatic effect on treatment. Consider the case of two children who both engage in “tantrum” behaviors. While the behaviors may be identical for each child, the function of those behaviors may be different. One child may engage in those behaviors to escape work/demands, while the other may do so to attain attention. As a result, the interventions for these two children should be different.

Consequently, a “functional behavioral assessment” is the first step in treating behavior problems. This typically involves looking at three variables related to the targeted behaviors: antecedents to the behaviors, the behaviors themselves, and consequences of the behaviors.

### **Antecedents:**

Antecedents occur *before* target behavior. These could include the presence of certain people, certain activities, types of tasks, adult instructions, etc. There are numerous antecedents that occur immediately before a child’s problem behavior, and it is possible that one—or a combination—of those antecedents affects behavior.

However, it is also possible that the effects of those immediate antecedents are compounded by events that have occurred long before target behavior. For example, hunger, sleep deprivation, sickness, fatigue, and medication could all affect behavior. Additionally, pre-existing conditions such as poor eyesight, difficulty hearing, disabilities, or mental health issues could also lead to problem behavior.

Consider these issues while completing the referral form. Are there any antecedents that seem to be consistently associated with problem behavior?

### **Behaviors:**

The behaviors that you choose to target should be clearly specified. Think about the following questions when targeting problem behaviors: Does this child engage in behavior that interferes with his/her learning and/or ability to function independently? Are any of his/her behaviors dangerous or destructive? Does this child engage in behaviors that are extremely disruptive?

When listing these behaviors, be sure to describe observable behaviors. For example, when using general terms such as “hyperactive,” “depressed,” or “angry,” provide precise depictions of the associated behaviors (i.e., rocking in chair, constantly moving around the room, physical aggression, etc.).

### **Consequences:**

Consequences have the most significant impact on behaviors. In fact, consequences serve to change, shape, and maintain our behaviors every day. This component of the functional behavioral assessment is particularly relevant because problem behaviors are *maintained* by their consequences. And, quite often, adults misjudge how consequences affect children. For example, time-out can affect children differently. Certainly, many children would often find such a consequence aversive. However, if the target behavior is maintained by an escape/avoidance function, time-out may actually serve to *reinforce* inappropriate behavior.

Also, think about the indirect consequences of behavior. For example, does the child gain attention from peers or adults? Does the child escape/avoid classroom demands, even if that escape/avoidance is in the form of time-out? Does the child “get what he/she wants” in some way?

### **Completing the Assessment:**

When completing the assessment form, think about these issues. Finding patterns in the variables associated with problem behaviors is the first step in the development of successful treatment. Please complete the two pages, and add any additional comments, suggestions, and/or observations.

# Functional Behavior Assessment

Date of Plan: \_\_\_\_\_

Child: \_\_\_\_\_

DOB: \_\_\_\_\_

## Behavior

1. Name and describe in objective and observable terms the behavior(s) that is interfering w/ the child's progress. If more than one behavior, complete separate assessment forms for each.

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

2. What is the average (a) frequency, (b) duration, and (c) severity of this behavior? (a) \_\_\_\_\_  
(b) \_\_\_\_\_ (c) \_\_\_\_\_

## Antecedents

1. Environmental Assessment: Identify and describe situations under which target behavior(s) may be most likely to occur.

- Time of day: \_\_\_\_\_
- Day of week: \_\_\_\_\_
- With certain children/adults: \_\_\_\_\_
- In certain locations: \_\_\_\_\_
- During specific activities: \_\_\_\_\_
- When asked to do something: \_\_\_\_\_
- When asked to *stop* doing something: \_\_\_\_\_
- Can you predict this child's "poor" days? How? \_\_\_\_\_
- Communication or social skills deficits? \_\_\_\_\_
- Other antecedents: \_\_\_\_\_

2. Physical / medical history (i.e., conditions, medications, complaints): \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

3. When is this behavior *most* likely to occur? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

4. When is this behavior *least* likely to occur? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

5. Describe any precursors/predictors to the behavior (i.e., becomes self-injurious before throwing things). \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

## Consequences

1. What might the child *attain* as a result of this behavior (i.e., attention, communication, preferred item/activity)? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

2. What might the child *avoid* as a result of this behavior (i.e., following directions, aversive tasks)? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

3. How do you respond to this behavior? \_\_\_\_\_

4. How do other children respond to this behavior? \_\_\_\_\_

5. Describe this child's positive behaviors and the consequences for them (use back if necessary). \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

## Behavior Support Plan

Effective behavioral interventions should include reactive strategies (i.e., what you do when the target behavior occurs) and—more importantly—proactive strategies (i.e., what you do when the target behavior *is not* occurring). In general, by identifying functions of behavior, you can limit (or eliminate) the reinforcement that a child attains through this target behavior; and—more importantly—you can increase the reinforcement that a child attains through alternative positive behavior.

1. Antecedent(s) (i.e., instructions, therapy): \_\_\_\_\_
2. Target behavior: \_\_\_\_\_
3. Consequence(s)/Function (i.e., attention, escape): \_\_\_\_\_

### **Proactive Strategies:**

4. If target behavior is related to skill deficit (i.e., communication, social skills), how will you teach alternative behavior?  
\_\_\_\_\_
5. Can you limit antecedents that lead to target behavior? If so, how? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
6. Can you increase antecedents that lead to positive behavior (i.e., visual support, choices, extra time, reinforcement)? If so, how? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
7. Describe alternative behaviors that you can teach/reinforce. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
8. What reinforcement can you use to increase the above positive behaviors? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
9. How will you provide consequences (i.e., reinforcement) related to function for positive behavior? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

### **Reactive Strategies:**

\* Note: If the safety of the child or others is threatened when the target behavior occurs, you may need to develop a crisis plan (possibly including time-out, removal, and/or restraint procedures).

10. Can you limit reinforcement for target behavior (i.e., escape, attention)? If so, how? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
11. Can you ignore the behavior? (This strategy is most appropriate for behaviors maintained by attention.) \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
12. Can you redirect the behavior? \_\_\_\_\_
13. Is time-out an appropriate consequence? (Don't use for escape/avoidance behaviors.) \_\_\_\_\_
14. What other consequences would be appropriate (i.e., verbal prompts, reinforcement hold)? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_