



Tips for Home or School

A Step-by-Step Overview of Conducting a Functional Assessment of Challenging Behaviors



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STEP 1: Identify challenging behaviors.

- Use structured interviews to identify the behavior(s), the settings the behavior(s) occur in, and the times the behavior(s) occur.

STEP 2: Prioritize challenging behaviors.

- Which behaviors should be targeted immediately? Which behaviors should be monitored for future interventions?

STEP 3: Define challenging behaviors.

- Operationally define challenging behaviors. Challenging behaviors should be defined in terms that are observable and measurable (i.e., one can see and count the behaviors).

STEP 4: Gather data to formulate hypotheses about the challenging behavior(s).

- Use Structured Interviews: Identify events that trigger & follow a challenging behavior
- Conduct Systematic Observations: Use scatter plots and/or A-B-C analyses
- Focus on variables that occur immediately before or after the challenging behavior(s).
- Potential functions include: gaining attention, obtaining a tangible item such as an object or food, escaping from a situation, gaining sensory feedback, communication, reaction to an event that happened in a previous setting.

STEP 5: Complete a functional analysis of the challenging behavior(s).

- Manipulate the situation to test all possible functions of the challenging behavior(s).

STEP 6: Link the results of the functional assessment to developing a positive behavior support plan.

- Select replacement behavior(s).
- Reinforce the replacement behavior(s), do not reinforce the challenging behavior(s).
- Address setting events & antecedents that may increase the occurrence of the challenging behavior(s).

Positive Behavioral Support Guidelines

1. Identify and reward/reinforce socially appropriate behaviors.
2. Do not reinforce unacceptable behaviors by attending unnecessarily to them.
3. Be consistent with reinforcers and other consequences.
4. Anticipate antecedents (i.e., events or situations that appear before a specific behavior).
5. Once responding to a behavior, follow through with the specified procedures.
6. Deliver reinforcers immediately following desired behaviors; punishment should also be delivered immediately following undesirable behaviors.
7. Reinforce peers for appropriate behavior in the presence of the student displaying inappropriate behavior. Ignore the inappropriate behavior; when the student engages in an appropriate behavior, immediately reinforce him/her.
8. Model the behavior that you would like the student to demonstrate.
9. Be specific with your verbal praise by referencing the behaviors that you consider acceptable (e.g., "Good job being quiet during math." "Nice job finishing your work.")
10. Be realistic in prioritizing behaviors in the sequence of importance in which they should be addressed (e.g., address behaviors injurious to self or others before nail biting)
11. Since modeling is so effective, be sure to demonstrate only those behaviors that you want the student to imitate.
12. The better the relationship the model has with the student, the more likely the student will imitate the model's actions.
13. Imitation of a modeled behavior is more likely to increase if it is reinforced.

