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# What Are Children Trying to Tell Us?

Understanding the Function of Young Children's Behavior

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## Goals

- What do we mean by function?
- How do we identify function?
- How does function guide intervention and supports?

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## Challenging Behavior Communicates

- Communicates a message when a child does not have language.
- Used instead of language by a child who has limited social skills or has learned that challenging behavior will result in meeting his or her needs.

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## Children Communicate in Many Ways:

- Forms of communication
  - Words
  - Sentences
  - Point to a picture
  - Eye gaze
  - Pulling adult
  - Crying
  - Biting
  - Tantrums
  - ?



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## Basics

- Behavior occurs within an environmental context
  - Antecedent
    - What happens before to “trigger”
  - Behavior
    - What the child does, setting specific
  - Consequence
    - What happens after to maintain

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## Basic Summary Statement


Antecedent	Behavior	Maintaining Consequence
<i>Joey is asked to come to circle. Teacher provides physical prompt to move him to group.</i>	<i>Joey resists, cries, and hits teacher.</i>	<i>Teacher moves away from Joey and allows Joey to select a different activity.</i>

  
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## Behavior


### *form of communication*

- Any observable or measurable action or act.
- Observable beginning & end
- Has measurable dimension
  - frequency, duration, locus, latency, intensity, topography

  
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## Examples

- Physical and Verbal Aggression
- Noncompliance
- Self-injury
- Disruption/Tantrum
- Property Damage
- Social Withdrawal/Isolation
- Inappropriate Language
- Running Away

  
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## Antecedent Stimulus

- Any event, action, object perceptible to senses
- Occurs before response
  - Signals or occasions the response
  - “Sets it off” (trigger)
- Example
  - *When told to shut up by another student, Rachel hits them*
  - *When presenting his sharing to the class, Mitch stands up and tells jokes*
  - *When his teacher praises him publicly, Fisher puts his head down on the desk and stops doing his work*

  
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## Identifying Antecedents

- Mario bangs his fist on the desk, stomps out of the classroom and slams the door.
- Mario is likely to do this:
  - When peers laugh at his answers in class.
  - When the teacher tells him it is time for writing
  - When he forgets to bring in his homework
  - When the teacher corrects him for talking out in class

  
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## Consequence stimulus

- Any event, action, object perceptible to senses
- Occurs after response
- Presented contingent upon performance of a response
  - Contingent = only after behavior has occurred
- Can **increase** or **decrease** future behavior
- Example
  - *When Rachel hits her peers, they leave her alone*
  - *When Mitch tells jokes, the students in the class begin to laugh, he is sent to the office and doesn't have to present his sharing*
  - *When Fisher puts his head down, the teacher walks away and doesn't say anything to him for about 20 minutes*

  
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## Identifying Maintaining Consequences

- Mario bangs his fist on the desk, stomps out of the classroom and slams the door.
- After Mario does this:
  - He spends 15 minutes in the hall and misses math
  - Other children laugh and cheer
  - The teacher joins Mario in the hallway, talks with him about his behavior and then gives him a hug
  - The teacher calls Mario's parents and they sit and talk with him about his behavior

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## Setting Event

- Event that occurs at another time that increases the likelihood the child will have challenging behavior. Setting events serve to “set the child up” to have challenging behavior.
  - Alters the value of the maintaining consequence
- Examples
  - Lack of sleep
  - Headache/illness
  - Lack of food (e.g., no breakfast)
  - Fight with peer/parent/etc.
  - .....

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## Identifying Setting Events

- Mario bangs his fist on the desk, stomps out of the classroom and slams the door.
- Mario is more likely to do this when:
  - He is tired
  - He is hungry
  - He had a fight with his brother in the morning before school

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## Behavior Summary Statement

Setting Event	Antecedent	Behavior	Maintaining Consequence
	<i>Quan approaches computer and sees child working on program.</i>	<i>Quan moves his picture to indicate that he is next. Quan observes and waits for his turn.</i>	<i>Child leaves computer and Quan sits down and begins working.</i>

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## Behavior Summary Statement

Setting Event	Antecedent	Behavior	Maintaining Consequence
<i>Quan was up most the night with an asthma attack. He arrives at school looking sleepy and with dark circles under his eyes.</i>	<i>Quan approaches computer and sees child working on program.</i>	<i>Quan hits child and pushes his body on the child's chair.</i>	<i>Child leaves computer and Quan sits down and begins working.</i>

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## Behavior Summary Statement

*When her teachers ask Tamisha to take her seat and begin working, she hits her teachers and is immediately sent to the office. This is more likely to occur first thing in the morning before Tamisha has had anything to eat (doesn't get breakfast at home)*

Setting event	Antecedent	Behavior	Consequence

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## Behavior Summary Statement

*Evan is playing with Duplos. He tries to attach a block to his stack of 3. He can't quite get the blocks to connect. He looks up at the adult and begins fussing. He holds the stack of blocks up, looks at the blocks, and looks at the adult. The adult helps him put the blocks together.*

Setting event	Antecedent	Behavior	Consequence

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## Challenging Behavior Works

- Children engage in challenging behavior because “it works” for them.
- Challenging behavior results in the child gaining access to something or someone (i.e., obtain/request) or avoiding something or someone (i.e., escape/protest).

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## Dimensions of Communication

Every communicative behavior can be described by the form and function.

- **Form:** the behavior used to communicate.
- **Function:** the reason or purpose of the communicative behavior.

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## Two Basic Research Validated Functions

- Positive reinforcement
  - Get/access something the child finds reinforcing
- Negative reinforcement
  - Avoid/escape something the child finds aversive

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	Get/Access	Avoid/Escape
Peer/Adult Social		
Activities/Tasks		
Tangibles		
Sensory		

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## Behavior Summary Statement

*When her teachers ask Tamisha to take her seat and begin working, she hits her teachers and is immediately sent to the office. This is more likely to occur first thing in the morning before Tamisha has had anything to eat (doesn't get breakfast at home)*

Setting event	Antecedent	Behavior	Consequence
No breakfast	Asked to sit at desk and do work	Hits the teacher	Sent to the office <u>Function</u>

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## Behavior Summary Statement

*Evan is playing with Duplos. He tries to attach a block to his stack of 3. He can't quite get the blocks to connect. He looks up at the adult and begins fussing. He holds the stack of blocks up, looks at the blocks, and looks at the adult. The adult helps him put the blocks together.*

Setting event	Antecedent	Behavior	Consequence
None	Playing with Duplos, can't connect blocks	Looks up at adult, fusses, holds up blocks, looks at block/adult	Adult helps put blocks together <u>Function</u>

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## PBIS focuses on fixing **environments**, not people


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## Designing Behavior Support Plans

- Strategies for
  - Preventing problem behavior antecedent strategies
  - Teaching new skills behavior strategies
  - Responding in new ways consequence strategies
    - Removing/decreasing reinforcement for problem behavior
    - Implementing/increasing reinforcement for appropriate behavior
  - Monitoring implementation effectiveness
- Emphasis on *all* parts of summary statement


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### Tim's Support Planning Chart- Hypothesis

Trigger	Behavior	Maintaining Consequence
Group play: centers and outside play with peers	Verbal aggression (threats), physical aggression (hit, push, kick, punch), property destruction	Peers give up toys/items Peers leave area Adults intervene with negative attention to Tim
<u>Setting Events</u> (if applicable):		<b>Function:</b> obtain toy/play
<b>Prevention</b>	<b>Teaching</b>	<b>Response</b>


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## Teaching Replacement Skills

- Teach alternative behavior to challenging behavior.
- Replacement skills must be efficient and effective (i.e., work quickly for the child).
- Consider skills that child already has.
- Make sure the reward for appropriate behavior is consistent.

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## Competing Behavior Equation

Child told peer gets a tum.

➔

Child yells, kicks, throws.

➔

Adult gives child another tum.


➔

Child asks for one more tum.

➔

Adult says "one more tum, then (peer's name)'s tum" and gives tum.

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## Competing Behavior Equation

Child asked to join circle.

➔

Child screams and resists.

➔

Teacher lets child out of activity.

➔

Child gestures "all done."

➔

Teacher lets child out of activity.

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## Functional Equivalence

- Identify an acceptable way that the child can deliver the same message.
- Make sure that the new response is socially appropriate and will access the child's desired outcome.
- Teach the child a skill that honors that function of the behavior (e.g., if child wants out of activity, teach child to gesture "finished").

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## Competing Behavior Pathway

```

    graph LR
      SE[Setting event: None] --> A[Antecedent: Preferred peer]
      A --> DB[Desired Behavior]
      A --> PB[Problem Behavior: Talking]
      A --> AB[Alternative Behavior]
      DB --> EC[Existing Consequence]
      PB --> MC[Maintaining Consequence: Gain Peer attention]
      AB --> MC
    
```

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## Competing Pathway: Landon (1)

```

    graph LR
      SE[Setting Events: Conflict at home] --> TA[Triggering Antecedents: Transition/Less structured time with peers]
      TA --> PB[Problem Behavior: Off-task, Out of seat, Talk-outs, Not following directions]
      TA --> DA[Desired Alternative: Follow directions, listen quietly]
      PB --> MC[Maintaining Consequences: Obtain peer & adult attention]
      DA --> TC[Typical Consequence: Complete transitions, appropriate relationships]
      AA[Acceptable Alternative: Request peer buddy]
    
```

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## Competing Pathway: Landon (2)

```

    graph LR
      SE[Setting Events: Conflict at home] --> TA[Triggering Antecedents: Difficult Academic Task (math, writing)]
      TA --> PB[Problem Behavior: Off-task, Out of seat, Talk-outs, Not following directions]
      TA --> DA[Desired Alternative: Complete work quietly and independently]
      PB --> MC[Maintaining Consequences: Escape task]
      DA --> TC[Typical Consequence: Points, grades, questions, more work]
      AA[Acceptable Alternative: Request break]
    
```

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## Big Messages

- Challenging behavior communicates
- Challenging behavior works
- Effective interventions fix environments, not people
  - Observe objectively
  - Understand context/function
  - Plan comprehensive, function-based supports

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## PBIS Resources

- Technical Assistance Center on Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports
  - [www.pbis.org](http://www.pbis.org)
- Center for Evidence-Based Practice: Young Children with Challenging Behavior
  - [www.challengingbehavior.org\\_fmhi.usf.edu/](http://www.challengingbehavior.org_fmhi.usf.edu/)
- Center on the Social and Emotional Foundations for Early Learning
  - [www.vanderbilt.edu/csefel](http://www.vanderbilt.edu/csefel)

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## Two Basic Research Validated Functions

- Positive reinforcement
  - Get/access something the child finds reinforcing
- Negative reinforcement
  - Avoid/escape something the child finds aversive

	Get/Access	Avoid/Escape
Peer/Adult Social		
Activities/Tasks		
Tangibles		
Sensory		

**Observation Cards**

<b>Name:</b>	<b>Observer:</b>	<b>Date:</b>
		<b>Time:</b>
<b>General Context:</b> _____		
<b>Social Context:</b>		
<b>Challenging Behavior:</b>		
<b>Social Reaction:</b>		
<b>POSSIBLE FUNCTION:</b>		

<b>Name:</b>	<b>Observer:</b>	<b>Date:</b>
		<b>Time:</b>
<b>General Context:</b> _____		
<b>Social Context:</b>		
<b>Challenging Behavior:</b>		
<b>Social Reaction:</b>		
<b>POSSIBLE FUNCTION:</b>		