

Functional Behavioral Assessment

Purpose of Functional Behavioral Assessment – A functional behavioral assessment (FBA) is a process for collecting data to determine the possible cause of problem behaviors and to identify strategies to address the behaviors. A person who is completing a FBA may use different methods and strategies, such as interviews with the child and his or her parents and classmates, observing the child in different environments such as at lunch, on the playground and in the classroom, gathering reports from teachers and other professionals and reviewing records.

It is important when collecting information about a child's problem behaviors to know as much as possible about the child, including his or her personality and temperament, medical conditions and behaviors associated with the condition, and the effects of any medications the child is taking. For instance, one may be able to predict that for a particular child with Tourette Disorder, increased periods of stress (new school, change in medication, testing situations, etc.) may lead to an increase in vocal or motor tics.

The results of a FBA process should be an "informed hypothesis" or guess about how the child's environment contributes to his or her positive and problem behaviors. It should also provide the basis of the development of a behavior intervention plan (BIP) that is focused on teaching new skills.

Steps of a Functional Behavioral Assessment – The steps in conducting a functional assessment will vary with the needs of each child, but begin with identifying the specific behaviors that need to change. If a child has numerous behaviors of concern, it will be important to focus on the one or two behaviors that are the most serious, and to define the behaviors in terms that everyone understands in the same way. FBAs will certainly vary from child to child, depending on the severity of need and the complexity of the behavior. These are the typical steps:

- Determine in which environments the behaviors do and do not occur and identify antecedents and other factors relating to the environments where the behaviors occur and do not occur.
- Ask: “What supports positive behavior in the environments where behavior is not a concern?” “What is different in the places where the behaviors do occur?” (teacher-child and peer interactions, size of classroom, number of students, curriculum, time of day, emotional state, etc.)
- Collect data from as many sources as possible including samples of the child's class work. The team will consider the data, including interviews conducted with the child and/or parents to develop a hypothesis about why problem behaviors occur (the function of the behaviors), and will identify replacement behaviors that can be taught and that serve the same purpose for the child.

A hypothesis includes predictions about under what circumstances a behavior is most likely and least likely to occur. It will also identify replacement behaviors that can serve the same function for the child. From the hypothesis statement, the team will design a behavioral intervention plan, and test their hypothesis by implementing and evaluating the agreed-upon interventions.

Resources

- Most states have a Positive Behavior Support (PBS) Network that contains information about the items and processes mentioned above. The Michigan PBS Network is a good source on FBAs and BIPs. There are also behavior observation forms, and links to a variety of resources like: “Tips to Ensuring a Successful Positive Behavior Plan” and “What is a Positive Behavior Plan?” This can be found at: www.bridges4kids.org/PBS/index.htm
- The Florida PBS Project is at: <http://flpbs.fmhi.usf.edu>
- The Texas Project is at: www.txbsi.org

- “Write Your Own Behavior Plan” includes sample plans for specific disabilities and specific behaviors: <http://specialchildren.about.com/od/specialeducation/qt/behaviorplan.htm>
- “Functional Behavioral Assessment and Positive Interventions: What Parents Need to Know” from the PACER Center at: www.pacer.org/parent/php/php-c141.pdf
- Advocacy in Action (October 2006) reported on a study of 800 due process, district court and appellate court decisions involving the adequacy of BIPs. The findings provide important information that advocates and parents need to take into consideration as they work together to plan effective behavioral interventions on behalf of students with disabilities: www.advocateinstitute.org/advocacyinaction
- FBA’s and BIPS: <http://cecp.air.org/fba>
- “Rationale for Using FBAs to Develop Positive Behavior Interventions”: <http://cecp.air.org/fba/problembehavior2/rationale2.htm>

From CAUSE (Citizens Alliance for Upholding Special Education)



The contents of this publication were developed under a grant from the US Department of Education, H328M150022 (PATH), H328M150023 (PEN), & H328M150024 (TEAM). However, those contents do not necessarily represent the policy of the US Department of Education, and you should not assume endorsement by the Federal Government.



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