Determining the Meaning of Challenging Behavior

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IDEAs that Work
Office of Special Education Programs

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Determining the Meaning of Challenging Behavior

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Determining the Meaning of Challenging Behavior

Participants’ Handout Slides

Learner Objectives

This workshop will teach you to:
- define forms and function of communication and identify the behavioral mechanisms that contribute to viewing challenging behavior as communicative.
- identify methods that may be used to determine the function of challenging behavior.
- use interview and observation data to determine the communicative function of challenging behavior.

Old Way – New Way

Old Way
- General intervention for all behavior challenges
- Intervention is reactive
- Focus on behavior reduction
- Quick fix

New Way
- Intervention matched to purpose of the behavior
- Intervention is proactive
- Focus on teaching new skills
- Long term interventions

Positive Behavior Support (PBS)

- An approach for changing a child’s behavior
- Is based on humanistic values and research
- An approach for developing an understanding of why the child has challenging behavior and teaching the child new skills to replace challenging behavior
- A holistic approach that considers all of the factors that impact on a child, family, and the child’s behavior
Research on PBS

- Effective for all ages of individuals with disabilities 2-50 years
- Effective for diverse groups of individuals with challenges: mental retardation, oppositional defiant disorder, autism, emotional behavioral disorders, children at risk, etc.
- PBS is the only comprehensive and evidence-based approach to address challenging behavior within a variety of natural settings.

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

Challenging Behavior

- 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)
Determining the Meaning of Challenging Behavior

Dimensions of Communication

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

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

Children Communicate a Variety of Messages

- **Functions of communication**
  - Request object, activity, person
  - Escape demands
  - Escape activity
  - Request help
  - Request social interaction
  - Comment
  - Request information
  - Request sensory stimulation
  - Escape sensory stimulation
  - ?

Children Communicate in Many Ways:

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

- 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.

**Shana**

- Shana is sitting in her high chair with nothing on the tray. Her mother is stirring her oatmeal. Shana begins crying and bangs her head on the back of the seat. Her mother says to her "It’s not cool enough, honey, just a minute". Shana stops crying when the oatmeal is placed on her tray.

**Cameron**

- Cameron is riding a trike on the playground bike path. He sees a child move to the sand box where he had just finished building a road-way. He leaps off his trike and tackles the child. He hits the child. An adult comes over to intervene. She comforts the child and scolds Cameron. Cameron goes to the sand box and continues construction on his road-way.
Michelle

- Michelle is in housekeeping, putting on high heels and a hat. Emily moves into the area and selects a purse from the dress-ups. Michelle shouts “no” and bites Emily. A teacher comes over, she asks Michelle to go to the thinking chair and takes Emily to the bathroom to look at the bite. After 4 minutes, Michelle leaves the thinking chair and returns to housekeeping. She grabs the purse Emily had selected and continues to play. Emily leaves the bathroom with the teacher and then begins an art activity where the teacher is present.

Behavior Equation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Trigger</th>
<th>Behavior</th>
<th>Maintaining Consequence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Joey is asked to come to circle. Teacher provides physical prompt to move him to group</td>
<td>Joey resists and cries, hits teacher</td>
<td>Teacher moves away from Joey and allows Joey to select a different activity</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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.
### Behavior Equation

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

### Behavior Equation

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

### Process of Positive Behavior Support

1. Establishing a collaborative team and identifying goals
2. Gathering information (functional assessment)
3. Developing hypotheses (best guess)
4. Designing behavior support plans
5. Implementing, monitoring, evaluating outcomes and refining plan in natural environments
Functional Assessment

- A process for developing an understanding of a person’s challenging behavior and, in particular, how the behavior is governed by environmental events.

- Observe the child in target routines and settings
- Collect data on child behavior, looking for situations that predict challenging behavior and that are linked with appropriate behavior
- Interview persons most familiar with the child
- Review records
Observation Card

Name: Observer: Date: Time:

General Context: Trigger:

Challenging Behavior:

Maintaining Consequence:

POSSIBLE FUNCTION:

---

Observation Card

Name: Karen Observer: Teacher Date: 1/23

General Context: Choose two:

Trigger: Playing alone in kitchen. Teacher comes over to Karen and asks her to come to the art table for art. When she doesn’t respond, the teacher tries to assist her by taking her arm to make her to stand.

Challenging Behavior: Karen pulls away and begins to protest by saying, “No! I not go to art” as she pulls away from the teacher.

Maintaining Consequence: The teacher walks away and says, “I will be back in a few minutes to see if you are ready.”

POSSIBLE FUNCTION: Escape art

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Home Observation Card

Home Observation Form

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Child’s Name:</th>
<th>Date/Time:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Behavior:</td>
<td>Observer:</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

What Happened Before?

- Played alone
- Wasn’t interested
- Not a preferred activity
- Changing or ending activity
- Changed or ended activity
- Requested something
- Requested something
- Changed or ended activity

What Happened After?

- Challenged parent
- Challenged object/behavior
- Received the object or behavior
- Requested or demanded another
- Left the place

Purpose of Behavior?

- To get an object
- To get a staff
- To get a child
- To get a child

---
Home Observation Card

Sample Setting Event Chart

Another Sample Setting Event Chart
Determining the Meaning of Challenging Behavior

Participants’ Handout Slides

Scatter Plot

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>01</th>
<th>02</th>
<th>03</th>
<th>04</th>
<th>05</th>
<th>06</th>
<th>07</th>
<th>08</th>
<th>09</th>
<th>10</th>
<th>11</th>
<th>12</th>
<th>13</th>
<th>14</th>
<th>15</th>
<th>16</th>
<th>17</th>
<th>18</th>
<th>19</th>
<th>20</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>7:00</td>
<td>Art</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>7:10</td>
<td>Painting</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>7:30</td>
<td>Crafts</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8:00</td>
<td>Songs</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8:10</td>
<td>Drama</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8:45</td>
<td>Dance</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
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<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Activity Analysis

**Child: Rachel**

**Routine/Activity: House Center**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity Description</th>
<th>Behavior Expectations</th>
<th>Problems</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Select materials</td>
<td>1. Pick materials that no one is using</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Pretend in roles</td>
<td>2. Use materials appropriately</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Exchange materials with peers</td>
<td>3. Don’t take from peer appropriately</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Follow peers’ lead or accept role assignment</td>
<td>4. Maintain engagement</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Clean-up</td>
<td>5. Put materials on shelf in correct area</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Routine/Activity: Snack**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity Description</th>
<th>Behavior Expectations</th>
<th>Problems</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Sit in chair</td>
<td>1. Stay in seat</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Take food from plate when passed</td>
<td>2. Take one item, wait for</td>
<td>2. Takes multiple items, puts hand in bowl, grabs plate when passed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Eat food on plate</td>
<td>3. Eat from own plate</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Drink juice from own cup</td>
<td>4. Drink and put cup on</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Ask for more food</td>
<td>5. Ask using please</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Wipe face with napkin</td>
<td>6. Use napkin, not clothing</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Throw plate/cup/napkin away when finished</td>
<td>7. Clear place, throw in trash</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Functional Assessment Interview
- Define behavior (describe what you see)
- Describe frequency and intensity
- Explore possible setting events
- Identify predictors (triggers)
- Identify maintaining consequences
- Identify current communicative functions
- Describe efficiency of the behavior
- Describe previous efforts
- Identify possible reinforcers

### Functional Assessment Interview
- Refer to Brendan’s Sample Functional Assessment Interview
- BrendansFAI.pdf

### Working as a Collaborative Team
- Assign roles
- Determine agenda and time for meetings
- Ensure group participation through facilitation and participatory processes
Roles

- **Facilitator** – person who guides group in stating agenda, work goals, time allocation
- **Recorder** – person who writes down the discussion
- **Time Keeper** – Person who tracks time and warns when agenda item is ending
- **Reporter** – person who shares group information, makes presentation
- **Encourager** – person who provides feedback to group members
- **Jargon-buster** – person who asks the question “what do you mean when you say ‘gobbledy-gook’” and helps the group with communicating clearly

Determining the Function of Challenging Behavior

- Assign roles
- Review child description
- Review observations
- Review interview
- Complete final page of interview
- Determine functions of challenging behavior
- Report to group

Major Messages

1. Challenging behavior communicates
2. Children use behavior to access something or someone (obtain/request) or avoid something or someone (escape/protest)
3. A behavior equation consists of triggers, the behavior, maintaining consequences, and the function
4. The process of Functional Assessment is used to determine the function or purpose of challenging behavior
Observation Card

Name: ____________________  Observer: ____________________  Date: ______
General Context: ____________________  Time: ______
Trigger: 

Challenging Behavior: 

Maintaining Consequence: 

POSSIBLE FUNCTION:

Observation Card

Name: ____________________  Observer: ____________________  Date: ______
General Context: ____________________  Time: ______
Trigger: 

Challenging Behavior: 

Maintaining Consequence: 

POSSIBLE FUNCTION:
**Observation Card**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name:</th>
<th>Observer:</th>
<th>Date:</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>General Context:</th>
<th>Time:</th>
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<tbody>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Trigger:</th>
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<tbody>
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<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Challenging Behavior:</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
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<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Maintaining Consequence:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>POSSIBLE FUNCTION:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Observation Card

Name: ________________________  Observer: __________________________  Date: ________
General Context: __________________________  Time: ________
Trigger:

Challenging Behavior:

Maintaining Consequence:

POSSIBLE FUNCTION:
Observation Card

Name: ___________________________  Observer: ___________________________  Date: ______

General Context: ___________________________  Time: ______

Trigger:

Challenging Behavior:

Maintaining Consequence:

POSSIBLE FUNCTION:

Observation Card

Name: ___________________________  Observer: ___________________________  Date: ______

General Context: ___________________________  Time: ______

Trigger:

Challenging Behavior:

Maintaining Consequence:

POSSIBLE FUNCTION:
# Home Observation Form

## Child's Name: ____________________________  Date/Time: ____________

### Activity: ____________________________  Observer: ____________

#### Describe Challenging Behavior:

## What Happened Before?

- [ ] Told or asked to do something
- [ ] Removed an object
- [ ] Not a preferred activity
- [ ] Difficult task/activity
- [ ] Playing alone
- [ ] Moved activity/location to another
- [ ] Told “No,” “Don’t,” “Stop”
- [ ] Attention given to others
- [ ] Changed or ended activity
- [ ] Object out of reach
- [ ] Child requested
- [ ] Other: ____________________________

## What Happened After?

- [ ] Given social attention
- [ ] Given an object/activity/food
- [ ] Removed from activity or area
- [ ] Punished or scolded
- [ ] Request or demand withdrawn
- [ ] Request or demand delayed
- [ ] Put in “time out”
- [ ] Ignored
- [ ] Given assistance/help
- [ ] Other: ____________________________

## Purpose of Behavior?

### To Get or Obtain:

- [ ] Activity
- [ ] Object
- [ ] Person
- [ ] Help
- [ ] Attention
- [ ] Food
- [ ] Place
- [ ] Other: ____________________________

### To Get Out of or Avoid:

- [ ] Activity
- [ ] Object
- [ ] Person
- [ ] Demand/Request
- [ ] Transition
- [ ] Food
- [ ] Place
- [ ] Other:
Home Observation Form

Setting Events/Lifestyle Influences:
- [ ] Hunger
- [ ] Absence of fun activities
- [ ] Absence of a person
- [ ] Sick
- [ ] Unexpected loss or change in activity/object
- [ ] Uncomfortable clothing
- [ ] Too hot or too cold
- [ ] Loud noise
- [ ] Lack of sleep
- [ ] Medication side effects
- [ ] Extreme change in routine
- [ ] Other: ____________________________

List notes / Comments / Unusual Events:
Functional Assessment Interview Form – Young Child

Child with Challenging Behavior(s): ____________________________ Interview Date: ______________
Age: Years ______ Months ______ Sex: ☐ Male ☐ Female Interviewer: _____________________
Respondent(s): _____________________________________________

A. Describe the Behavior(s)

1. What are the behaviors of concern? For each, define how it is performed, how often it occurs per day, week, or month, how long it lasts when it occurs, and the intensity in which it occurs (low, medium, high).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Behavior</th>
<th>How Is It Performed</th>
<th>How Often</th>
<th>How Long</th>
<th>Intensity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td></td>
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<td>3.</td>
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<tr>
<td>4.</td>
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<tr>
<td>5.</td>
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<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2. Which of the behaviors described above occur together (e.g., occur at the same time; occur in a predictable "chain"; occur in response to the same situation)?

B. Identify Events that may Affect the Behavior(s)

1. What medications does the child take, and how do you believe these may affect his/her behavior?

2. What medical complication (if any) does the child experience that may affect his/her behavior (e.g., asthma, allergies, rashes, sinus infections, seizures)?

3. Describe the sleep cycles of the child and the extent to which these cycles may affect his/her behavior.

4. Describe the eating routines and diet of the child and the extent to which these routines may affect his/her behavior.

5. Briefly list the child’s typical daily schedule of activities and how well he/she does within each activity.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Daily Activities</th>
<th>Child’s Reaction</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6:00 AM</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7:00 AM</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8:00 AM</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>9:00 AM</td>
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<tr>
<td>10:00 AM</td>
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<td>11:00 AM</td>
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<td>12:00 PM</td>
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<td>8:00 PM</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>9:00 PM</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

6. Describe the extent to which you believe activities that occur during the day are predictable for your child. To what extent does the child know what he/she will be doing and what will occur during the day (e.g., when to get up, when to eat breakfast, when to play outside)? How does your child know this?

7. What choices does the child get to make each day (e.g., food, toys, activities)?
C. Identify Events and Situations that may Trigger Behavior(s)

1. **Time of Day**: *When* are the behaviors most and least likely to happen?
   Most likely:

   Least likely:

2. **Settings**: *Where* are the behaviors most and least likely to happen?
   Most likely:

   Least likely:

3. **Social Control**: *With whom* are the behaviors most and least likely to happen?
   Most likely:

   Least likely:

4. **Activity**: *What* activities are most and least likely to produce the behaviors?
   Most likely:

   Least likely:

5. Are there particular situations, events, etc. that are not listed above that “set off” the behaviors that cause concern (particular demands, interruptions, transitions, delays, being ignored, etc.)?

6. What one thing could you do that would most likely make the challenging behavior occur?

7. What one thing could you do to make sure the challenging behavior did not occur?
D. Describe the Child’s Play Abilities and Difficulties

1. Describe how your child plays (with what? how often?).

2. Does your child have challenging behavior when playing? Describe.

3. Does your child play alone? What does he/she do?

4. Does your child play with adults? What toys or games?

5. Does your child play with other children his/her age? What toys or games?

6. How does your child react if you join in a play activity with him/her?

7. How does your child react if you stop playing with him/her?

8. How does your child react if you ask him/her to stop playing with a toy and switch to a different toy?
E. Identify the “Function” of the Challenging Behavior(s)

1. Think of each of the behaviors listed in Section A, and define the function(s) you believe the behavior serves for the child (i.e., what does he/she get and/or avoid by doing the behavior?).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Behavior</th>
<th>What does he/she get?</th>
<th>OR</th>
<th>What exactly does he/she avoid?</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
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</table>

2. Describe the child’s most typical response to the following situations:
   a. Are the above behavior(s) more likely, less likely, or unaffected if you present him/her with a difficult task?

   b. Are the above behavior(s) more likely, less likely, or unaffected if you interrupt a desired event (eating ice cream, watching a video)?

   c. Are the above behavior(s) more likely, less likely, or unaffected if you deliver a “stern” request/command/reprimand?

   d. Are the above behavior(s) more likely, less likely, or unaffected if you are present but do not interact with (ignore) the child for 15 minutes?

   e. Are the above behavior(s) more likely, less likely, or unaffected by changes in routine?
f. Are the above behavior(s) more likely, less likely, or unaffected if something the child wants is present but he/she can't get it (i.e., a desired toy that is visible but out of reach)?

g. Are the above behavior(s) more likely, less likely, or unaffected if he/she is alone (no one else is present)?

F. How Well Does the Behavior Work?
1. What amount of physical effort is involved in the behaviors (e.g., prolonged intense tantrums vs. simple verbal outbursts, etc.)?

2. Does engaging in the behaviors result in a “payoff” (getting attention, avoiding work) every time? Almost every time? Once in a while?

3. How much of a delay is there between the time the child engages in the behavior and gets the “payoff”? Is it immediate, a few seconds, longer?

G. How Does the Child Communicate?
1. What are the general expressive communication strategies used by or available to the child (e.g., vocal speech, signs/gestures, communication books/boards, electronic devices, etc.)? How consistently are the strategies used?

2. If your child is trying to tell you something or show you something and you don’t understand, what will your child do? (repeat the action or vocalization? modify the action or vocalization?)
3. Tell me how your child expresses the following:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FUNCTION OF COMMUNICATION</th>
<th>FORM OF COMMUNICATION</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>NONSYMBOLIC FORM</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PROXIMITY</th>
<th>FACIAL EXPRESSION</th>
<th>LAUGHING/SQUEALING</th>
<th>CRYING/WHINING</th>
<th>TAPPING/TOUCHING</th>
<th>PULLING BY THE HAND</th>
<th>PULLING Pulling Away</th>
<th>SHOUTING</th>
<th>SWAYING</th>
<th>REACHING</th>
<th>WAVING</th>
<th>POINTING</th>
<th>HEAD SHAKE</th>
<th>HEAD NOD</th>
<th>VOCALIZING</th>
<th>OTHER</th>
<th>SINGLE WORDS (spoken)</th>
<th>ECHOLOGIA</th>
<th>WORD COMBINATIONS</th>
<th>SIGN LANGUAGE</th>
<th>PICTURES/ WRITTEN WORDS</th>
<th>OTHER</th>
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<td>Regulate Behavior</td>
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4. With regard to receptive communication ability:
   a. Does the child follow verbal requests or instructions? If so, approximately how many? (List, if only a few).
   b. Is the child able to imitate someone demonstrating how to do a task or play with a toy?
   c. Does the child respond to sign language or gestures? If so, approximately how many? (List, if only a few.)
   d. How does the child tell you “yes” or “no” (if asked whether he/she wants to do something, go somewhere, etc.)?
H. Explain Child’s Preferences and Previous Behavior Interventions

1. Describe the things that your child really enjoys. For example, what makes him/her happy? What might someone do or provide that makes your child happy?

2. What kinds of things have you or your child’s care providers done to try and change the challenging behaviors?

I. Develop Summary Statements for Each Major Trigger and/or Consequence

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Setting Event</th>
<th>Triggers</th>
<th>Challenging Behavior</th>
<th>Maintaining Consequence</th>
<th>Function</th>
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Functional Assessment Interview Form – Brendan

Child with Challenging Behavior(s): ______ Brendan ________ Interview Date: ______ May 10th ______
Age: Years ______ 3 ______ Months ________ Sex: ______ Male ______ Female ______ Interviewer: ______ Rochelle ______
Respondent(s): ______ Mother, Father ______

A. Describe the Behavior(s)

1. What are the behaviors of concern? For each, define how it is performed, how often it occurs per day, week, or month, how long it lasts when it occurs, and the intensity in which it occurs (low, medium, high).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Behavior</th>
<th>How Is It Performed</th>
<th>How Often</th>
<th>How Long</th>
<th>Intensity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Tantrum with physical</td>
<td>Prolonged whine, cry, and scream; then thrusts</td>
<td>3-4 times</td>
<td>10-15 minutes</td>
<td>High (when in public, to</td>
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<tr>
<td>aggression</td>
<td>his body onto adult’s legs, head thrust, hold</td>
<td>per day</td>
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<td>point of leaving the store)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>brother down, take objects, or hit</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Tantrum with dropping</td>
<td>Prolonged whining, crying and screaming; then drops to</td>
<td>5-7 times</td>
<td>2-20 minutes</td>
<td>High with much</td>
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<td>to the ground and/or</td>
<td>the ground and sometimes</td>
<td>per day</td>
<td></td>
<td>physical effort</td>
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<tr>
<td>throwing objects</td>
<td>throws object (mostly in public)</td>
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<td>3. Wanders and runs</td>
<td>Backs away and then runs away; when caught</td>
<td>2-3 times</td>
<td>10-15 minutes</td>
<td>High with much</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>will sometimes drop to the ground and become</td>
<td>per day</td>
<td></td>
<td>physical effort</td>
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<td>physically aggressive (thrusts his body onto</td>
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<td>adult’s legs, head thrust, and/or hit</td>
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</table>

2. Which of the behaviors described above occur together (e.g., occur at the same time; occur in a predictable “chain”; occur in response to the same situation)?

Whines, cries, screams, drops to the floor, kicks, thrusts his body onto adult’s legs. Or whines, cries, drops to the floor and then throws object. Or runs then drops to the ground.

B. Identify Events that may Affect the Behavior(s)

1. What medications does the child take, and how do you believe these may affect his/her behavior?

N/A

2. What medical complication (if any) does the child experience that may affect his/her behavior (e.g., asthma, allergies, rashes, sinus infections, seizures)?

N/A

3. Describe the sleep cycles of the child and the extent to which these cycles may affect his/her behavior.

Needs 10 hours of sleep to be “happy”. Bedtime is 7:30-9:30. Has broken sleep (now 3-4x/night), use goodnight transition song, talks loudly to self (15-30 min) prior to falling to sleep, consistency helps.

4. Describe the eating routines and diet of the child and the extent to which these routines may affect his/her behavior.

   *Picky eater. Eats with family but not some things. Likes white rice and mushy food (other foods camouflaged in rice), pancakes, no meats, no sweets, likes french fries. Wanders through the house as he eats.*

5. Briefly list the child’s typical daily schedule of activities and how well he/she does within each activity.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Child’s Reaction</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>7:00 AM</td>
<td>7:30 Gets up</td>
<td>Happy</td>
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<tr>
<td>8:00 AM</td>
<td>Breakfast (oatmeal, pancakes)</td>
<td>Good</td>
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<tr>
<td>9:00 AM</td>
<td>TV</td>
<td>Good, gets up and roams the room and sits back down</td>
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<tr>
<td>10:00 AM</td>
<td>Leaves for therapy</td>
<td>Difficulty getting in car, when arriving at therapy gets upset; o.k. while at therapy</td>
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<tr>
<td>11:00 AM</td>
<td>Shopping</td>
<td>Sometimes goes in nicely, other times drops at the door. Toward 15 min. mark, tries to run, usually we leave when this occurs.</td>
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<tr>
<td>12:00 PM</td>
<td>Lunch</td>
<td>Loves french fries.</td>
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<td>12:30 Playground</td>
<td>Loves to run and play</td>
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<td>1:00 PM</td>
<td>Pool play</td>
<td>Loves it!</td>
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<tr>
<td>2:00 PM</td>
<td>Snack/Free play</td>
<td>If snack is in several pieces (pretzels, fries, fishies), he will wander around the room with food and keep going back for more snack. Problems playing with brother. Starts to get tired.</td>
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<tr>
<td>3:00 PM</td>
<td>Free play/Computer</td>
<td>Good unless needs to share with brother. Then tantrums and becomes aggressive.</td>
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<tr>
<td>4:00 PM</td>
<td>Video/plays as mom preps dinner</td>
<td>More cranky. On the move. Pulls on mom.</td>
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<tr>
<td>5:00 PM</td>
<td>5:30 Plays with dad</td>
<td>Loves it! Sometimes becomes aggressive towards brother.</td>
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<tr>
<td>6:00 PM</td>
<td>Dinner</td>
<td>Eats in living room at desk like brother with adult show on TV, parents at TV trays. A bit picky with foods, wanders with food.</td>
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<tr>
<td>7:00 PM</td>
<td>Play time with dad, mom cleans</td>
<td>Does ok, sometimes becomes whiny</td>
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<td></td>
<td>7:30 bath</td>
<td>Loves it!</td>
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<tr>
<td>8:00 PM</td>
<td>Snack/Play</td>
<td>Often “melts down,” needs lots of help. Brother aggravates him, falls to ground, throws tantrums, hits</td>
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<tr>
<td>9:00 PM</td>
<td>Brush teeth/potty</td>
<td>Tantrums, refuses by dropping to ground, yells “no.” OK, parent lies with him in his bed until he falls asleep. Talks loudly (lots of echolalia) until falls asleep.</td>
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</table>

6. Describe the extent to which you believe activities that occur during the day are predictable for your child. To what extent does the child know what he/she will be doing and what will occur during the day (e.g., when to get up, when to eat breakfast, when to play outside)? How does your child know this?

   *Most days are 90% predictable (verbally tell him); 0% predictability on other days. Verbally tell him what to do.*

7. What choices does the child get to make each day (e.g., food, toys, activities)?

   *Computer game, videos, toys, colors of items (cups, towels), pool or play inside*
C. Identify Events and Situations that may Trigger Behavior(s)

1. **Time of Day**: When are the behaviors most and least likely to happen?
   - **Most likely**: Late in the afternoon, evening. When someone leaves without saying “goodbye” or when someone tells him to “wait.”
   - **Least likely**: When he gets out of bed in the morning, when he’s eating highly preferred foods. When you give him what he wants, when he’s rested.

2. **Settings**: Where are the behaviors most and least likely to happen?
   - **Most likely**: In public, library, stores, and restaurants. At home when brother tries to share trains or computer. Crowded places.
   - **Least likely**: At home during isolated play, in pool.

3. **Social Control**: With whom are the behaviors most and least likely to happen?
   - **Most likely**: Mom and anyone who tells him to “wait” or “no,” with brother.
   - **Least likely**: Therapist and Dad

4. **Activity**: What activities are most and least likely to produce the behaviors?
   - **Most likely**: Shopping, parties, crowds, and sharing computer or trains with brother.
   - **Least likely**: Watching TV, bath/pool play, physical activity (chase, jumping, bouncing on, ball, hide and seek)

5. Are there particular situations, events, etc. that are not listed above that “set off” the behaviors that cause concern (particular demands, interruptions, transitions, delays, being ignored, etc.)?
   - Visiting new places/homes, being “ignored”

6. What one thing could you do that would most likely make the challenging behavior occur?
   - Mess with his train set and not giving him something he wants

7. What one thing could you do to make sure the challenging behavior did not occur?
   - If you let him do what he wants when he wants
D. Describe the Child’s Play Abilities and Difficulties

1. Describe how your child plays (with what? how often?).
   
   Trains, “Blue’s Clues” notebook, computer, books, balls, pool (on a daily basis), books.

2. Does your child have challenging behavior when playing? Describe.
   
   Yes, with sharing with brother. Grabs, removes his toy so you can’t get it. Tackles brother.

3. Does your child play alone? What does he/she do?
   
   Yes, with most toys.

4. Does your child play with adults? What toys or games?
   
   Yes, hide and seek, dancing, jumping, chase, some interactive games.

5. Does your child play with other children his/her age? What toys or games?
   
   Yes, when directed by the therapist in group therapy, mostly parallel plays.

6. How does your child react if you join in a play activity with him/her?
   
   50% of the time he doesn’t want you to play.
   50% of the time he enjoys the interaction.

7. How does your child react if you stop playing with him/her?
   
   He will tell you to “sit” to get you to come back and play.

8. How does your child react if you ask him/her to stop playing with a toy and switch to a different toy?
   
   If preferred toy/activity, he won't switch. If you try to make him, will tantrum and throw objects. Other times he is fine with it.
**E. Identify the “Function” of the Challenging Behavior(s)**

1. Think of each of the behaviors listed in Section A, and define the function(s) you believe the behavior serves for the child (i.e., what does he/she get and/or avoid by doing the behavior?).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Behavior</th>
<th>What does he/she get?</th>
<th>OR</th>
<th>What exactly does he/she avoid?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Tantrum w/ physical aggression</td>
<td>Request help or attention</td>
<td></td>
<td>Avoids a demand</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Tantrum w/ dropping to ground and/or throwing</td>
<td>Escape or delay transition</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Wanders and runs (sometimes with aggression)</td>
<td>Escape, boredom or avoid wait</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2. Describe the child’s most typical response to the following situations:

a. Are the above behavior(s) more likely, less likely, or unaffected if you present him/her with a difficult task?
   *More likely*

b. Are the above behavior(s) more likely, less likely, or unaffected if you interrupt a desired event (eating ice cream, watching a video)?
   *More likely*

c. Are the above behavior(s) more likely, less likely, or unaffected if you deliver a “stern” request/command/reprimand?
   *More likely*

d. Are the above behavior(s) more likely, less likely, or unaffected if you are present but do not interact with (ignore) the child for 15 minutes?
   *Less likely*

e. Are the above behavior(s) more likely, less likely, or unaffected by changes in routine?
   *More likely*

f. Are the above behavior(s) more likely, less likely, or unaffected if something the child wants is present but he/she can’t get it (i.e., a desired toy that is visible but out of reach)?
   *More likely*

g. Are the above behavior(s) more likely, less likely, or unaffected if he/she is alone (no one else is present)?
   *Less likely*
F. How Well Does the Behavior Work?

1. What amount of physical effort is involved in the behaviors (e.g., prolonged intense tantrums vs. simple verbal outbursts, etc.)?
   
   *When he “drops down to the ground,” it takes the most physical effort. Sometimes he progresses to hitting and running. Can become prolonged and intense.*

2. Does engaging in the behaviors result in a “payoff” (getting attention, avoiding work) every time? Almost every time? Once in a while?
   
   Almost every time

3. How much of a delay is there between the time the child engages in the behavior and gets the “payoff”? Is it immediate, a few seconds, longer?
   
   2 – 15 minutes, varies depending on the situation. In public there tends to be a quicker pay off due to embarrassment.

G. How Does the Child Communicate?

1. What are the general expressive communication strategies used by or available to the child (e.g., vocal speech, signs/gestures, communication books/boards, electronic devices, etc.)? How consistently are the strategies used?
   
   Verbal and gestures

2. If your child is trying to tell you something or show you something and you don’t understand, what will your child do? (repeat the action or vocalization? modify the action or vocalization?)
   
   Modify action and vocalization then may give up

3. Tell me how your child expresses the following:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FORM OF COMMUNICATION</th>
<th>NONSYMBOLIC FORM</th>
<th>SYMBOLIC FORM</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Regulate Behavior</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Request Object</td>
<td>X X X X X X X X X X X X X X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Request Action/Activity</td>
<td>X X X X X X X X X X X X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Protest Object</td>
<td>X X X X X X X X X X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Protest Action/Activity</td>
<td>X X X X X X X X X X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Draw Attention to Self</td>
<td>X X X X X X X X X X X X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Request Social Game</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Request Comfort</td>
<td>X X X X X X X X X X X X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greet</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Call</td>
<td>X X X X X X X X X X X X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Take Turn</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Show Off</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Draw Attention to Object or Event</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Label or Comment</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provide Information</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Request Information</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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4. With regard to receptive communication ability:

   a. Does the child follow verbal requests or instructions? If so, approximately how many? (List, if only a few).
      
      Yes, 30-50 words.

   b. Is the child able to imitate someone demonstrating how to do a task or play with a toy?
      
      Lead, grab, gesture
      Imitate – “yes”

   c. Does the child respond to sign language or gestures? If so, approximately how many? (List, if only a few.)
      
      ~10 (want, more, eat, drink, all done, point for “look”…)

   d. How does the child tell you “yes” or “no” (if asked whether he/she wants to do something, go somewhere, etc.)?
      
      Nod – No                Repeats what is said to affirm or indicate “yes”
      Verbal – Yes
      Tantrum – No

H. Explain Child’s Preferences and Previous Behavior Interventions

1. Describe the things that your child really enjoys. For example, what makes him/her happy? What might someone do or provide that makes your child happy?

   Tickle, jumping, hide and seek, chase, trains, balls, water play (any type), bike, computer, sometimes books on his own, video (“Blue’s Clues,” “Bob the Builder,” “Thomas,” “Scooby-Doo”), figures of characters, juice boxes

2. What kinds of things have you or your child’s care providers done to try and change the challenging behaviors?

   Being silly to distract;
   Giving into his “requests;”
   Avoidance of behavior; avoid situation of cause;
   More sleep;
   Give him food to calm or distract;
   Distraction through bouncing him up and down.
**I. Develop Summary Statements for Each Major Trigger and/or Consequence**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Setting Event</th>
<th>Triggers</th>
<th>Challenging Behavior</th>
<th>Maintaining Consequence</th>
<th>Function</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lack of sleep</td>
<td>Activity/food out of reach  Activity/food unavailable</td>
<td>Tantrums – prolonged whining, crying, and screaming; which will sometimes increase to physical aggression (Thrashes body onto adult’s legs, head thrusting, holding his brother down, taking/throwing objects)</td>
<td>Adults cajole with food/hugs  Adults tell him “show me”.  Adults ask “what do you want?”  Adult gives food/activity</td>
<td>Access to food or activity and/or help  Adult attention</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transitioning from one place to another</td>
<td></td>
<td>Tantrums – prolonged whining, crying, and screaming; which will sometimes increase to throwing objects</td>
<td>Allowed to continue what he is doing a bit longer</td>
<td>Temporarily escapes transition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Given a demand  Asked to share  Asked to take turns</td>
<td></td>
<td>Tantrums – prolonged whining, crying, and screaming; OR throwing objects</td>
<td>Adults give him back his toy  Allowed to continue what he was doing alone  Adults give him a preferred item or activity</td>
<td>Avoids demands</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asked to “wait”</td>
<td>Wanders or runs; which sometimes progresses to physical aggression (banging self onto adult, head thrusting, or hitting)</td>
<td>Adults try coaxing him  Adults verbally redirect  Adults ask him questions</td>
<td>Adult attention</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Determining the Meaning of Challenging Behavior

Positive Behavior Support (PBS) is a process for understanding the purpose of challenging behavior and developing a plan of support that promotes the development of new skills while reducing the need for the individual to engage in challenging behavior (Carr et al., 2002; Koegel, Koegel, & Dunlap, 1996). Positive Behavior Support offers a holistic approach that considers all factors that impact on a child and the child’s behavior. It can be used to address challenging behaviors that range from aggression, tantrums, and property destruction to social withdrawal.

Positive Behavior Support is different from traditional behavior modification or behavior intervention approaches in four important ways. First, the interventions that are developed are individualized and are based on an understanding of the child, the child’s communication abilities, and the unique situations of the child. Behavior interventions are not developed until there is an understanding of the purpose of the child’s challenging behavior. The second difference is the proactive nature of a behavior plan developed through PBS. Once a purpose is identified, interventions are developed to prevent challenging behavior and to teach the child new skills. Third, the focus of the plan is on the development of appropriate social, communication, and behavior skills. The plan is not solely focused on challenging behavior reduction. Finally, the intervention strategies that are developed are focused on helping the child have a better lifestyle. That is, the goal of PBS is to help the child gain access to new environments, have positive social interactions and develop friendships, and learn new communication skills.

Positive Behavior Support (PBS) resulted from the many major changes in our culture about how individuals with developmental and behavioral challenges are supported and empirical research about optimal approaches for support (Carr et al., 2002). In the past, professionals would often recommend that aversive consequences or therapies were used to “treat” challenging behavior. For example, a child might be placed in exclusionary time-out for aggression or a teacher might be advised to scrub a child’s mouth with mouthwash for biting. Many child advocates and researchers felt strongly that these approaches were dehumanizing and began working together to ensure that only positive and supportive approaches would be used to “treat” challenging behavior. The need for positive and socially accepted methods for addressing challenging behavior became even more urgent as children and adults with developmental and behavioral delays became more a part of the community. In the last twenty years, the inclusion movement has resulted in children with challenges attending typical early childhood programs and receiving intervention within the community. Finally, PBS is based on a wealth of research that documents the effectiveness of the approach with all types and ages of people (Carr et al., 1999).
Many studies have demonstrated that challenging behavior may be used by children to control the social environment by gaining attention, escaping from demands or undesired events, or gaining access to objects or activities. Challenging behavior is often a form of communication in the same way that talking, reaching, or pointing is considered a form of communication. When challenging behavior is used for communication it may be used for different purposes or functions. Possible functions of challenging behavior may include requesting an activity, object, event or avoiding a person, or event (Fox, Buschbacher, & Dunlap, 2000; Nielsen, Olive, Donovan, & McEvoy, 1999).

The process of developing an effective behavior support plan begins by identifying the purpose or function of the challenging behavior. The function of challenging behavior is identified by examining the context in which behavior occurs. For example, a child may tantrum after the parent asks the child to sit at the dinner table. After several seconds of crying, the child bangs his head on the table and the parent allows the child to leave the table. The child moves away from the table and stops crying. In examining the context, the trigger that precedes the behavior and the response that follows is important. These provide you with an understanding of why the child engages in challenging behavior. In the previous example, the trigger of requesting the child to sit at the table and the consequential response of the parent tells you that the function or purpose of the challenging behavior was to escape the situation.

In addition to understanding the triggers and maintaining consequences of challenging behavior, it may also be important to identify other events that seem to be associated with an increase in challenging behavior. These events, called setting events, set the child up to have increased challenging behavior. For example, a child who did not sleep during the night may be more likely to have challenging behavior the next morning. Other examples of these events are allergies, fatigue, hunger, problematic interactions, medication, and sensory overload.

The process of Positive Behavior Support includes the use of functional assessment to determine the meaning or function of challenging behavior. Functional assessment provides a process for developing an understanding of a child’s challenging behavior and how that behavior is governed by environmental events. The functional assessment process should result in the following: a) a clear description of the challenging behavior; b) an identification of events that predict when problems will and will not occur; c) an identification of the consequences that maintain challenging behavior; d) the development of behavior hypotheses that provide purpose statements about the function of challenging behavior; and e) direct observations that support the behavior hypotheses (O’Neill et al., 1997).
There are several strategies that are used in the functional assessment process. They include observations of the child, collecting data on challenging behavior, conducting interviews, and reviewing the child’s records. Functional assessment often begins with observations of the child in routines or activities that are problematic. One way to collect information is through the use of index cards where the observer records information on the triggers of challenging behavior, a description of the behavior and the social response (i.e., maintaining consequence) to behavior on index cards. The cards are then evaluated and sorted by proposed behavior function (Carr et al., 1994). The scatterplot may be used to see if the behavior is related to a particular activity or time of day (Touchette, MacDonald, & Langer, 1985). In the use of the scatterplot, a grid is created to capture time of day or activity and the observer records if the behavior occurs within that period. After several days of data collection, you can see if the behavior has a pattern related to time of day.

The Functional Assessment Interview developed by O’Neill et al. (1997) offers a structured format for systematically collecting information about the nature of the challenging behavior. A structured interview is desirable because it provides a framework for sorting through information that may seem overwhelming. The structured interview collects information on the nature of the challenging behavior, setting events that may occasion challenging behavior, the predictors of challenging behavior occurrence and nonoccurrence, responses that may maintain challenging behavior, the child’s communication abilities, the history of previous intervention efforts, and the identification of possible reinforcers. The Interview can be used to get information from family members, teachers, and other support providers.

Families are essential partners in the functional assessment process. No one has better knowledge of the events that precede and follow a child’s challenging behavior than family members who provide daily care to the child. Families become partners in the functional assessment process by identifying the environments and activities where the child is most likely to have challenging behavior and assisting the professional in conducting and interpreting observations (Albin, et al. 1996). Families are more likely to reveal information to providers when there is rapport and a trusting relationship (Fox et al., 1997). The value of a trusting relationship should not be underestimated. Family members have reported that they often feel judged when their children have challenging behavior and may be reluctant to share information that makes them feel vulnerable or exposed to criticism. The functional assessment interview may yield more complete information once rapport has been established with the family. The family may also be more willing to allow observations within difficult contexts once they feel assurance that providers are family-centered and supportive.
Determining the Meaning of Challenging Behavior

References:


Positive Behavior Support Additional Resources


**Web Sites on Positive Behavior Support**

http://www.challengingbehavior.org

http://www.csefel.uiuc.edu

http://www.pbis.org

http://ici2.umn.edu/preschoolbehavior/

http://www.nau.edu/~ihd/positive/index.html

http://www.uoregon.edu/~ttobin/

http://www.beachcenter.org/

http://rrtcpbs.fmhi.usf.edu

http://www.state.ky.us/agencies/behave

http://cecp.air.org/fba/default.htm