Assessing and Treating Challenging Behavior in Individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorder and other Developmental Disabilities

Lauren Moskowitz, PhD

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This talk is dedicated to my mentor Edward (Ted) Carr 1947-2009

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What Is “Challenging behavior”?

- Aggression
- Self-injury
- Property destruction
- Tantrum behavior
- Disruptive Behavior
- Noncompliance
- Repetitive behavior/stereotypy

Why Is Challenging Behavior Important to address?

- Prevents full community integration (home/school/employment)
- Demoralizes family members (parents/siblings) and teachers
- Increases likelihood of institutionalization (loss of choice/dignity)
- Rejection by others (social isolation/no friends)
- Damages self-esteem (shame/regret)

Summary: Destroys quality of life
How Do We Understand Challenging Behavior?

1) Behavior is **learned**

2) Behavior is **functional**
   - Behavior serves a purpose

3) Behavior depends on **context**… it doesn’t occur in a vacuum!

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**Challenging Behavior serves a Function**

- Children engage in challenging behavior because it **pays off** – it serves a **FUNCTION** or **PURPOSE**

- Challenging behavior persists because it meets an **immediate need**

- Behaviors persist because children want/need to…

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Get something</th>
<th>Escape/avoid something</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Obtain parent/peer/staff attention</td>
<td>• Escape or avoid demands</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Obtain preferred items or activities</td>
<td>• Escape/avoid social interaction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Obtain sensory stimulation</td>
<td>• Escape/avoid anxiety</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Positive Reinforcement)</td>
<td>• Escape/avoid sensory stimulation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(Negative Reinforcement)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Challenging behavior = Communication

- Functions of Communication
  - Request object, activity, person (e.g., “I want the book”)
  - Request help or assistance (e.g., “I need help”)
  - Obtain attention (e.g., “Look at this!” or “Talk to me!”)
  - Request social interaction (e.g., “Can I play with you?”)
  - Request information (e.g., “How much longer do we have?”)
  - Request sensory stimulation (e.g., “This motion makes me feel calm”)
  - Escape demands (e.g., “I don’t want to do this work”)
  - Escape activity (e.g., “I don’t like this; I need a break”)
  - Escape a person (e.g., “I don’t want you to talk to me”)
  - Escape anxiety (e.g., “This makes me anxious; I need to get out of here!”)
  - Escape sensory stimulation (e.g., “This noise is too loud”)
  - Comment (e.g., “I like you” or “Look at that airplane”)
  - Protest (e.g., “No, I don’t want to do that”)
  - Reassurance/predictability (e.g., “I’m afraid, I need consistency”)

The Problem with Nonfunctional Interventions

“If we select an intervention based on the child’s behavior only, and ignore the environmental reasons, we can - at best - stop the behavior temporarily

We cannot stop it for good because the reasons for it continue to exist”

- Ted Carr

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Challenging Behaviors Depend on Context

Functional Assessment of challenging behavior

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How do we conduct an FBA?

- **Interviews**
  - Multiple informants
  - e.g., Functional Assessment Interview (FAI) (O’Neill et al., 1997)

- **Direct observation**
  - Conduct across multiple settings, multiple observers
  - e.g., scatterplot, ABC chart

- **Checklists and Questionnaires**
  - Motivation Assessment Scale (MAS) (Durand & Crimmins, 1988)
  - Functional Assessment Checklist (FACTS) (March et al., 2000)
  - Setting Events Checklist (Gardner et al., 1986)
  - Contextual Assessment Inventory (CAI) (Carr et al., 2008)

- **Functional analysis**
  - Experiment to verify function of behavior (Iwata et al., 1994)

For more tools, see http://www.kipbs.org/kmhpbs/resources/functional-assessment.html

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Functional Assessment: Example of Some Interview Questions

- In clear, concrete, observable terms, what is the behavior?
- Where, when, & with whom does it occur most often?
- Is the behavior triggered by specific events or conditions?
- Are expectations for this person realistic?
- Does the environment provide opportunities for achievement, control, & mastery?
- Does the environment support self-efficacy & self-esteem?
- Does the person know a better way (sometimes behave & cope well)? Under what circumstances?
- Does the person need to develop new skills (a better way)? What skills are needed?
- How can we motivate this person?

See Functional Assessment Interview (FAI) by O’Neill et al. (1997); get free adapted versions of the FAI at:
http://flpbs.fmhi.usf.edu/revision07/tertiary/FAIForm%206.5.06.pdf
http://www.kipbs.org/new_kipbs/fsi/behavassess.html
FBA: Example Excerpt from Interview

After identifying the problematic context, identify the specific situations that set off challenging behavior.

Example Problematic Context: *Having to wait*

- **What specific activity is most/least likely to cause CB?**
  - Example: Having to wait in line at the grocery store.
- **With whom is the CB most/least likely to occur?**
  - Example: Having to wait in line at the grocery store with father.
- **In what setting is the CB most/least likely to occur?**
  - Example: Having to wait in line at Trader Joes.
- **During what time of day is the CB most/least likely to occur?**
  - Example: Having to wait in line at the grocery store after school.
- **How do you respond to the CB?**
  - Example: Leave the grocery store.
- **What is your child’s reaction to your response?**
  - Example: He calms down after leaving the store.

*Hypothesis?

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Example A (Excerpt from Interview)

When I’m doing individual work with Val, she does very well but when I move on to work with other children, she becomes disruptive and may strike another child. Also, I noticed that when the speech pathologist comes in to talk to me or to observe the class, Val puts on quite a show. She’ll spit or swear or grab things off the table and throw them. When she’s acting like this, we’ll lay down the law and tell her that we won’t allow this kind of thing in our classroom and that she’d better start to act more like a young lady.

*Communication-Based Treatment of Severe Behavior Problems* (1993)
By Edward G. Carr, Gene McConnachie, Len Levin, & Duane Kemp
When we’re having break time, Jim is quiet and happy but when I ask him to go back to work, he yells and pushes me out of the way. When we’re doing (physical) exercises, I never get through more than one or two sit-ups before Jim runs away. If I ask him to come back, he tries to kick me. After a while, it’s just not worth it for me to force him. When we start folding his laundry and I tell him we’ll all have a snack when we’re done, he’ll fold one shirt and ask for the snack. If I say, ‘we have to fold more,’ Jim will have a tantrum. When he gets really bad, it’s easier to finish folding the laundry myself.

Communication-Based Treatment of Severe Behavior Problems (1993)
By Edward G. Carr, Gene McConnachie, Len Levin, & Duane Kemp

Functional Assessment: Examples of Direct Observation

- **ABC Chart**: logging all incidents of behavior, along with antecedents & consequences
- **Scatter Plot**: checking off or tallying each time period during which the behavior does occur; determine days or times when challenging behavior occurs
- **Functional Assessment Observation Form**: checklist, record up to 25 incidents of several different behaviors; check typical antecedents, perceived functions, & consequences
- **Observation Cards**
  (http://csefel.vanderbilt.edu/resources/modules-archive.html)
Example of Scatter Plot

Functional Assessment Scatterplot

Student: Myxx
Grade: 6th
School: John B. Lyman
Date(s): 10/8/97 to 10/8/97
Observer(s): Dennis
Behavior(s) of concern: disrupts class w/inappropriate comments and verbal threats directed at peers.

Setting:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ACTIVITY</th>
<th>TIME</th>
<th>Monday</th>
<th>Tuesday</th>
<th>Wednesday</th>
<th>Thursday</th>
<th>Friday</th>
<th>TOTAL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Math</td>
<td>9:20 - 10:10</td>
<td>II</td>
<td>I</td>
<td>II</td>
<td>I</td>
<td>I</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Science</td>
<td>10:10 - 11:00</td>
<td>II</td>
<td>I</td>
<td>I</td>
<td>I</td>
<td>I</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Studies</td>
<td>11:00 - 11:30</td>
<td>I</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>I</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English</td>
<td>11:50 - 12:30</td>
<td>I</td>
<td>I</td>
<td>II</td>
<td>I</td>
<td></td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lunch</td>
<td>12:30 - 1:00</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health/P.E.</td>
<td>1:00 - 1:50</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Art</td>
<td>1:50 - 2:40</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td>5</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

http://cecp.air.org/fba/problembehavior2/Appendix%20A.PDF

FBA: Example of ABC Chart

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Antecedent</th>
<th>Behavior</th>
<th>Consequence</th>
<th>Most likely function?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mother is on the phone (not talking to Eddie)</td>
<td>Eddie yells</td>
<td>Mother says, “Eddie, I’m on the phone.”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mother asks Eddie to do math homework.</td>
<td>Eddie yells</td>
<td>Mother stops interacting with Eddie and leaves him alone.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Five minutes before dinner time, Tom’s mother walks into kitchen</td>
<td>Tom walks into the kitchen and starts crying &amp; screaming</td>
<td>Tom’s mother immediately gives him one of his favorite foods</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Going to library. Mother says, “Let’s go inside.”</td>
<td>Jen screams, kicks, and drops to the floor</td>
<td>Mother picks Jen up and carries her into library</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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### Functional Assessment: Example of Questionnaire (MAS)

2. Does the behavior occur following a request to perform a difficult task? 6-Always

3. Does the behavior seem to occur in response to your talking to other persons in the room? 2-Seldom

4. Would the behavior ever occur to get a toy, food or activity that this person has been told he/she can’t have? 2-Seldom

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sensory</th>
<th>Escape</th>
<th>Attention</th>
<th>Tangible</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Total Score:**

- Sensory: 0
- Escape: 20
- Attention: 16
- Tangible: 10

**Mean Score:**

- Sensory: 4
- Escape: 5
- Attention: 4
- Tangible: 2.5

**Relative Ranking:**

- Sensory: 1
- Escape: 2
- Attention: 3
- Tangible: 2

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### Examples of Antecedents Typically Observed in Schools

- Given specific assignment or type of work to do
- Being teased, called names, verbally abused, or berated
- Victim of physical aggression, threat, or provocation
- Told no after asking for something
- Frustration or failure on a task
- Task demands exceeded perceived or actual capacity or endurance
- Interruptions, especially during preferred activity
- Waiting
- Performing boring or tedious tasks
- Transitions between activities
- Interaction with a specific person (teacher, principal, peer)
- Crowded conditions, loud noise, or other (over)stimulation
- Reprimanded or redirected

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Example of Setting Events

Example Hypothesis: Sam

Sam engages in disruptive behavior when asked to complete independent seatwork because, when he does, he avoids (escapes) having to complete the work. This is more likely to happen during afternoon classes, particularly when he hasn’t slept well the previous night.
Intervention for challenging behavior (based on functional assessment)

How Do We Treat Challenging Behavior?

- **Key idea:** assessment is linked to treatment
- **Prevention Strategies**
  - Antecedent Strategies
  - Setting Event Strategies
- **Replacement Strategies**
  - Communication Skills (i.e., FCT), Coping Skills, Academic Skills, Daily Living skills, Problem-Solving, etc.
- **Response Strategies**
  - Consequence-based strategies
    - Positive Reinforcement
    - Extinction
    - Differential Reinforcement (DRA, DRI, DRO, DRL)
- Typically, these are combined to increase effectiveness
Prevention Strategies: Increase Predictability - Visual Schedules

- Helps make the environment, activities & tasks more predictable, less overwhelming
- Enhances sense of control over environment; promotes independence
- Reduces stress, uncertainty, anxiety
- Helps child prepare for transitions, preview what is coming next
- Builds on child’s strengths

McClannahan & Krantz (1999); Mesibov, Browder, & Kirkland (2002)

Prevention Strategies: Increase Predictability – Timers/Countdowns

- Advanced warnings: Used to alert child of end of activity
  - Provides child with time to prepare
  - Prevents/reduces anxiety, frustration associated with transitions
  - Makes transition a gradual process, instead of abrupt ending
  - Increases predictability, provides greater sense of control

Dettmer, Simpson, Myles, & Ganz (2000); Mace, Shapiro, & Mace (1998)
Prevention Strategies:
 Increase Predictability - Priming

- **Previewing** future events, materials, or learning activities on a 1:1 basis, under relaxed conditions, so they become more predictable
- Effective for children for whom group instruction may be overwhelming
  - e.g., parents read story at home the night before
  - **E.g., Video priming**
    - e.g., Carried camera through transition setting to show the environment as the child would see it when progressing through the transition

  Priming: Wilde, Koegel, & Koegel (1992)

Prevention Strategies:
 Social Stories

- Written stories, sometimes illustrated, that give the child information on social topics
- Used to develop better understanding of social expectations, provides coping techniques for difficult social situations
- Written from the child’s perspective, describes situation/skill/concept, gives child relevant cues, perspectives of others, and common responses
- Read on multiple occasions prior to the situation.

Kuttler, Smith Myles, & Carlson (1999); Ozdemir (2008)
**Prevention Strategies: Provide Choices**

- Provide frequent opportunities to make choices
  - Enhances sense of control
  - Child learns to become an active participant, rather than a passive, helpless bystander
  - Increases motivation to participate & behave well

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**Prevention Strategies: Embedding**

- Intersperse highly preferred, easy tasks among more difficult & disliked ones

- Benefits:
  - Increases opportunities to experience success
  - Enhances motivation

  **Example:**
  “Judy, what kind of shoes will you buy at the mall? Will you be getting a birthday card for your mother too? OK, finish making your bed, and then I’ll tell you about the party this weekend”
Prevention Strategies: Incorporating Perseverative Interests

- Incorporating a child’s preferences or interests into a disliked or unpleasant activity can increase motivation and reduce the likelihood of challenging behavior
  - e.g., handwriting book exercises replaced with copying instructions from a preferred video games’ bonus point booklets

- Perseverative:
  - An object, activity, or topic with which the child is intensely interested or even preoccupied (highly salient, highly preferred)

Prevention Strategies: Generalized Reinforcement

- One way to weaken the conditioned aversiveness of an aversive situation is to pair that situation with a wide variety of highly preferred tangible, activity, and social reinforcers
  - Noncontingently present positive reinforcers

- By being consistently paired with many strongly preferred reinforcers, the formerly aversive situation then becomes an antecedent for approach rather than escape

Baker, Koegel, & Koegel (1998); Vismara & Lyons (2007)

Magito McLaughlin & Carr (2005)
Reducing challenging behaviors Requires Increasing Alternatives
(Building replacement skills)

- If challenging behavior is functional, it meets some need for the child
  - We can’t simply remove something that is serving a purpose without replacing it with a more appropriate alternative
- First step is understanding the function it serves (what need it meets)
- Next step is to offer the child a better way to meet that need
- Types of skills that serve as Alternative Behavior:
  - Communication skills (i.e., FCT)
  - Social Skills
  - Self-regulation skills (e.g., coping skills)
  - Academic skills, daily living skills

Replacement Strategies: Communication Skills

- **Functional communication training (FCT: Carr & Durand, 1985):**
  - Teaching child to ask for what he wants through language instead of challenging behavior
- **Examples of appropriate communication:**
  - **Function: Attention**
    - Ask for social interaction, attention, or praise
  - **Function: Escape**
    - Ask for break, ask for help, ask for change in activity
  - **Function: Tangible**
    - Ask for preferred items, activities, or people; ask for a turn
  - **Function: Sensory**
    - Ask for item that provides sensory stimulation or privacy
Replacement Strategies: Coping Skills

Examples:

- **Relaxation Exercises**
  - Deep Breathing
  - Progressive Muscle Relaxation

- **Coping Self-Statements**
  - e.g., "I can do it!"
  - Thinking of funny statement, line from cartoon, etc.

Replacement Strategies: Coping Skill: Waiting
(tolerance for delay of reinforcement)

- Can’t always (choose to) escape from difficult situations, tasks, non-preferred activities
- Teach tolerance by delaying reinforcement
  - e.g., "Do these two first, and then you can take a break"
  - Only implement this once child can & does consistently use break strategy (other coping skills)
- Teach while waiting for materials
- Provide interim activity
  - Pair the waiting positively
  - Use visuals & timers

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Response (Consequence) Strategies: Types of Consequences

- **Reinforcement**
  - A consequence (following a behavior) that INCREASES the future probability of that behavior; strengthens the behavior

- **Punishment**
  - A consequence (following a behavior) that DECREASES the future probability of that behavior; weakens the behavior

- **Extinction**
  - The lack of any consequence following a behavior; also DECREASES the future probability of that behavior

Response/Consequence Strategies: Linking Positive Reinforcers to FUNCTION of Behavior

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Examples of Daily Rewards</th>
<th>Function: Attention</th>
<th>Function: Escape</th>
<th>Function: Tangible</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sit in teacher’s chair</td>
<td>Choosing which homework or classwork problem the teacher will give the answer to for a “freebie”</td>
<td>10 min of Computer time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Line leader</td>
<td>Get to tell 1 joke to class at end of the day (or end of each period)</td>
<td>Get to play Angry Birds on class Ipad for 5 min</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>First in lunch line</td>
<td>Get to go to Lunch or Recess 5 min early</td>
<td>10 min of reading preferred book</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Play freeze tag with class for 5 minutes</td>
<td></td>
<td>Pick a book from school library at end of day</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Get to tell 1 joke to class at end of the day (or end of each period)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Examples of Weekly Rewards</th>
<th>Function: Attention</th>
<th>Function: Escape</th>
<th>Function: Tangible</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Invite 1 or 2 friends to eat lunch in classroom</td>
<td>Get out of homework pass</td>
<td>Trip to vending machine at school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Read morning announcements over loudspeaker</td>
<td>Get out of classwork pass</td>
<td>Get to buy lunch instead of bring lunch for a day</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Choose book for teacher to read aloud to class</td>
<td>“Buy back” a bad grade</td>
<td>Get to pick a prize (toy or treat) from a prize box</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Breakfast with favorite person (e.g., custodian)</td>
<td>Get to leave school a half-hour early on Friday</td>
<td>Get to print out 10 pictures from computer</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

See [http://www.behaviordoctor.org/rewards.html](http://www.behaviordoctor.org/rewards.html) for more ideas for rewards
Response Strategies: Using Perseverative Interests as Reinforcers

- Using obsessions as reinforcers provided contingent upon nonoccurrence of challenging behavior were the most effective at reducing inappropriate behaviors.

- Using a child’s “aberrant behaviors” (stereotypy, delayed echolalia and perseverative behaviors) as reinforcers was superior to using food reinforcers.

Response Strategies: Extinction

- Withdrawing reinforcement from a previously reinforced behavior; its rate of occurrence decreases.
  
  e.g., A child cries at night after being put to bed.

Positive Reinforcement: Her parents come to her room to comfort her and calm her down.

  Outcome: The child now cries more often at bedtime.

Extinction: Parents stop coming to the room.

  Outcome: If the parents stop coming to the child's room when she cries at night, the child is less likely to cry during bedtime in the future.
Response Strategies: Extinction

When child engages in negative/inappropriate behavior, limit the attention provided but...

- **If function is to gain your attention:**
  - Ignore challenging behavior
  - As soon as he acts appropriately or uses his coping skills, give him loads of attention, LABELED PRAISE, positive interaction, and affection

- **If function is to obtain access to tangible:**
  - Do not give desired toy, snack, item, or activity in response to CB
  - As soon as he requests the object or activity appropriately, or uses coping skills, give him the object he wants if at all possible

- **If function is to escape/avoid something:**
  - Do not allow child to escape activity in response to CB
  - As soon as he uses his communication skills or coping skills, provide assistance, simplify the activity, or give him a short break

Effects of Extinction

- **Initial** effects of extinction are different from **long-term** effects!
  - Initially, the behavior actually **INCREASES**
  - **Extinction burst:** increase in frequency, duration, intensity, or variability of the un-reinforced behavior during the extinction process
    - This is why people doing intervention often give up

- **Long-term** effect of extinction is that the behavior gradually **decreases**
  - Person learns behavior is no longer effective, so it stops!
  - (Although there may be spontaneous recovery)
**Intervention based on functional assessment (example)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Setting Event</th>
<th>Antecedent</th>
<th>Behavior</th>
<th>Consequence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Amount of time since toy was last played with (i.e., child has not had access to her toys for a while)</td>
<td>Toys are currently out of reach</td>
<td>Self-injury (bangs her head)</td>
<td>Mother gives child her toys</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alter setting event:</td>
<td>Remove trigger: Place toys within child’s reach</td>
<td>Teach replacement for behavior: Teach child to request her toys</td>
<td>Alter consequences: If child appropriately requests toys, give her toys. If she head-bangs, do NOT give toys</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Horner & Carr (1997)*
Example Interventions if Function is to Gain Attention

- **Prevention Strategies**
  - Schedule adult attention: give undivided attention for periods of time
  - When adult occupied, assign highly preferred or easier task
  - Schedule peer attention

- **Teach Replacement/Coping Skills**
  - Teach child communication skills to ask for your attention.
    - e.g., “Watch what I’m doing!” “Look what I did!”
    - e.g., “Can I play with you?”, “Do you want to play Uno?”
    - e.g., “Hi, what’s up?”, tap on arm
    - e.g., “Can you read to me?”

- **Response (Consequence) Strategies**
  - When child engages in inappropriate attention-getting behaviors, **ignore** these completely!
  - When child engages in appropriate attention-getting behaviors, respond immediately with **praise** or attention!

Adapted from Bambara & Kern (2005)

Example Interventions if Function is to Gain a Preferred Item/Activity

- **Prevention Strategies**
  - Provide advanced warning (that activity will end soon)
    - Use Timer
    - Use Countdown
  - Provide access to preferred item/activity on a schedule
  - Schedule Transition Activity

- **Teach Replacement/Coping Skills**
  - Teach child communication skills to ask for object/activity
    - e.g., “I want book please.”
    - e.g., “Can I play with that?”
    - e.g., “Can I take a turn with that?”
    - e.g., “My turn please.”

- **Response (Consequence) Strategies**
  - When child requests item/activity appropriately, give it to him
  - Over time, have the child wait for longer periods of time to obtain the item/activity

Adapted from Bambara & Kern (2005)
Example Interventions if Function is to Escape Demand

- **Prevention Strategies**
  - Modify mode of task completion
  - Use embedding
  - Include child’s preferences & interests in the activity
  - Offer choices between tasks or how to complete tasks

- **Teach Replacement/Coping Skills**
  - Teach child communication skills to:
    - Escape by requesting assistance
    - Escape by requesting a break
    - Escape by ending activity
    - Escape by rejecting

- **Response Strategies**
  - As soon as child asks appropriately, provide assistance, simplify the activity, or give him a short break
  - Provide with labeled praise, reward, and/or stickers/tokens to count towards reward for doing task

Adapted from Bambara & Kern (2005)

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Example Interventions if Function is to Escape Anxiety

- **Prevention Strategies**
  - Increase predictability
  - Offer choices ahead of time
  - Pair anxiety-provoking situation with highly positive stimuli

- **Teach Replacement/Coping Skills**
  - Teach to ask for a break from stressful or anxiety-inducing activities (e.g., teach to say, “I want a break,” or ask, “What is happening next?”)
  - Teach Relaxation training
  - Teach child to request a calming object/activity

- **Response (Consequence) Strategies**
  - Acknowledge anxiety & provide positive reinforcement (e.g., labeled praise, reward) for “brave behavior” (e.g., for completing anxiety-inducing activity)

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Example Interventions if Function is to obtain Sensory Reinforcement

- **Prevention Strategies**
  - Provide alternative sensory reinforcement
    - e.g., offer radio to a child seeking auditory reinforcement

- **Replacement Strategies**
  - Teach replacement behavior that is incompatible with self-stim
    - e.g., if child bites his finger, teach to chew gum or licorice
    - e.g., if child pinches himself, teach to squeeze ball or play with play-doh
    - e.g., if child finger-flicking, teach to fiddle with jewelry or draw picture

- **Response Strategies**
  - Differential reinforcement of incompatible behavior (DRI)
  - Use the sensory activity as a positive reinforcer (reward)
  - Allow the sensory activity during a specific time/place/situation

Adapted from Bambara & Kern (2005)

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How Well Has PBS Succeeded (Outcome)?

- A *wide variety* of challenging behaviors have been treated successfully using PBS interventions
- Depending on the studies reviewed, between *one-half to two-thirds* of the individuals treated show at least 80-90% reduction in challenging behavior from baseline
- Treatments based on functional assessment information are about *twice* as likely to succeed as those that are not

See meta-analyses by Carr et al. (1999) & Horner et al. (2000)
Take-Home Message

- Challenging behavior serves a function in children with ASD, just as in any other child or adult!
  - A child may engage in CB because he is anxious and doesn’t know how to calm himself, frustrated and can’t communicate it, wants attention and doesn’t know how else to get it, etc.
  - In order to know how to handle the CB, you need to know… WHY the child is exhibiting CB
  - Then modify the antecedents or setting events that lead to CB, teach skills to replace the CB, and respond to CB in a way that does not reinforce it (and reinforces positive behavior instead)

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Resources: Websites on Positive Behavior Support (PBS)

- The Association for Positive Behavior Support (APBS)
  www.apbs.org
- The Behavior Doctor – Positive Interventions & Effective Strategies
  www.behaviordoctor.org
- Positive Behavior Support – Beach Center on Disability
  http://www.beachcenter.org/pbs/default.aspx
- Technical Assistance Center on Social Emotional Intervention for Young Children
  www.challengingbehavior.org
- Center on the Social & Emotional Foundations for Early Learning
  www.vanderbilt.edu/csefel
- OSEP Center on Positive Behavioral Interventions & Supports
  www.pbis.org
- Kansas Institute for Positive Behavior Support
  www.kipbs.org
- Florida's Positive Behavior Support Project
  http://flpbs.fmhi.usf.edu
Book Recommendations

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