Understanding Functions of Behavior

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Behavior

What is behavior?

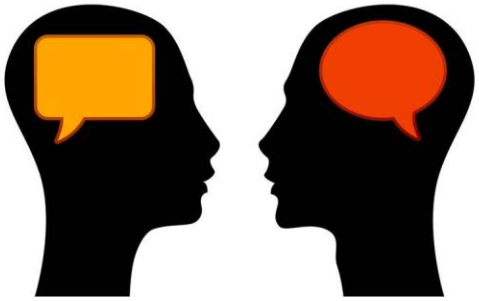
- Behavior is the activity of living organisms. Human behavior is the entire range of what people do, including thinking and feeling.

Behavior can be determined by applying the Dead Man's test:

"If a dead man can do it, it isn't behavior.
And if a dead man can't do it, then it is behavior."

Ogden Lindsley, 1965

Most Behaviors are Communicative



What if you needed a drink of water or hated the smell in the room, but you didn't know how to talk or communicate how you felt?

You would figure out a way to communicate. However, for some children the most functional way to communicate, may not be the most appropriate.

The four possible functions of behavior

Access to a Tangible

Escape/Avoidance

Attention

Automatic

Access to Tangibles

Tangibles are things you can touch:

like food or an object like a toy

Can take the form of behaviors like tantrums, aggression, self-injury, grabbing, yelling, hoarding, etc.

Strategies

- Prompt them to ask for object appropriately
- Use "First…Then…" statements
- Have them earn tokens
- Teach replacement skills

Examples: Waiting (using a timer) or sharing

Escape and Avoidance

Can take the form of behaviors like tantrums, aggression, self-injury, reciting movies, running away, refusing to comply, etc.

Strategies

- Make learning fun!
- Make sure your reinforcers are reinforcing
- Provide choices

Attention

Can be positive or negative

Can take the form of behaviors like tantrums, aggression, self-injury, yelling to get your attention, looking to see if you are watching, doing something wrong on purpose, etc.

Strategies

- Ignore inappropriate behavior
- Redirect or distract
- Reinforce another, better behavior or when a behavior doesn't happen
- Make sure the child is only getting positive attention when he or she is doing the appropriate behavior

Automatic Reinforcement

Any behavior that occurs without the involvement of another person and creates an internal state of pleasure or removes an internal state of displeasure (pain) may be maintained by automatic reinforcement.

Can take the form of self stimulatory behavior. Self stimulatory behavior is a behavior that is done repetitively. If nothing is done to shape the behavior it can become the primary way the child receives reinforcement. This can include self-injurious behavior.

Strategies

- Redirect to appropriate behaviors or items that are less disruptive
- Reinforce appropriate behaviors
- Provide times and places when these behaviors are allowed

How we determine the function of behavior

- Observations
- Data
- Interviews
- Questionnaires

How we determine the function of a behavior

The ABC's of ABA

- Antecedent – what happened right before the behavior
- Behavior- what the behavior looks like
- Consequence- what happened after the behavior

Example:

Antecedent	Behavior	Consequence
Child falls out of chair by accident	Child cries for mom	Mom comes and hugs child

How do we react to behaviors?

Knowing the function of a behavior determines how we react to it.

How do we react to behaviors?

WE NEED TO BE CAREFUL!

If inappropriate behaviors are reinforced, then they are more likely to occur again in the future.

- Try to stay calm and neutral.
- Watch your body language and tone of voice
  - Recognize when you are feeling overwhelmed
  - Find a way to take a break if you need one
- Keep language to a minimum
- When you do talk, use positive language. Do not label the behaviors.
- Seek help if you are feeling the situation is too much to handle.

Some tips for motivating and decreasing behaviors

1. Be one step ahead

- Environmental arrangement – set up the environment so as to avoid behaviors occurring
- Cueing changes - use a visual timer or provide verbal reminders, "5 minutes left, 2 minutes left," etc., to prepare the child
- Increase predictability by making sure events occur at the same time in a consistent fashion, or use a visual schedule to show the child what changes are coming

2. Be reinforcing

- Let child know when they are doing what you want them to do
- Vary reinforcers. Make sure they are not getting the same reinforcer over and over.
- Reinforce immediately (within 2 sec.)
- Limit access to desired items

3. Allow some control

- Provide forced choices that make child feel like they are in control

4. Timing

- Do not avoid tasks. Use a highly desired reinforcer when individual has difficulty with a task.
- Follow an undesirable task with a desirable one