Understanding and Addressing Challenging Behavior

Dr. Cathy Pratt, BCBA-D
Director, Indiana Resource Center for Autism
Indiana Institute on Disability and Community
Indiana University
Phone: (812) 855-6508
Fax: (812) 855-9630
prattc@indiana.edu
www.iidc.indiana.edu/irca
Individuals with problem behaviors are often excluded due to the presence of challenging behaviors.
Categories of Behavior

- Refusal
- Withdrawal
- Self-Injury/Abuse
- Aggression
- Property Destruction
“What do we do when...?”
• Know that there is no categorical approach to behavior supports. Accept the fact that there is no single recipe for handling problem behavior, because each individual and situation is different. Must understand/know individual and context.
Whatever you choose to do will be driven by your values?

Within the first few statements, a person’s beliefs about behavior are often evident.
Safety should always be the first concern. Requires the development of a crisis or de-escalation plan.
De-Escalation Plan

- All must be safe
- Must have a written plan
- Short-term solution
- Minimize your verbal comments
De-Escalation Plan

• Do not approach quickly
• Goal is to de-escalate
• Catch a behavior before it escalates out of control. Understand the escalation cycle.
• Our reaction may strengthen behavior...beware
• Avoid power struggles
Functional Behavioral Assessment:

• A process for determining the relationship between a person’s internal/external environment and the occurrence of problematic behavior.
• Focuses on the “why”.
• Looks at the underlying reasons for behavior.
Antecedents

• Antecedents are events that happen before the behavior.

• There are two types of antecedents:
  – Slow Triggers (Setting Events)
  – Fast Triggers (Immediate Antecedents)
Antecedents

• Antecedents are events that happen before the behavior.

• There are two types of antecedents:
  - Slow Triggers (Setting Events)
  - Fast Triggers (Immediate Antecedents)
Slow Triggers/Setting Events

- May happen in or out of school/classroom context.
- Conditions that increase the likelihood that behavior will occur.
  - Anxiety/Biological Issues
  - Trauma/Neurology
  - Schedule changes
  - Staff changes
  - Medications changed/missed
  - Irregular sleep patterns
  - Illness/Impending Illness
  - Missed meals
  - Excessive hot/cold temperatures
  - Argument/fight with classmates/parents/teachers
  - Difficulties on the Bus
  - Skills Deficits
  - Home Conditions
  - Past/Current Experiences with School
Antecedents: “Fast Triggers”

• Events that are directly related to the challenging behavior.
• Events that immediately precede the behavior.
• Circumstances or conditions that might trigger the behavior.
Antecedents/Fast Triggers

- Teasing/Bullied
- Assignment Too Difficult/Boring/Easy Task
- Specific Type of Task/Activity
- Specific Request or Wording of A Request
- Certain Noise/People
- Unstructured Time
- Behavior of Others
- Transitions
Consequence

- Follows a Behavior or Response
- Reinforcement
- Punishment
- What is the payoff?
- What maintains behavior?
Punitive Approaches

- Does not teach appropriate behavior.
- May teach aggression.
- Does not address the function of the behavior.
- Effects will probably not generalize.
- Does not lead to self-management or self-control.
- Can increase anxiety and lead to distrust.
- May result in increased problematic behavior (e.g., student may be reinforced by suspension).
Indirect Assessment Methods

✓ Informal or structured interviews with multiple informants, including the individual.
✓ Rating Scales/Behavior Checklists
✓ Learning Styles Inventory
✓ Lagging Skills Inventory [Link](http://www.livesinthebalance.org/sites/default/files/ALSUP216.pdf)
✓ Ziggurat Strength and Skills Inventory [Link](http://texasautism.com/blog/wp-content/uploads/2013/04/ISSI.pdf)
✓ Record Reviews
Direct Methods for Gathering Information

- Frequency Recording
- Duration
- Scatterplot
- Setting Events
## Scatter Plot

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Day 1</th>
<th>Day 2</th>
<th>Day 3</th>
<th>Day 4</th>
<th>Day 5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Math</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Industrial Arts</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P.E.</td>
<td>/</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lunch</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Science</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Study</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Computer</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Hypothesis Statement (Problem Behavior Pathway)

Setting Events
- Autism/Anxiety
- Seizures
- Medications
- Allergies
- Communication Limitations
- Sensory Challenges
- Lack Self-Regulation and Self-Management
- Poor Social Skills

Triggering Antecedents
- Certain Demands
- Too Much Talking
- Transitions: Leaving School Bus
- Changes in Routines
- Certain academic work...too much paperwork and being read to or lectured to.

Problem Behavior
- Pinching
- Yelling
- Screaming
- Elopement
- Refusal
- Kicking
- Hitting
- Aggression

Maintaining Consequence
- Ends an Activity
- Gains Access to Desired Event/Activity
- Attention
- Sensory
Hypothesis Statement
(Problem Behavior Pathway)

Setting Events | Triggering Antecedents | Problem Behavior | Maintaining Consequence

Strengths/Skills:
Teaching Alternative Behaviors

• Specific alternative or replacement behaviors that must be made as efficient and effective as the problem behavior(s).
Alternative Skills

• Problem-Solving Skills
• Choice-Making Ability
• Anger Management
• Relaxation
• Self-Management/Control
• Communication
• Social Skills
Strategies to Teach
Include Prompts

• No Universal Prompt Hierarchies
• Fading
• Prompt Dependency
• Types: Verbal, Visual, Modeling, Physical, Gestural
Engagement

• Issue of Engagement
• 80%
• Elicit Frequent Responses
• Maintain an Appropriate Pace
• Maintain Attention
• Importance of Routines
• Incidental Teaching/Modeling
Premack Principle

- A less preferred behavior, followed by a highly preferred behavior, becomes stronger.
- If-then.....
Task Analysis

- Task broken down into discrete steps
- Observe a number of competence individuals
- Consult with experts
- Perform the task yourself
- Understand the complexity of what you are asking someone to do. Sometimes students are “lost”.

Behavioral Momentum

- Deliver 3 to 4 highly preferred activities or requests and then introduce a less preferred tasks with support.
Visual Supports

• 5 point scale

- Outside Voices
- Play Voices
- Inside Voices
- Whisper Voices
- NO Talking
Choice Making

• Identify preferred and non-preferred objects or activities
• Determine if choices are acceptable.
• Present Choices
• Strategies for Building into Day
Rules for Reinforcement

- Reinforcement system should be in place.
- Reinforcers must be individually determined.
- Based on observation of behavior change.
- When teaching or strengthening a new behavior, reinforce frequently.
- When maintaining behavior, use intermittently.
- Must directly follow behavior.
- Specifically state why a behavior is being reinforced.
Praise and Feedback

• Immediate
• Given Frequently
• Enthusiastic and Sincere
• Acceptance of praise/feedback is a good skills
• Specify behavior you are praising
• Rapport Building
• Positives Outweigh Negatives
Proximity/Instructional Control

• Also consider room arrangement and staff positioning.
• Be present with students.
Generalization

• Teach Sufficient Examples
• Training in Multiple Settings with Multiple People
• Training Loosely
• Use Intermittent Reinforcer
Maintenance

• Teach to Mastery
• Rehearse
• Practice Behaviors in Various Settings
• Teach Authentic Behaviors
• Importance of Meaningful Curriculum
Create Support Plan

Behavior support plans should logically evolve from hypotheses you develop through the functional behavioral assessment process.
Behavioral Support Plans

• Defined: A clearly written document that defines how an environment will be altered in an effort to change a specific pattern of behavior for an individual, and alternative behavior(s) the individual will be taught, and the use of other strategies/resources.

• Behavior support plans should be developed in the context of the overall educational program.

• Should address resilience, self-advocacy, reduce anxiety (e.g., yoga, mindfulness) and promote success.
And often times we have to examine and change our behavior as well.