CHALLENGING BEHAVIORS SERIES

Functional Behavioral Assessment of Young Children

What is Functional Behavior Assessment (FBA)?

- A process that identifies the links between the challenging behavior and the conditions surrounding the behavior.

- It determines the antecedents and consequences of the child's challenging behavior through observation and data collection.

- It guides behavioral intervention planning by systematically identifying a function of a specific behavior and the environmental reinforcers that will determine what intervention strategy will be effective in decreasing that challenging behavior. For example, if a child consistently screams at circle time and the consequence for his/her behavior has consistently been removed from the activity, it may be determined that the reason why the child screams is that he/she wants to escape circle time. Therefore, the intervention strategy will have to address why he/she does not find circle time rewarding and will need to teach that child to request a break in a more socially acceptable manner. The process may include record reviews, a Functional Analysis Interview with primary care providers, rating scales, and direct observation in natural settings.

When should I complete a Functional Behavior Assessment?

- A Functional Behavior Assessment is required by law under IDEA when a child's behavior is determined to impede his or her learning or that of others. An FBA is also a mandated component of an evaluation for Emotional Behavioral Disorders (EBD). The IFSP/IEP/IIIP team must complete an FBA that will lead to a Positive Behavioral Intervention Plan with specific measurable goals and objectives on the educational plan that address the targeted behavior.

Who should complete the Functional Behavior Assessment?

- The FBA should be completed using a team model with the case manager coordinating the interviews and data collection. The FBA is ultimately the responsibility of the IFSP/IEP/IIIP team of a particular student.

Why should I complete a Functional Behavior Assessment?

- FBA provides a data driven evaluation method to guide Positive Behavioral Intervention Plans.

- FBA documents target behaviors in objective terms that can be shared across team members to allow for better communication regarding the nature and severity of the particular challenging behavior.

- In IDEA an FBA is a mandatory component of an EBD evaluation.

How does Functional Behavior Assessment apply to young children?

- An FBA can be used with young children who engage in challenging behaviors. Primary care providers can be interviewed, observations conducted in a child's natural setting and intervention planning can be designed to be carried out in the home, daycare, and in early childhood settings.

- All behavior is influenced by the environment in which it occurs. With young children the cause of their behavior may be directly related to the environment and at this age most students do not have the verbal ability to communicate how environmental factors such as sound, light, touch, smell, the environmental arrangement of the classroom, staffing patterns, group sizes, etc. may be affecting them. Part of conducting an FBA in an early childhood setting may be environmental manipulation, whereby the care provider directly structures the environment to either elicit or decrease the challenging behavior to test a hypothesis about the environmental cause of a particular challenging behavior.

- An FBA is a first step to designing a proactive approach to coping with a young child's challenging behavior because it necessitates that we define the behavior, determine its function and analyze the elements in the environment that may be reinforcing or causing the challenging behavior. To view a sample Functional Analysis Interview Form, visit the Early Childhood Behavior Project at slhslinux.cla.umn.edu.

Common terms used in Functional Behavior Assessment

- Challenging Behavior is defined as behavior emitted by a learner that results in self-injury, or injury to others, causes damage to the physical environment, interferes with the acquisition of a new skill and/or socially isolates the learner. (Doss & Reichle, 1991)

- Antecedents are events that occur immediately before the behavior.

- Consequences are events that occur immediately after the behavior.

- Reinforcement occurs when a consequence serves to increase the likelihood that a behavior will occur again. There are two types of reinforcement positive and negative.

- Positive reinforcement is a consequence that is presented following a behavior and it increases the likelihood that a behavior will occur again. An example of positive reinforcement is a sticker chart that increases the likelihood that the child will pick up toys when asked. A negative reinforcer is a consequence that is removed following a behavior and it increases the likelihood that the behavior will occur again. For example if a child cries when asked to pick up toys and his/her parent picks up the toys for them, the parent is negatively reinforcing the child's crying, because the consequence was the removal of an undesired event or activity.

- A function of a behavior is the purpose that it serves for the student who is engaging in the challenging behavior. Some examples of functions of behavior are escaping from an activity, seeking and maintaining attention, and obtaining or maintaining access to an object or event.