PBS Practice

The purpose of the series on PBS Practices is to provide information about important elements of positive behavior support. PBS Practices are not specific recommendations for implementation, and they should always be considered within the larger context of planning, assessment and comprehensive support.

Methods of Functional Behavioral Assessment (FBA)

Functional (behavioral) assessment (FBA) is a systematic process for gathering information in order to determine the relationships between a person's problem behavior and aspects of their environment. Through FBA, it is possible to identify specific events that predict and maintain behavior and design a support plan that effectively addresses those variables. FBA methods can, and should, vary across circumstances, but typically include <u>record reviews</u>, <u>interviews</u>, and <u>direct observation</u>.

Method	Sample Sources/Tools	Examples/Products
Record Reviews	Diagnostic/medical records, psychological reports, assessments from therapies, developmental profiles, social histories, previous behavior management plans, IEPs, ISPs, anecdotal records, incident reports, discipline referrals	Sammy's records contained: History of allergies and asthma Some effective educational strategies used in the past Patterns of discipline referrals
Structured Interviews	People who know the individual well and represent a range of environments (the person, family members, teachers, friends, direct service providers, etc.) may be interviewed. Some interview tools: *Functional Assessment Interview, Student-Directed Functional Assessment Interview (O'Neill et al., 1997) Motivational Assessment Scale (Durand & Crimmins, 1988)*	Interviews of Delores's family, friends, and job coach addressed her preferences for 'low key' settings, difficulty with dramatic changes in routine, and beliefs that she is motivated to avoid demanding social circumstances
Direct Observation	Observations should be conducted across a variety of times and circumstances. Some observation tools: *ABC (Antecedent-Behavior-Consequence) Recording Scatterplot (Touchette, MacDonald, & Langer, 1985) Frequency measures across conditions*	Scatterplot data indicates that Ben's biting is most likely when he is getting ready to leave in the morning and immediately after lunch

FBA methods range from highly precise and systematic to relatively informal. Particular tools and strategies should be selected based on the circumstances, individuals involved, and goals of intervention. The goal of FBA, regardless of which methods are used, is to answer certain questions:

1) Under what circumstances is the behavior most/least likely to occur (e.g., when, where, with whom)?
2) What outcomes does the behavior produce (i.e., what does the person get or avoid through his or her behavior)?

To answer these questions, the information gathered must be analyzed and summarized. Hypothesis (or summary) statements describe the specific patterns identified through the FBA and, if supported by the data, provide a foundation for intervention. A hypothesis statement must describe the behavior and

surrounding conditions, and be clear, comprehensive, and unbiased to be useful. Example: "When Steven finishes his work early, he makes noises and destroys his materials. His behavior prompts his supervisor to initiate an alternative activity."

Frequently-Asked Questions

1. When and why should a functional behavioral assessment be completed? An FBA may be initiated when a person's behavior interferes with performance, progress, and/or participation within typical daily routines and environments. It is completed for the purpose of designing an effective intervention that will allow the person with challenging behavior to be successful across all circumstances.

2. Who should do a functional behavioral assessment (e.g., what qualifications are needed)? It is important to have individuals who are experienced and skilled in FBA, competent in promoting collaboration, and proficient in designing effective positive behavioral support strategies involved in the process. Such individuals may come from varying backgrounds (e.g., applied behavior analysis, school psychology).

3. Are there shortcuts (e.g., one page forms) for conducting FBAs? Yes and no. A variety of tools are available for data collection and synthesis. In many cases, an informal or abbreviated approach can lead to reasonable interventions. However, in other circumstances, a more comprehensive and systematic process is required. An appropriate FBA is one that is matched to the circumstances and leads to an effective behavioral support plan.

4. What is the difference between functional behavioral assessment and functional analysis? Functional behavioral assessment is a broad term referring to the information gathering and hypothesis development process. It can involve a variety of methods, including functional analysis. Functional analysis is a rigorous experimental procedure in which hypotheses are tested by manipulating antecedents and consequences to see what impact they have on behavior. Whereas functional analysis may be useful in some circumstances, it is not always necessary or appropriate.

Other Resources

    Demchak, M & Bossert, K.W. (1996). Assessing problem behaviors. Innovations (No. 4). Washington, D.C.: American Association on Mental Retardation.

    Foster-Johnson, L. & Dunlap, G. (1993). Using functional assessment to develop effective, individualized interventions for challenging behaviors. Teaching Exceptional Children, 25, 44-50.

    O'Neill, R.E., Horner, R.H., Albin, R.W., Sprague, J.R., Storey, K., Newton, J.S. (1997). Functional assessment and program development for problem behavior: A practical handbook. Pacific Grove, CA: Brooks/Cole.

    Repp, A.C. & Horner, R.H. (Eds). (1999). Functional analysis of problem behavior: From effective assessment to effective support. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Publishing.

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