

Autism and Child Psychopathology Series

Series Editor: Johnny L. Matson

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Alan W. Brue

Practitioner's Guide to Functional Behavioral Assessment

Process, Purpose, Planning, and
Prevention

 Springer

Autism and Child Psychopathology Series

Series Editor

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Brief Overview

The purpose of this series is to advance knowledge in the broad multidisciplinary fields of autism and various forms of psychopathology (e.g., anxiety and depression). Volumes synthesize research on a range of rapidly expanding topics on assessment, treatment, and etiology.

Description

The **Autism and Child Psychopathology Series** explores a wide range of research and professional methods, procedures, and theories used to enhance positive development and outcomes for children. Developments in education, medicine, psychology, and applied behavior analysis as well as child development across home, school, hospital, and community settings are the focus of this series. Series volumes are both authored and edited, and they provide critical reviews of evidence-based methods. As such, these books serve as a critical reference source for researchers and professionals who deal with childhood disorders and disabilities, most notably autism, intellectual disabilities, challenging behaviors, anxiety, depression, ADHD, developmental coordination disorder, communication disorders, and other common childhood problems. The series addresses important mental health and development difficulties that children, their caregivers, and the professionals who treat them must face. Each volume in the series provides an analysis of methods and procedures that may assist in effectively treating these childhood problems.

More information about this series at <http://www.springer.com/series/8665>

Stephanie M. Hadaway • Alan W. Brue

Practitioner's Guide to Functional Behavioral Assessment

Process, Purpose, Planning, and Prevention

 Springer

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ISSN 2192-922X
Autism and Child Psychopathology Series
ISBN 978-3-319-23720-6
DOI 10.1007/978-3-319-23721-3

ISSN 2192-9238 (electronic)
ISBN 978-3-319-23721-3 (eBook)

Library of Congress Control Number: 2015950750

Springer Cham Heidelberg New York Dordrecht London
© Springer International Publishing Switzerland 2016

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Printed on acid-free paper

Springer International Publishing AG Switzerland is part of Springer Science+Business Media
(www.springer.com)

Stephanie: I would like to dedicate this book to my husband, Lee, who never ceases to amaze me! Thank you for always seeing the best in me.

Alan: This book is for my wife, Jett, who is always so very supportive of everything that I do. You are the best!

Acknowledgments

We would like to acknowledge and thank the parents, teachers, and administrators with whom we have worked. We have learned a lot from them and have incorporated this knowledge in our daily work with children and adolescents.

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List of Abbreviations

ABA	Applied behavior analysis
ABC	Antecedent-behavior-consequence
ADHD	Attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder
ASD	Autism spectrum disorder
BACB	Behavior Analyst Certification Board
BIP	Behavior intervention plan
CECP	Center for Effective Collaboration and Practice
FAPE	Free Appropriate Public Education
FBA	Functional behavioral assessment
FERPA	Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act of 1974 (also known as the Buckley Amendment)
IDEA 2004	Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004
IEP	Individualized Education Program
LRE	Least restrictive environment
ODD	Oppositional defiant disorder
OSEP	Office of Special Education Programs
OSERS	Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services
PBIS	Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports
RTI	Response to Intervention

Part I
Introduction

Chapter 1

Introduction to the FBA Process: How to Use This Book

What You Need to Know

Let us start with what counts. This book is designed for those of you who are *working with* or *learning to work with* individuals exhibiting behaviors that impact their ability to adapt appropriately to their environment. It is designed to be used as a practical application for those directly involved in the classroom, community, or residential setting. You may be a college student, teacher, counselor, school psychologist, residential coordinator, or even a behavior specialist. You may have a lot of experience with individuals exhibiting behavioral difficulties or this may be your very first year working with them. It does not matter. This book is designed to give you a manageable approach to what can be a challenging area. It is based on our collective experiences and has grown from the difficulties we have encountered in our day-to-day professional lives. There are a lot of great ideas and strategies to writing functional behavioral assessments (FBAs) available to the public. We have taken our own needs and reconceptualized how the process should work. Those reflections and experiences are the foundational structure of this book. We want you to take our hard-earned lessons and make your own process much easier.

Strategy One: Understand the Basics

This book is about sharing a philosophy on how to create an effective FBA. As a point of reference, it is important that we clarify the content in question. One faulty assumption that we often encounter is that FBA and functional analysis are interchangeable terms. FBA is a set of techniques and strategies that are designed to ascertain relational connections between a respondent and environmental conditions. Creating a comprehensive FBA entails both indirect assessment and direct assessment to form a hypothesis regarding the behavior of concern. Functional analysis might be a com-

ponent of this assessment. It is an experimental method designed to test the accuracy of the hypothesis through the manipulation of variables. The appropriateness of its inclusion should be weighed in light of need and accessibility when considering environmental and situational components.

In our experience with behavioral applications, consistency is often linked with effectiveness. It seems to us that those who have achieved a high degree of professional consistency and, subsequently, professional effectiveness have an underlying set of guiding principles. Without a well-understood philosophical and practical base, some are inclined to jump on every new trend or technique often yielding unfruitful progress in their practice. Developing a foundational assumption has helped to steer us towards the applications that are beneficial to those we support.

Our behavioral philosophy rests on several assumptions that guide our practice. First, behavior cannot be viewed in single, isolated episodes. Choosing to let one behavioral incident shape our perceptual understanding of a person is like looking at a photograph taken in 1 s and believing that it defines a person's next 24 h of living. Understanding a person's behavior means looking beyond one or two occurrences of challenging behavior. It requires perspective and just one glance will not suffice. If you are going to obtain a realistic perspective of an individual's behavior, nothing will be as beneficial as viewing the individual multiple times across a landscape that encompasses variability in contextual factors such as those present, setting and events taking place. When an interfering behavior does not occur often yields just as much meaningful data as when it does occur. Therefore, guard against defining the function of an interfering behavior based on an isolated incident.

Second, effective behavioral interventions cannot be overgeneralized. In order for behavior planning to be successful, it must be individualized and cover both deliberate assessment and deliberate prevention. Even good strategies will not work with every person. Therefore, strategies must be driven by data, knowledge, and understanding. If any of those components are lacking, it weakens the strategy.

Finally, FBA is a tool. Just as a hammer is essential in building a house, it is not the only tool needed. It would be very difficult to effectively cut wood with a hammer. And it would be very difficult to hold boards in place without the use of nails. When it comes to understanding and addressing behavioral needs in individuals, there are many evaluative and experiential methods that can be used. When chosen at random or used in isolation, these tools have little effectiveness in the resolution of interfering behaviors. Worse, sometimes the misapplication of a strategy can actually deter progress. Addressing challenging behaviors efficiently requires identifying a person-specific set of behavior planning tools, and working those tools to successfully complement one another. FBA is a useful tool, but it should not be considered a means to an end. Rather, the FBA process is more like the starting point on a behavioral planning map. Once it is completed, it determines the direction that behavior planning will take for an individual. Therefore, it should be approached thoughtfully.

Strategy Two: Understand the Scope

In order to encompass this type of approach, we decided as practitioners that we needed a fresh way to look at the FBA process. We did this by viewing both the development of an FBA and the creation of a behavioral plan as occurring in four essential phases. These phases are sequential and build on each other. We identified them as *Process*, *Purpose*, *Planning*, and *Prevention*.

Process is the beginning phase of FBA. Within Process, the practitioner would make preparations, review records, interview the student and other contributing parties, utilize assessments, collect data, and complete observations. The Process phase could also be considered the *doing* or *working phase*. This phase is about gathering, asking, reviewing, and observing. It is driven by focusing on target behaviors. These behaviors have been defined by the practitioner typically in conjunction with the individual's team. By making the effort to attain good, reliable, and sound information in this phase, the practitioner is prepared to continue to make good, reliable, and sound decisions in the next phase. The groundwork attained in Process is what underlies data analysis and propels decision-making forward. So, this process moves the practitioner into determining the purpose of the exhibited behavior.

Purpose is the second phase. Just as Process needs to be reliable, Purpose needs to be sound. Within Purpose, the practitioner begins data analysis. This involves looking critically at all of the information gathered. It is a detail-oriented task that requires organization and reflection. After analysis, the practitioner uses the results obtained to form a hypothesis about the function of the individual's behavior. If appropriate, functional analysis will begin in order to test the hypothesis. Once the purpose of the exhibited behavior has been defined, the practitioner, often along with a team, can develop a behavior plan.

Planning is the third phase and a step just beyond writing an FBA. Within Planning, the practitioner leads the team in developing interventions based on the hypothesis statement. Interventions include defining replacement behaviors and identifying strategies and curriculum to use. During Planning, reinforcers and consequences are determined based on the individual's personal preferences. Also, an action plan that entails how additional data will be collected on the progress of interventions is enacted. When behavior planning is set into motion, this leads to prevention.

Prevention is the final phase of our multiphasic approach to behavior planning. Within Prevention, the practitioner remains a strong voice but is also a collaborator with the team for the prevention of behaviors. The climate, culture, and community all can equally serve to minimize or increase the demonstration of disruptive behavior. Even with the best Process, Purpose, and Planning in place, a lack of commitment to Prevention as a whole will give rise to behavioral challenges. Without an effort towards prevention, negative and difficult behavior might reemerge despite all other attempts at behavior management.

Ultimately, Process, Purpose, Planning, and Prevention are phases that help us to think about more long-term solutions. For us, this model changes how we teach

other professionals about behavior and behavior planning. Our goal is to simplify the process of planning and development. It is our hope that you can turn to any part of this book and understand where you are in the development of an FBA and behavior planning.

Strategy Three: What to Do

Use this book to its fullest! Dive into these concepts and allow them to anchor your thinking about how to approach behavioral planning. Use the four phases as divisions for clarification. Instead of thinking about them as four distinct points, consider them as four stairs that lead to an informational result. Behavior planning is a comprehensive effort; make this book your jumping-off point.

To aid you in this process, we have used two methods to help make this information applicable to you. First, each chapter has been designed in a consistent format. If you look back through this chapter, the format will become clearer. We have built the structure in a hierarchical manner that takes you from the basics of the presented topic, widens the scope of understanding, tells the practitioner step by step what to do, and then applies the information presented. Subsequently, each chapter ends with a “takeaway” from us, the authors—Stephanie, a behavior specialist, and Alan, a school psychologist. These “takeaway” moments are our individual viewpoints—based on our training and school-based experiences—regarding the content of that chapter. Second, we have added a case snapshot of Willow Wilding to guide you through a generalized application and perhaps inject a measure of levity in the book. This ends with both an FBA and behavior intervention plan in Chap. 12.

Additionally, we encourage you to use the worksheets provided throughout the book. We will be the first to say there are plenty of good ways to approach all of the information that we have provided. In fact, your organization or school district might mandate the use of certain forms. We understand this because we have similar mandates on paperwork. But, if you can, use these forms as you go through the book, if only for practice. They have been especially designed to complement the four-phase model we have developed.

Finally, we have spent a portion of many chapters in this book addressing what we will term, “professional conduct.” When called upon to execute the steps in behavior planning, the practitioner will enter into both environmental and relational situations. Technically, your approach may be thorough and exact. You may understand how to successfully apply techniques and strategies to create an exceptional plan. Yet, our experience has taught us that the willingness of organizations and individuals to remain open to this process can be equally enhanced and limited by their interactions with the practitioner. Therefore, we have provided guidelines on how to maintain professional conduct throughout the FBA process.

Strategy Four: Application

The application of this chapter is twofold. First, we encourage you to read on. As much as we have simplified this information, some of it might still seem challenging. In those moments, take a break and come back to the material fresh. Second, reflect on your own cases as you work through this book. For instance, when we take you step by step through the development of a target behavior, try this yourself. Before you bring this information into practice, it is good to try it privately. You might even want to work through the material with a partner or a group. However you approach the creation of FBA, it is our hope that this book will be an excellent resource for you.

A Before-You-Proceed Checklist

1. Understand that behavior cannot be viewed accurately in single episodes.
2. Understand that behavior planning must be individualized.
3. Familiarize yourself with the four phases.
4. Understand that FBA is the starting point of behavioral planning.

Author Takeaways

From both Stephanie, the behavior specialist, and Alan, the school psychologist:

Interfering or inappropriate behaviors are sometimes difficult to understand. They can bring unrest and chaos into any setting. There are many strategies and curricula that are available; however, these have little effectiveness if the purpose of an individual's challenging behavior is unknown. Addressing the right issue with appropriate reinforcements is essential in working towards the resolution of misbehavior. FBA is the tool that aids the practitioner in gaining this information. By the end of this book, we hope you will feel confident in using that tool as needed. Happy reading.

Chapter 2

The Basics of Functional Behavioral Assessment

What You Need to Know

We introduced you to the four-phase concept in Chap. 1. The first phase, *Process*, is the working phase of writing a functional behavioral assessment (FBA). Before beginning, it is vital that you develop an understanding of the language and underlying principles that govern the development of an FBA.

In this chapter, our goal is not to give you an in-depth history of FBA. However, it seems to us that we would be remiss if we jumped straight into the FBA process without offering you an understanding of the theoretical fields from which this tool has emerged. We also felt that those of you working in the field of education should know the regulations that govern the use of FBA in public schools. This chapter might seem a bit heavy, perhaps even wordy. *Do not worry!* This is a practitioner's guide. After you wade through the concepts contained in this chapter, the book will take you step by step through the process of completing an FBA. But, first things first—let us begin.

Strategy One: Understand the Basics

Over the years, we have read and studied different viewpoints on the ramifications involved in defining FBA. The Center for Effective Collaboration and Practice (CECP) considers FBA to be “a problem-solving process for addressing student problem behavior.” They go on to include that this process uses strategies and techniques that lead to understanding the purpose of an individual's behavior. (This is from the helpful CECP website at <http://cecp.air.org/fba/>. They are funded by the Office of Special Education Programs and several other government agencies.) Our cue is taken from this problem-solving process. As practitioners, we have come to define FBA as a multilayered method of determining the function or intent of a behavior. It is a systemized approach that allows the practitioner to answer the question, “What purpose does this behavior serve?” Within the context of supporting an

individual with behavioral challenges, the question typically focuses on the aberrant or interfering behavior.

Functional Behavioral Assessment and Behaviorism

Let us rewind the clock now. The FBA approach has a history with deep roots in the fields of learning and behavior. Behaviorism or behavioral psychology is the cornerstone to this vast field of theory, experiment, and application. Behaviorism asserts that behavior is learned. So, what is learned can essentially be unlearned and replaced with alternative behavior. Pioneering research in this field includes works by John B. Watson (1913), Ivan Pavlov (1927), Edward L. Thorndike (1911), and B. F. Skinner (1953).

You might remember from a child development class or a general psychology course the controversial “Little Albert” experiment by John B. Watson. In this study, Watson demonstrated the impact of conditioning on an 11-month-old boy. In brief, the child was presented with a white rat and then an iron rod was loudly clanged causing the child to cry. This process was repeated until the child began to cry when the white rat was presented without an accompanying noise. Subsequently, the boy cried when a white rabbit, a dog, and even fur were presented to him.

Now, what was Watson attempting to do? He was attempting to demonstrate that through the introduction of a stimulus, he could create a specific response. Although controversial, Watson seemed to have successfully “conditioned” the boy to express a fear response. Whenever the 11-month-old was presented with a furry animal or object, he cried. In this regard, Watson appeared to have successfully paired a stimulus (furry animal or object) with a response (crying).

In Watson’s day, the popular psychological perspective focused on internal urges. Through his experimental work, Watson was attempting to show that human behavior was not caused by internal drives. He was attempting to establish that environment impacted the formulation of behaviors. This environmental impact could be manipulated to then create a change in the individual. In the journal *Psychological Review*, Watson (1913) wrote:

Psychology as the behaviorist views it is a purely objective experimental branch of natural science. Its theoretical goal is the prediction and control of behavior. Introspection forms no essential part of its methods, nor is the scientific value of its data dependent upon the readiness with which they lend themselves to interpretation in terms of consciousness. The behaviorist, in his efforts to get a unitary scheme of animal response, recognizes no dividing line between man and brute. (p. 162)

Watson, known as the father of behaviorism, was not the only pioneer in the field. In the area of conditioning, Ivan Pavlov and B. F. Skinner are two key figures. You might remember that conditioning is pairing a stimulus with a response. This should sound somewhat familiar based on the preceding paragraphs. For a brief review and a quick reminder, we will cover the two most basic types of conditioning: classical and operant.

a. *Classical conditioning:*

Ivan Pavlov is probably best known for his conditioning dogs to salivate at the sound of a bell.

Step 1: A naturally occurring stimulus is paired with an unconditioned response.

<i>Food</i>	<i>Salivation</i>
<i>Unconditioned stimulus</i>	<i>Unconditioned response</i>

Step 2: A neutral stimulus is paired with the naturally occurring stimulus.

Bell + Food = Salivation

This is repeated until the neutral stimulus (bell) begins to prompt the unconditioned response (salivation) without the naturally occurring stimulus (food) present.

<i>Bell</i>	<i>Salivation</i>
<i>Conditioned stimulus</i>	<i>Conditioned response</i>

b. *Operant conditioning:*

B. F. Skinner differentiated between a natural response, such as salivation in the presence of food, and a learned response that takes place through both reinforcement and punishment. The respondent begins to link behavior and consequence through operant conditioning. If the respondent finds the consequence desirable or positive, he or she is more likely to repeat the behavior; however, if the respondent finds the consequence too negative or undesirable, he or she is less likely to repeat the behavior. Skinner identified these consequences as reinforcements and punishments. According to Skinner (1953), “The strengthening of behavior which results from reinforcement is appropriately called ‘conditioning’. In operant conditioning we ‘strengthen’ an operant in the sense of making a response more probable or, in actual fact, more frequent” (p. 42).

During the 1950s and the 1960s, many researchers began to move towards developing behavioral change experiments with humans. Numerous studies were completed and an ever-growing body of research was developed. Behavior modification moved to the forefront as experiments demonstrated the impact of consequence on the behavior of human respondents. In the late 1960s, Sidney Bijou began using strategies designed by Skinner. He focused his work in the area of child development. As a result, Bijou was one of several who formalized techniques, such as the antecedent-behavior-consequence (ABC) model. This model allows the observer to gather information to analyze how the antecedent (*what comes before*) and the consequent (*what comes after*) impact the behavior of a respondent. For example, Ms. Mealer passes out the math assignment (*antecedent*). Aaliyah begins to cry (*behavior*). Ms. Mealer comforts Aaliyah and helps her answer the first few questions (*consequence*). Of further impact, Bijou, along with Donald Baer, Todd Riskey, James Sherman, and Montrose Wolf, founded the *Journal of Applied Behavior Analysis* in 1968.