



WTF?! What is the Function

THERE IS ALWAYS A FUNCTION

As educators, it is our responsibility to support all learners, including those with challenging behaviors. Often for these learners, we choose goals to improve behavior. Some of our students do not have the communication skills to let us know what they want and need in a conventional way, so they use interfering behavior to express those messages. Other students have not yet developed social competence and rely on interfering behavior. Still others use interfering behaviors because they have worked for them over time. There are good reasons to support behavior change, but most importantly we want to support change that increases the quality of life for our students. Independence, employability, and skills to participate in the community are worthy goals. Interfering behavior does not occur in a vacuum, it always serves a function. There is a reason for the behavior. It is our job as educators to understand the function or reason for the behavior and support students to meet those functions in appropriate ways.



WHAT ARE THE 4 FUNCTIONS:

1. Attention
2. Escape
3. Tangible
4. Sensory (Automatic Reinforcement)

HOW DO WE FIND THE FUNCTION?

This is our favorite question! You can figure out the function of a learner's behavior by analyzing the environment where the behavior occurs.

Learn more by reading our ABC data fact sheet!



I FIGURED OUT THE FUNCTION, NOW WHAT?

After we figure out the function of our student's behavior, it's time to choose a replacement behavior and reinforce it! Think about it, if you student is having behaviors to get your attention, choose an appropriate replacement behavior such as "Can I tell you a story?" or "Will you play with me?" then give the attention. There are multiple different strategies you can use to teach replacement behaviors such as functional communication training (FCT), differential reinforcement of an alternative behavior (DRA), task analysis (TA), differential reinforcement of an incompatible behavior (DRI) etc!

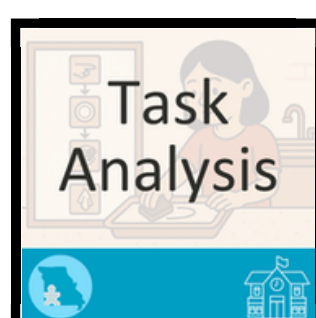
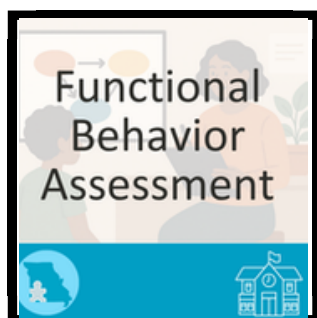
It is important to make sure whatever replacement behavior we are teaching our student matches the SAME FUNCTION as the challenging behavior. For example, if our student is having challenging behaviors to get out of doing their work, we would not want to teach them to ask for a squeeze. The function is escape, so instead we would teach them to ask for a break! And we want to make sure we do not send them to the hallway, or the office for their challenging escape based behaviors because this can accidentally reinforce the behavior you do not want to see!

REMINDERS

- We have to be aware of how we are responding to the learner's behavior and if we are reinforcing the behavior by accident! We may think sending them to the office or reprimanding them is "punishing"; however, if the behavior continues to happen, it is, by definition, reinforcing the behavior!
- Our replacement behaviors we teach **MUST BE FUNCTIONALLY EQUIVALENT**. Meaning, if our student is hitting and receiving attention, the replacement behavior we teach must also help the student gain attention!
- Ethically, we must **ALWAYS** look at the function before implementing interventions!
- Looking at the function does not always equal a formal FBA. Sometimes we just need to take a step back and look at what is going on in the environment informally using a piece of paper and pencil!

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Article written by Dr. Greg Hanley that talks about why finding a function of behavior is soooooo important. [Read it here!](#)



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