

Functional Behavioral Assessment – What, Why and How?

What is a functional behavioral assessment?

A functional behavioral assessment (FBA) is a process for gathering information about behaviors of concern. Those behaviors could be academic-related such as not completing homework assignments or class work. Or, the behaviors could be social or emotional in nature, for example: hitting others, getting out of the desk frequently, calling others' names, or refusing to follow directions given by the teacher or other adult.

By gathering information on what the behavior is, where it occurs, and when it occurs, the child's teacher and other school personnel (as well as the child's parents) can develop a plan to teach the child more appropriate replacement behaviors or to support the development of more desirable behaviors.

Who is responsible for completing a functional assessment?

All members of the IEP (Individual Education Plan) team are responsible for insuring that the functional assessment is completed. Since a variety of instruments and data collection tools may be used, persons collecting the information will vary; however, a person trained in the interpretation of each instrument and/or tool is essential. Those persons who are typically involved in this information gathering process include the child's general education teacher, a special education teacher, a school psychologist, a school social worker and/or a school counselor.

How is the information gathered?

An assessment plan should be designed that designates specific information to be gathered and assigns specific persons to obtain that information. Techniques for gathering the information that may be needed include: interviews with the student,

interviews with the student's teachers, interviews with the student's parents, observations of the student in the environments where the behavior of concern occurs. For example, if the student is hitting other students and the behavior occurs primarily at recess and during other unstructured times, observations should occur during recess, cafeteria time, and other times when the student is not following a designated schedule.

Another technique for gathering information is a review of the student's educational records. This review can help determine factors that might be influencing the occurrence of the inappropriate behavior such as any negative events in the student's educational history. Disciplinary records from previous years can help the school team determine if there is a long or short history of inappropriate behaviors and what interventions were tried in the past to change those behaviors.

Is there a law that requires that a functional behavioral assessment be done?

IDEA 97 tells us that we must do a functional assessment when a child with a disability has been removed from his/her current educational placement for more than 10 days. However, for students at-risk of suspension or those suspended for less than 10 days, school districts should complete a functional assessment and develop a behavior support plan to prevent future suspensions.



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A functional assessment provides the IEP team with critical information including:

- Those interventions, which have been tried, and their effects;
- Possible motivation(s) underlying the student's behavior, and;
- Whether instructional and behavioral supports being provided to the student are working.

After the assessment is conducted, the team of professionals at a child's school will develop a positive behavior intervention support plan.

What is a positive behavior intervention plan?

Positive behavior supports include multiple approaches such as changing systems, altering environments, teaching skills, and appreciating positive behavior. Strategies that support a child in learning new behaviors are incorporated in a positive behavior intervention plan. These interventions may include:

- Environmental modifications such as allowing a student to sit in a specific place in his/her classes or providing a quiet place, free from distractions for a student complete class work; academic accommodations such as shortened assignments, taking tests orally, or working in small groups for instruction;
- Social skills instruction designed to teach a student more appropriate behaviors may also be determined by the team to be a helpful strategy for improving behavior;
- Individual, group support, or counseling to improve a student's ability to function socially or emotionally at school;
- Curriculum materials may need to be adapted - using supplemental materials, providing sample tests, teaching pre-requisite skills, and teaching study skills could be included in the plan that is designed.

What is the purpose of a positive behavior intervention plan?

A positive behavior intervention plan is written to address behavior concerns that interfere with the student's ability to gain reasonable benefit from the learning environment. This is accomplished through

teaching and supporting the development of more appropriate behaviors.

The essential components of the positive behavior intervention plan are as follows:

- A detailed description of the disruptive behavior;
- interventions used and their results;
- behavioral goals;
- plan for teaching and supporting the new behavior, including a crisis intervention plan;
- description of success (criteria and consequences); and
- follow-up activities.

What role do the student's parents play in the development of a positive behavior intervention plan?

Parents are important members of the team that is conducting a functional behavior assessment and developing the positive behavior intervention plan. Parents should provide information to the school team about where, when and with whom the behaviors occur. A parent also knows which intervention strategies have been tried before (at home or at school) and which strategies work.

Parents should be included as a partner in the development of the positive behavior intervention plan. Information and/or training should be provided to parents so the strategies and techniques used at school can also be used at home. Parents can also continue to teach and reinforce the use of more appropriate behaviors at home and in the community. Communication between school personnel and parents should occur on a frequent basis about modifications or changes in the plan to encourage success.

Reference:

- CDE – Behavior Learning Team, Special Education Services Unit (303) 866-6694
- 1993. Sugai, G. & Horner, R., et.al. (Summer, 2000). *Journal of Positive Behavior Interventions*, 2(3), 131 – 14.