Functional Behavioral Assessment (FBA) Facts

**Purpose of the FBA/assessment process:**
- To identify the specific environmental factors influencing the problem behaviors
- To identify the functions or motivations for behavior in order to establish an appropriate behavior treatment plan
- To identify specific, individualized areas for skills training
- To increase awareness of the presence and patterns of problem behaviors

(Paclawskyj, Kurtz, & O’Conner, 2004)

**Necessity of FBA and behavioral interventions:**
- To identify individual functions and interventions to address behavior problems (i.e., data driven decision making to enable individualized planning (IDEA, 2004; NCLB, 2001)
- To develop the behavioral programming portion of the IEP (i.e., BIP) because “...All of a student’s unique needs must be addressed, not just academic needs” (Abrahamson v. Hershman, 1983)
- There’s a need for IEPs to go beyond academic goals (NYSE QPI, 2001)

**Steps to Conducting the FBA/initial assessment:**

1. **Choose the Target Behavior:**
   - Focus on 2-3 behaviors per individual at one time
   - To determine if the behavior should be a focus of intervention ask:
     » Is the behavior harmful?
     » Does the behavior interfere with learning?
     » Does the behavior interfere with integration?
     » Do personnel/caregivers agree that this behavior should be targeted?

(Kazdin, 2001)

2. **Operationally Define Target Behavior:**
   - Select behaviors that are observable and measurable
   - Create a simple definition that encompasses all aspects of the behavior (example: aggression is defined as hitting others with an open or closed hand, kicking, scratching, or biting others)
   - The operational definition is useful because it assists with:
     » Making sure all individuals are assessing the same behavior
     » Providing a basis upon which change can be measured in the future

(Kazdin, 2001)

3. **Conduct Observations (at various times, activities, and settings):**
   - Record setting events (i.e., events recently occurring but removed in time from the current observation)
   - Record what is occurring in the environment during the observation period (e.g., who is present, time of day, setting, activity)
   - When a target behavior is observed, record the ABCs:
     » Antecedent (A): What was happening immediately prior to the target behavior (e.g., teacher asked child to complete a math worksheet)
     » Behavior (B): Which target behavior occurred and how many times did it occur (i.e., frequency) or how long it occurred (i.e., duration)
     » Consequence (C): What happened immediately after the target behavior occurred (e.g., teacher removed the worksheet and the child immediately calmed down)

(Kazdin, 2001; Stichter, Hudson, & Sasso, 2005)

**Identifying Behavioral Function:**
- The ‘function’ of a behavior is the purpose it serves for the individual or what the individual is gaining by engaging in the behavior
- All behavior serves a function and FBA is aimed at determining these functions
- Once sufficient data has been collected, a function (or multiple functions) is determined by looking for patterns in the individual’s behavior (e.g., only engages in problem behavior when a work task is present, the teacher provides a great deal of attention to the individual whenever problem behaviors occur)
- Several functions of problem behavior have been well documented by researchers:
  » Attention: the individual gains social attention in the form of verbal language or physical contact directed towards him/her after engaging in the target behavior
  » Tangible: the individual gains access to a preferred item (e.g., food, toys, activities) after engaging in the target behavior
  » Escape: an activity or event is terminated when the individual engages in the problem behavior
  » Sensory: the target behavior itself elicits a pleasurable sensory experience or reduces the discomfort brought about by physical pain.

(Durand & Crimmins, 1988; Lovaas & Simmons, 1969; Hanley, Iwata, & McCord, 2003)
Designing Treatment Based on FBA Results:

- Behavioral treatment generally consists of several components:
  - Environmental Adaptations: designed to increase structure, predictability, and stability in the environment
  - Training replacement behaviors: a new behavior or skill must be taught that serves the same function as the target behavior
  - Reduction of the target behavior: target behavior is reduced through the use of positive reinforcement and reductive techniques

(Mace & Roberts, 1993; Luiselli & DesNoyers, 2005)

References:


*Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act* (2004).
No Child Left Behind (2001).