

# FUNCTIONAL COMMUNICATION

## General Guidelines



**HANDS in Autism®**  
Interdisciplinary Training  
& Resource Center

1130 W Michigan Street  
Fesler Hall, Suite 302  
Indianapolis, IN 46202

HANDSinAutism.iupui.edu  
hands@iupui.edu  
(317) 274-2675

Also, check out...

How-To Video Series  
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## WHY DO WE USE FUNCTIONAL COMMUNICATION TRAINING?

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- We know that many skills including communication skills are very complex but are often done very naturally for many of us.
- Behavior is one form of communication but not an appropriate one.
- Functional communication training provides a structured process for training the appropriate skill in a gradual and systematic way with kiddos challenged in the area of communication and using behavior to communicate their needs.

## WHAT IS ESSENTIAL TO TEACH?

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- The purpose of functional communication training would be to train skills that can replace the negative behavior that we are trying to reduce but that has been effective in communicating something.
- We choose something to train that serves the same function as and is an appropriate and motivating replacement for the negative behaviors (e.g., ask for break vs. throwing items across the room to get escorted out)
- We can teach a wider range and number as well as communication that is increasingly complex over time.

## WHEN AND WHERE CAN WE TEACH THESE SKILLS?

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- We have opportunity to teach 24/7.
- All caregivers can and should take responsibility for training in essential life skills.
- Skills are generally taught in a 1:1 setting initially where the individual can have the support needed and can feel safe and secure.
- The setting should be physically and visually structured to support the individual in knowing the expectations.
- Generalization is a skill that needs to be specifically taught as well and cannot be assumed that it will occur. Generalization is the ability to use the same skills taught with a particular person, with a certain set of conditions and a certain person in different settings, with different people and in different circumstances.

## HOW IS FUNCTIONAL COMMUNICATION TRAINING (FCT) EFFECTIVELY CARRIED OUT?

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- As mentioned previously, emerging communication skills/formats (e.g., exchange, words, talkers).
- Functional communication that will lead to the desired function/purpose for communication are focused upon as well (e.g., I want a break, I want M & Ms).
- Skills are generally taught in a 1:1 setting initially where the individual can have the support needed and can feel safe and secure.
- Skills are taught progressively.
- Consistency is important!!!
- Data should guide the process—which skills to target, where to begin and when progress is being made
- A number of supportive strategies are used to support development and independence with functional communication inclusive of:
  - Differential responding to emphasize behaviors that we would like to see repeated and those that we prefer not
  - Structuring teaching by breaking tasks into several steps and being taught progressively and systematically.  
*Strategies used include: whole task training, chaining, modeling with feedback*
  - Structured prompting methods to support at the level needed but also allowing for independence:  
*Errorless learning, guided compliance*
  - Other supports include:  
*Visual Cueing (e.g., picture cues, scripting), Social Narratives, Self-talk*
- Ultimately, FCT is a great example of ABA in action and where an integration of a number of specific strategies and concepts can be utilized (which is dependent on the needs of the individual and inclusive of:
  - DTT
  - PRT
  - Incidental Teaching
  - PBS
  - TEACCH
  - ABA