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 (IDEIA,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)

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