

FUNCTIONAL BEHAVIORAL ASSESSMENT: a study guide

“The purpose of school discipline is to allow effective instruction and learning to take place. The goal isn’t just behavior control – it’s student development. Proactive approaches focus on positive and constructive problem-solving techniques for prevention of behavior problems. Reactive approaches focus on controlling or suppressing behavior.”

***--- Hill M. Walker, Ph.D.
University of Oregon***

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HOW TO USE THIS STUDY GUIDE

This study guide is intended as a brief overview of functional behavioral assessment (FBA), the development of behavioral intervention plans (BIP), and positive practices and interventions. It is by no means complete. Some additional resources are included in this kit, and there are many more commercially available products. The purpose of this guide is to provide a framework for understanding and implementing proactive programs to address the behavioral needs of children with disabilities, as well as address the legal requirements in IDEA '97 for FBA.

While every effort has been made to be consistent and accurate, this guide is not a legal document. The suggestions represent commonly accepted practices.

This guide may be used in a number of ways:

- Presentation outline – inservice, preservice, workshops, parent groups
- Discussion guide – small groups with a facilitator rather than a presenter
- Individual – self-study, professional reading
- Supplementary material/professional library

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[FUNCTIONAL ASSESSMENT AND PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT FOR PROBLEM BEHAVIOR: A Practical Handbook. O’Neill, Horner, et al. Page 3]

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PREFACE

There are new legal mandates addressing functional behavioral assessment (FBA) and behavior intervention plans (BIP). In order to provide a coordinated statewide approach to these issues, the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction (DPI) funded a special education discretionary project in CESA (Cooperative Educational Service Agency) 12 beginning in the 1998-99 school year. A task force was formed and one of the activities has been to review materials related to FBA and BIP. There are many, many excellent sources of information available, and the kit in which you will find this module contains only a few examples. This is not intended to be a complete course, but rather an overview of functional behavioral assessment.

There are several key concepts that form a philosophical basis for the information that has been selected for this kit and for the approach to FBA that the task force recommends. Those ideas are as follows:

- Behavior occurs in a context, not in a vacuum. We need to consider the environment as well as the child; we cannot assume that the problem is solely within the child.
- Behavior continues because it is reinforced. The misbehavior works for the student. The challenge is to identify the purpose or function the behavior serves, and attempt to identify a replacement behavior that is more acceptable and will serve the same purpose for the student.
- All too often, we rely on punishment and negative responses. The new law requires positive strategies & interventions. It is not enough to decrease the inappropriate behavior; we must also teach replacement behaviors and allow for practice of those new skills.
- “We seem to forget everything we know about learning when it comes to dealing with behavior. 96% of behavior is learned and so it can be unlearned.” (Van Acker) Misbehavior becomes automatic; the student does not go through a cognitive process and “decide” to misbehave. When a student must unlearn an inappropriate behavior and learn an appropriate replacement behavior, it may take at least 4 to 6 times more practice. Behavior change is not a discrete event; it takes time.
- We should be proactive in addressing challenging behaviors, and try to prevent problems before they occur.

The task force has developed this study guide as an overview of the functional behavioral assessment process as part of a kit provided to local education agencies. References to other materials in the kit are provided in the event the user wants more detailed information on a particular topic.

SECTION I: OVERVIEW OF FUNCTIONAL BEHAVIORAL ASSESSMENT

What is functional behavioral assessment (FBA)?

- Process for identifying (1) the purpose or function of the behavior; (2) the variables that influence the behavior; and, (3) components of an effective behavioral intervention plan (BIP)
- A system for gathering data about the antecedents and consequences of specific behaviors, developing a hypothesis about the function of the behavior, and implementing and evaluating a behavioral intervention plan

What is FBA based on? What's applied behavioral analysis (ABA)?

- Functional behavioral assessment is nothing new, and is based on applied behavioral analysis (ABA). ABA is concerned with the analysis and modification of human behavior, and is often represented by one of the following paradigms:

$$A \equiv B \equiv C \quad \text{or} \quad A \equiv R \equiv C$$

- The “A” in either paradigm is “antecedent” – that which precedes the behavior of concern. The antecedents may include external factors such as settings, tasks, people, activities, events and so on. Antecedents may also be internal factors such as moods, medical conditions, disabilities, psychiatric conditions, and so on.
 - The “B” represents “behavior”, while the “R” stands for “response”. It is important to define behavior or response in observable, factual terms. Stay away from emotions or projected feelings, such as “he felt bad” or “his feelings were hurt”. Everyone involved needs to understand the meaning of the behavior. For example, what is meant by “in seat”, “disruptive”, or “on time”?
 - The “C” is “consequence” – that which follows the target behavior. It is important to consider what the student does, what other students do, what teachers or other adults do, whether there are meaningful consequences, and so on.
- The goals of ABA include (1) determining the relationship between behavior and the environment; (2) understanding the reasons or functions for the behavior; (3) helping behavior change; and, (4) arranging consequences to promote the learning of desirable skills that are observable and measurable.
 - The relationship between behavior and learning must not only be considered but must be acted upon. The purpose is to fill in the blanks in the following sentence: When _____ occurs, the student _____ in order to _____.

Why are we hearing about this so much lately?

- Now mandated in certain circumstances by federal and state special education law
(NOTE: Wisconsin has adopted the federal language)

IDEA '97:

Section 615(k): "PLACEMENT IN ALTERNATIVE EDUCATIONAL SETTING—

(1) AUTHORITY OF SCHOOL PERSONNEL

(A) School personnel under this section may order a change in the placement of a child with a disability---

(i) to an appropriate interim alternative educational setting, another setting, or suspension, for not more than 10 school days (to the extent such alternatives would be applied to children without disabilities); and

(ii) to an appropriate interim alternative educational setting for the same amount of time that a child without a disability would be subject to discipline, but not for more than 45 days if --(I) the child carries a weapon to school or to a school function under the jurisdiction of a State or a local educational agency; or (II) the child knowingly possesses or uses illegal drugs or sells or solicits the sale of a controlled substance while at school or at a school function under the jurisdiction of a state or local educational agency.

(B) Either before or not later than 10 days after taking a disciplinary action described in subparagraph (A) --

(i) **if the local education agency did not conduct a functional behavioral assessment and implement a behavior intervention plan for such child before the behavior that resulted in the suspension described in subparagraph (A), the agency shall convene an IEP meeting to develop an assessment plan to address that behavior; or**

(ii) **if the child already has a behavioral intervention plan, the IEP Team shall review the plan and modify it, as necessary, to address the behavior."**
(emphasis added)

[Sections (2) – Authority of Hearing Officer - and (3) – Determination of Setting - have been omitted]

(4) "MANIFESTATION DETERMINATION REVIEW. --

(A) IN GENERAL. -- If a disciplinary action is contemplated as described in paragraph (1) or paragraph (2) for a behavior of a child with a disability described in either of those paragraphs, or if a disciplinary action involving a change of placement for more than 10 days is contemplated for a child with a disability who has engaged in other behavior that violated any rule or code of conduct of the local educational agency that applies to all children --

- (i) not later than the date on which the decision to take that action is made the parents shall be notified of that decision and of all procedural safeguards accorded under this section; and
- (ii) immediately, if possible, but in no case later than 1-school days after the date on which the decision to take that action is made, a review shall be conducted of the relationship between the child's disability and the behavior subject to the disciplinary action."

Why should we do FBAs (other than the legal requirement)?

- It helps us to better understand the behavior and to develop more effective BIPs
- It helps improve programming for students whose behavior interferes with their learning or that of others
- The current punitive approach isn't working
- It will help us more accurately report to parents
- We can more accurately predict outbursts and prevent future outbursts

When you do an FBA, why are the outcomes helpful?

- If our hypothesis about the function or purpose of a problem behavior is correct, we get ideas for alternative skills or strategies that can be taught. We also get ideas for meaningful consequences for the student.

Why the new emphasis on positives? What's wrong with punishment?

- Unless we can teach replacement behavior and establish that behavior in a child's repertoire, we will not see any long-term behavior change. We need to address behavior as a subject and the goal is to make the appropriate behavior automatic. Otherwise, in a crisis, the child will revert to what s/he knows.

What if we don't do FBAs?

- The student's behavior probably will not improve and most likely will deteriorate.
- It may be a procedural violation of the law if there is an IDEA Complaint, mediation, and/or a due process hearing.
- Disciplinary action may have to be put on hold while an FBA is conducted, a BIP developed, implemented, evaluated and revised if needed.

When do we have to do FBAs?

- When challenging behaviors are a concern, regardless of the disability of the child - **This is not just a process for children identified as emotionally disturbed (ED).**
- When the current program isn't effective
- When the student or others are at risk for harm or exclusion
- When a more restrictive placement or a more intrusive intervention is contemplated
- When there are repeated and serious problem behaviors
- When legally required [see pg. 2]

How do we decide when to conduct an FBA? Must we do this for every child with a disability?

- No. The legal requirements are discussed above. If the student’s behavior is interfering with his/her learning or that of others, the IEP team must address the behavioral issues. Consider the following factors:
 - are you spending more time on behavioral issues than on other needs with this student? is behavior a primary issue with this student?
 - is the misbehavior more than just occasional? is it pervasive?
 - how does the student’s behavior compare to peers? is the behavior chronologically and/or developmentally appropriate?
 - is the behavior responding to typical school and/or classroom interventions?
 - can you point to a reason why the child may be misbehaving (for example, a recent divorce or illness in the family)? would you expect or predict the behavior given the circumstances? do you expect the behavior to naturally diminish over time?

Who does and FBA?

- **The IEP team, including the parents**
- **One person should not be responsible** for an FBA, although one person may coordinate the process as case manager
- There is no requirement that someone licensed in the area of ED be included
- The team may wish to consider:¹
 - Who will collect what information and where?
 - Who will be responsible for summarizing and displaying the information?
 - When and how often will information be collected?
 - Who will meet, and when and how often will they meet, to review/discuss relevant information for decision making?

What are some of the common functions of behavior? [See pg. 9 for more details]

- Attention
- Escape or avoidance
- Justice or revenge
- Power or control
- Expression of self
- Acceptance or affiliation

¹ National Association of State Directors of Special Education (NASDSE). “Functional Behavioral Assessment: Policy Development in Light of Emerging Research and Practice”. (March, 1998, pg. 15)

- Access to tangible rewards or personal gratification

What are the critical dimensions of behavior that should be considered? [See pg. 10 for more details]

- Frequency
- Topography
- Duration
- Latency
- Magnitude
- Locus

Why should we be concerned about the critical dimensions of behavior?

- It's important to collect the correct type of data. If the behavior of concern is out of seat, the number of behaviors may be less critical than the duration of the behavior. Being out of seat 6 times for 1 minute each time is different from being out of seat 6 times for 15 minutes each time.

Is the process the same in every case?

- Neither the federal nor the state rules and regulations outline a specific format that must be used; it will vary on a case-by-case basis
- In some cases, review of records and existing information may be sufficient; in other cases, for example, it may be necessary to conduct interviews, do observations, and/or complete formalized assessments

What does the research say?

- The foundation of functional behavioral assessment is basic applied behavioral analysis principles, and that has been validated across populations and behaviors. Much of the research on functional behavioral assessment itself originated with individuals who were non-communicative (communicative functions of behavior), such as those identified as severely cognitively disabled or those with stereotypic & self-injurious behaviors.

What is the role of the parent?

- Parents are IEP team participants
- Parents should be encouraged to share information about their child, including routines, expectations, behavior in the home, cultural issues, medical history, and other relevant factors [see pg. 12 for further discussion]

How does an FBA fit with an IEP? [See pg. 23 for more details]

- The IEP is the centerpiece of instructional programming for a student with a disability and an FBA provides baseline data for appropriately addressing the student's behavioral needs.
- If the student's behavior is interfering with his/her learning or that of others, the IEP must address that behavior.

- Information from the FBA can be part of the present level of educational performance (PLOP); it should also provide the basis for annual goals, short term objectives, and benchmarks.
- A BIP should include teaching replacement or alternative behaviors, short term prevention strategies, long term prevention strategies, and any necessary supports including a crisis management plan (if appropriate).
- Behavior can be addressed in an IEP through (1) annual goals, short-term objectives, benchmarks; (2) special factors; and/or (3) a behavioral intervention plan that is attached to the IEP.
- Behavior should be addressed as a learning issue, not just as a disciplinary issue.

In conducting an FBA, what questions should the team discuss?

- The following questions may be useful as a guide for discussion²:
 - What happened? – Describe the behavior of concern
 - What happened before? – Identify the specific triggers
 - What has been happening? – Describe the patterns of behavior
 - What happened after? – Describe the immediate consequences of the behavior
 - What are the facts? – Present data
 - What do you think? – Brainstorm hypotheses and why you feel as you do
 - What do they think? – Ask the student and parents for their input
 - What part does the disability play? – Keep in mind the relevance of any disabilities

What do we want from the data we collect? [See section 3 for further discussion]

- Information about the environment in which the behavior occurs
- Meaningful reinforcers or consequences related to the behavior
- Whether the deficit is a skill deficit or a performance deficit [see next question below]
- Information to answer the following questions³:
 - When is the student most likely to engage in the problem behavior?
 - What specific events or factors appear to be contributing to the student's problem behavior?
 - What function(s) does the problem behavior serve for the student?
 - What might the student be communicating through the problem behavior?
 - When is the student most successful, and therefore less likely to engage in the problem behavior?

² Kathleen Fad, James Patton, and Edward Polloway. BEHAVIORAL INTERVENTION PLANNING: COMPLETING A FUNCTIONAL BEHAVIORAL ASSESSMENT AND DEVELOPING A BEHAVIORAL INTERVENTION PLAN (Pro-Ed, 1998, pg. 9).

³ NASDE, Pg. 1

- What other factors might be contributing to the student's problem behavior?

What are skill deficits and performance deficits?

- Skill deficit - one the student cannot do; the student lacks the necessary information or component skills. The intervention? Teach the skill(s).

Ask: Does the student understand the behavioral expectations for the situation?
Does the student realize that he or she is engaging in unacceptable behavior, or has that behavior simply become a "habit"?
Is it within the student's power to control the behavior, or does he or she need support?
Does the student have the skills necessary to perform expected, new behaviors?

- Performance deficit – one the student is not motivated to do; has performed the skill previously or does it in some settings but doesn't generalize to other settings. The intervention? Provide opportunities for the student to perform; reinforce the desired behavior while not reinforcing the undesired behavior.

Ask: Is it possible that the student is uncertain about the appropriateness of the behavior (e.g., it is appropriate to clap loudly and yell during sporting events, yet these behaviors are often inappropriate when playing academic games in the classroom)?
Does the student find any value in engaging in appropriate behavior?
Is the behavior problem associated with certain social or environmental conditions?
Is the student attempting to avoid a "low-interest" or demanding task?
What current rules, routines, or expectations does the student consider irrelevant?

What if the BIP doesn't work? [See pg. 24-25 for further discussion]

- You may still understand the situation better than before.
- Go back and double-check your hypothesis – maybe it was inaccurate
- Make sure you don't give up too soon – it can take 4 to 8 weeks for a reasonable trial period
- Maybe the replacement behavior doesn't meet the student's need
- Are your expectations realistic?
- Do you have intervention integrity and treatment fidelity? In other words, was the plan appropriately implemented? Was there consistency across settings and people? Was the reinforcement schedule followed? Was the plan given a fair shot?
- There may be other events that hindered progress, such as illness of the student or teacher, family emergencies
- There may be more powerful issues for the student such as chemical dependency, abuse, depression

What is the relationship between an FBA and a manifestation determination?

- An FBA provides information concerning effective strategies for addressing the behavior(s)
- Manifestation determination provides information concerning whether the student's disability impaired his/her understanding of the consequences of the behavior, and his/her ability to control the behavior
- Manifestation determination also addresses the appropriateness of the student's current IEP and placement

What are the main components of an FBA?

- Sources of information include review of records, interviews, observations, standardized and informal assessments
- Generally an FBA includes:
 - What is the problem? – Identify and define the behavior(s) of concern
 - Why does the problem exist? – Formulate a preliminary hypothesis; gather data to test that hypothesis
 - What should be done to address the problem? – Develop a BIP and implement it
 - Did the intervention work and what's next? – Monitor and evaluate progress

Section 1 has provided a brief overview of the functional behavioral assessment process, including the answers to some frequently asked questions. The next section will cover FBA data collection techniques, including interviews and observations, in more detail.

SECTION 2: DATA COLLECTION

The functional behavioral assessment is a foundation for positive behavioral support. Behavior can serve any number of functions for a student. The goal is to identify the specific behavior(s) of concern and then to carefully examine that behavior in light of the contextual variables that accompany the behaviors and/or maintain its performance. Some common functions of student behavior include:

- Attention – this may include both positive and negative attention, and the student may be seeking attention from peers and/or adults
- Escape or avoidance – the student wants to avoid a particular activity, such as a class, an interaction with a particular person or group, or an unpleasant situation
- Justice or revenge – the student wants to get back at an individual or group for a real or an imagined slight; the student wants to “even a score”, sometimes on behalf of a friend or family member
- Acceptance and affiliation – belonging or gaining acceptance to a group may be a motivation for misbehavior; the student may be seeking to impress members of a peer group he/she hopes to join
- Power or control – the student wants to dominate, to be in charge, to control his/her environments, to refuse to follow rules or directions, to refuse to participate in certain activities
- Expression of self – the student is seeking to announce his/her independence and/or individuality, to express his/her vision of self
- Access to tangible rewards or personal gratification – the student behaves in a manner to get tangible reinforcement (such as items, money, privileges); the student is seeking to feel good or get immediate feedback or reward

What must we be aware of when identifying the functions of behavior?

- Same behavior may serve more than one function (for example: talk-outs = attention, escape & control)
- Different difficult behaviors will serve the same or a similar function (for example: attention = talk-outs, tantrums, refusal, throwing crumpled up papers)
- Information about when, where, and why challenging behaviors occur can assist in building effective and efficient behavioral supports. It is important to know what the student gets out of particular behaviors so that meaningful consequences can be identified. This includes selecting replacement behaviors that are more acceptable to others and will serve the same function for the student.

What is the first step in conducting a functional behavioral assessment?

- The first step is to identify and define the behavior(s) of concern. The description of the behavior should be clear and **observable** so that everyone involved with the student will understand. The IEP team responsible for the FBA should agree on the definition of the behavior(s).
- It is also important to consider the critical dimensions of behavior:
 - Frequency – how often the behavior occurs
 - Topography – the description of the behavior; what it looks like (in seat, on task)
 - Duration – how long the behavior lasts
 - Latency – the amount of time that elapses between “A” and “B”; for example, the amount of time between a teacher giving a direction and the student complying with that direction
 - Magnitude – force or power of the behavior (5 minute tantrum vs. a 30 minute tantrum; mumbling vs. talking loudly)
 - Locus – where the behavior occurs (gym class vs. English class; structured time vs. unstructured time)
- Descriptions of behavior should be clear, observable and consistent among those involved with the student so that interventions result in positive behavior change. By identifying these critical dimensions, the operational definition of the student’s behavior is more precise so that everyone views it in the same way.

Then what?

- Formulate a preliminary hypothesis regarding why the behavior occurs – hypothesize on the function the behavior serves for the student so that data can be gathered to test the hypothesis

How do we begin data collection?

- Multiple sources and methods are needed, since a single source of information generally does not produce sufficiently accurate information
- Triangulate the data that is collected - have multiple sources or confirmations of information (example: an interview does not stand alone, but if the same conclusions are supported by direct observation and a second interview source, the information is then more reliable)
- Review existing records and other information to determine whether additional data must be gathered
- Consider both indirect and direct methods (*see questions below*)
- Is it a skill deficit or a performance deficit? (*see pg.7*)

What is meant by indirect assessment?

- Gathering information by talking to, or interviewing, those individuals who know the student best; secondhand information in that the assessor is collecting information that is filtered through the interviewees, including the student, or is contained in written records - **this is important to remember when interpreting interview data.**

What are examples of indirect methods / information that should be considered?

- Record review (attendance, cumulative file, health, discipline, report cards, previous evaluations and interventions)
- Permanent products (work samples, test papers, projects)
- Interviews

What is the most common method of indirect assessment?

- Interviewing the student, teachers and other school staff, parents, and others who know the student well

What are the outcomes of a functional assessment interview?

- Four main outcomes of a functional assessment interview are similar to the outcomes for the functional assessment process as a whole:
 - Description of behavior(s)
 - Description of the physical/environmental factors that influence the occurrence or nonoccurrence of the behavior(s)
 - Description of the outcomes or consequences of the behavior(s)
 - Hypothesis of the function of the behavior(s), including the relationship of the situation (antecedent), behavior, and consequence
- Opportunity to collect information about a range of other things that will be helpful in developing support programs for an individual, such as the person's communicative abilities or suggestions for effective reinforcers

Should the student in question be interviewed?

- Yes, if the student has the necessary communication skills

What types of information can the student provide?

- Favorite activities, subjects, interests, pastimes
- Own perception of situations and behaviors
- Relationships to peers & adults
- Complaints, concerns

- Insight into the student's motivation to change
- To the extent that these statements are accurate and consistent, personally provided information supplements information obtained from teachers, parents, and/or direct observation
- Sample interview formats are included in this kit⁴

What are the outcomes of student-directed interview?

- Problematic times, settings, activities, people
- Predictors of problem behaviors
- Summary statements [*see pg. 17*]
- Ideas for the behavior intervention plan (BIP)

Which adults might be interviewed?

- Teachers
- Therapists
- Paraprofessionals
- Pupil services staff (counselor, school psychologist, school social worker)
- Support staff (clerical, food service, transportation, custodial)
- Agency personnel
- Parents and other family members
- Other caregivers

What types of information can parents provide?

- A description of the child, his/her behavior and the environment in which he/she lives
 - Eating habits (does the child eat breakfast, what kind of treats they like)
 - Exercise
 - Daily schedule
 - Leisure time activities
 - TV viewing habits
 - Bedtime routine and sleep habits
 - Discipline
 - Health problems, including medications

⁴ O'Neill, Horner, et al. FUNCTIONAL ASSESSMENT AND PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT FOR PROBLEM BEHAVIOR, 2d ed. (Brooks/Cole Publishing Co., 1997, pg.109)

Are there disadvantages to indirect methods?

- Yes. Interviews are subjective – based on people’s opinions and perceptions. It is important to verify indirect information through direct methods of assessment whenever possible

What is meant by direct assessment?

- Observing the student with the problem behavior in typical daily activities and routines
- Observations are only snapshots of the settings and behaviors; students may be aware they are being observed and may be on their best behavior or they may show-off for this new audience.
- Be sure to verify data - observations do not stand alone

What are some good practices when observing in classroom and other school settings?

- **Observe a student across settings and at a variety of different times.** Rather than observing for 2 hours during the morning, for example, it may be more useful to break that 2 hour block into 6 smaller blocks of 20 minutes each. Those observations could take place at different times of the day, different days of the week, and during different activities such as academic classes, recess or lunch, and so on. **It may be helpful to observe the student in settings where behavior is not a problem so that we can try to identify the features of that context that support success and appropriate responses.** Multiple observations also help give you a clearer picture of the behavior, rather than a one-time snapshot.
- **Try to keep your recording system as simple as possible** so that you can efficiently record information and you can decipher your notes later. It takes some practice to determine what method works for you, and to develop some shorthand codes such as “o” for ‘out-of-seat’ or “p” for ‘playing with an object without permission’. Obviously, if you try to write things out in longhand, you will miss a lot of the action.
- **Be sure to accurately define the behavior you’re observing.** Be clear as to what “out of seat” means: does that mean the student must be completely out of the desk, or can the student be on his/her knees yet still “in” the chair? Try to be more precise than “aggressive behavior” by clarifying that it means hitting, kicking, or pinching. This also helps to determine what you will tally and what you will ignore. You are looking for specific, observable behaviors that either occur or do not occur.
- When observing a particular student, it is helpful to **collect data on a second student** of the same sex so that you can more objectively compare the incidents of misbehavior. If several students are wandering around the classroom, there may be a more general classroom management problem. If you know what the average out-of-seat time is for other students, you can compare the student in question to see if it really is a significant concern.

- If you are observing in someone else's classroom, **get some background information** from that person prior to your observation: what activities will be going on? how does the student typically behave during those times? Encourage the teacher to conduct business as usual, including consequences for inappropriate behaviors.
- **Gather general information about the classroom:** what is the physical set-up? are students squeezed together or do they have elbow room? how many students are there? what about natural distractions such as noisy heaters, windows overlooking a busy street, or hallway traffic? what is the teacher's teaching style? how does the teacher respond to misbehavior? how does the teacher reward or reinforce students? do students seem to know what they are expected to do, or do they have to be reminded? are teacher directions clear and understandable? are students passive learners, or are they actively involved in lessons? how many adults are there in the classroom? are students in and out for various activities? is there a lot of moving around the classroom or are students generally in their chairs?

How do we collect data?

- Methods may be determined by personal preference, the purpose of the observation, and the type of behavior being targeted
- In some instances, you may wish to use more than one method. For example, you might start with a narrative of the general classroom environment, the lesson or activity in progress, the teaching style, and so on (non-systematic). Then you might do a time-sample to focus in on particular behaviors (systematic).
- The more commonly used methods of collecting observational data are:
 - **Narrative recording** - this involves taking notes and simply writing down what occurs. It is not quantitative - there is no behavior count or number as a result. It is time consuming, but can also be useful in providing general descriptions.
 - **Frequency or event recording** - this is a count of how many times a specific behavior occurs during a given time period. This is generally the easiest and most accurate method of data collection. It works best with behaviors that are **discrete** (have a clear start and stop, take about the same amount of time whenever they occur, can be distinguished from another event), rather than **continuous** (not as easy to tell when it stops or starts). For instance, each time the student raises his/her hand, that event is tallied.
 - **Interval recording** - divide the observation time (generally less than 1 hour) into equal intervals (probably no more than 30 seconds each), and then record whether or not the behavior occurs during each interval. You may wish to use simple "+" and "-" recording, and you will need a timing device, usually a watch with a second hand. It is not an exact count of the number of times a behavior occurs, since it might happen twice during the interval, but you are only tallying the "+".
 - **Time-sampling** - this is similar to interval recording with 2 exceptions: the intervals are either random or unequal in this method, and the observer looks

only momentarily. It is therefore possible to miss a behavior because the interval is longer and you looked at the student just after the behavior occurred. The advantage of this method is that you can do other things along with the data collection, since you only need to glance at the student occasionally. Keep in mind that the longer the interval, the less accurate the data.

- **Duration recording** - how long a particular behavior lasts. An example would be a temper tantrum, where you may wish to know not only whether it happened, but also how long it went on. It may be more useful to know that a student was out of his/her seat for 20 minutes at a time, rather than just knowing that the behavior occurred.
- **Latency recording** documents the amount of time between behaviors. For instance, you might time the interval between the teacher giving a direction and the student complying with the request. Another example of latency recording would be to see how long the student remains in his/her seat before the next incident of wandering around the classroom.
- **Scatter plot** - over a week, recording occurrences of the behavior on a time grid (e.g. with the days of the week divided into 15 or 30 minute time intervals). The aim is to record when and where a behavior occurs, chart the information, and look for patterns. This information is generally used in determining when and where to collect data. An example of a scatter plot format is attached (Appendix A).
- **Antecedent–Behavior–Consequence** – narrative accounts of the environmental events that precede (antecedents) observable behavior, objective description of the behavior, and events that follow that behavior (consequences). (See Appendix B)

Are there any other issues pertaining to the environment that may surface?

- Function of the teacher behavior with regard to the student being observed - **an intervention may require a modification of the teacher's behavior**. Therefore, we must attempt to identify key behaviors and explore the function some of these behaviors might serve for both the student and the teacher. For example, a teacher might choose to ignore a serious behavior problem in a child in an attempt to avoid an escalation of the problem. In turn, the fact that the teacher ignores the child may allow the child to avoid an unpleasant task. Thus, both the teacher and the student are being negatively reinforced in the interaction.

Once the data is collected, where do we go next?

- Develop a positive behavior intervention plan, implement it and monitor the effects/results of the plan and make any adjustments/modifications that are needed. Section 3 includes information to assist in the development of positive behavioral intervention plans.

SECTION 3: DEVELOPING POSITIVE BEHAVIOR INTERVENTION PLANS

Section 2 outlined typical functional behavioral assessment data collection procedures and techniques. After collecting data on a student's behavior and formulating a tentative hypothesis of the function of the problem behavior, the IEP team should develop (or revise) the student's behavior intervention plan (BIP). The BIP should be incorporated into the student's IEP [see pg. 23]. The purpose of the functional behavioral assessment is to gain a clear picture of what is maintaining the problem behavior so that interventions can be more effective and efficient. One of the significant changes in the 1997 Amendments to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) was the requirement that students with disabilities who have significant misbehavior must have an IEP that addresses that behavior. Specifically, this requirement which applies to all students in special education regardless of their disability label, ensures that the disciplinary plan must be based on a functional behavioral assessment and should include **proactive positive behavioral interventions and supports**.

What is positive behavioral support or intervention?

- All too often, school personnel attempt to eliminate problem behavior by punishment without investigating why the behavior occurred. Positive behavioral support, which is based on a functional behavioral assessment, attempts to **understand the purpose of a problem behavior** so that the student can be assisted in replacing the problem behavior with new and more appropriate behaviors that achieve the same purpose.
- There are three reasons why school personnel should strongly consider positive behavioral supports and interventions:
 - Simply suppressing a problem behavior does not have long-term effects and often leads to increased counter-aggressive behaviors from students
 - Once school personnel know why a student's behavior occurs, they can respond more appropriately by teaching the student a more appropriate way of responding. This serves the long-term interests of both student and teacher.
 - Traditional punishment focuses on "fixing the student", whereas the focus of positive behavioral support is shifted to fixing student skill deficiencies, classroom settings, instructional delivery, and/or curricular adaptations.

What are the major components of a comprehensive behavior intervention plan?

- A good behavior support/intervention plan should include the following key features:
 - **An operational definition of the problem behaviors** - Clear enough so that a person reading the plan can identify instances and non-instances of each problem behavior

- **Summary statements resulting from a functional behavioral assessment**

- T Setting events

- T Antecedents to the problem behavior

- T The problem behavior

- T Maintaining consequences for the problem behavior

- T Examples of summary statements

- (1) When Marlene has experienced negative peer social interactions (setting event) during lectures (antecedent), she will talk out (problem behavior) to try to gain peer attention (maintaining consequence).

- (2) When there are no structured activities (antecedent), Philip's rocking and flipping behaviors (problem behaviors) are maintained by access to staff attention (maintaining consequence). In this summary statement there was no identified setting event.

- **Expected outcomes and goals**

- T Focus on teaching new skills

- T Include support services that the student may need to function more appropriately and independently

- **A general approach for making problem behaviors irrelevant, inefficient, and ineffective**

- T Describe the intervention procedures developed as a result of the FBA

- T Overall intervention goal = identifying a set of procedures that make the problem behaviors irrelevant, inefficient, and ineffective [*see pg.18-19 for further discussion*]

- T Intervention strategies will consist of

- 1. Setting event strategies

- 2. Immediate predictor strategies

- 3. Teaching strategies

- 4. Consequence strategies

- T Examples of each of the 4 strategies above are found on pg. 20

- **Specific descriptions of typical routines and most difficult problem situations** - describe in detail how to respond when the problem behavior occurs

- **A monitoring and evaluation plan**

- T Ongoing

- T Systematically reviewed regularly

- T Reviewed more often than the annual IEP review

- T Two key questions

- 1. is the plan having a positive impact on the problem behavior of the student?

2. is the plan having a positive impact on the behavior of teachers, family members, and others that interact with the student?

- **Identify the case manager** who will be responsible for the overall management of the behavior intervention plan and **specify the individuals** who are responsible for specific interventions described in the plan

*What are some questions to address in developing the behavior intervention plan?*⁵

- What is the definition of the problem behavior?
- To what extent is this behavior a priority for behavior change and why?
- Has a functional behavioral assessment been conducted?
- What are the results of the FBA – what is the function of the behavior?
- What appropriate alternative behavior matching the function of the problem behavior could be taught as a replacement?
- Has the source of reinforcement for the undesirable behavior been identified?
- What reinforcers are effective with this student?
- How will progress be measured?
- Who will be involved in teaching the new behavior?
- How has generalization been addressed?
- What roles will team members assume in the behavior intervention plan?

What are some important considerations in developing behavior intervention plans?

- Specifically describe the changes expected in the behavior of school personnel, family members or other individuals with responsibility for improving the independent functioning of the student with the problem behavior
- Remember that it is the change in the behavior of the teacher, parent or other responsible individual that will result in the change in the behavior of the student with the problem behavior
- BIP goals and procedures should directly flow from the FBA results. For example, if the summary behavioral assessment statement revealed that problem behaviors were maintained by access to attention, the intervention plan should avoid contingent delivery of attention, even negative attention (e.g., a verbal reprimand), following the problem behavior. Another example involves a functional behavioral assessment that concluded problem behaviors were maintained by escape from tasks. The behavior intervention plan should avoid using procedures such as time-out, which removes the student with the problem behavior from the school task at hand.
- BIPs must be technically sound; the goal of the plan should focus on making the problem behaviors **irrelevant, inefficient, and ineffective**
 - **Irrelevant** - typically involves structural changes such as altering the physical setting, changing the curriculum, or increasing predictability and choice options available to the student. For example, if Jason finds seatwork very

⁵ Mitchell Yell and Erik Drasgow. Handout, Summer 1998.

difficult and frustrating for him because of his inability to do the problems, a change in the curriculum may be necessary such as reducing the complexity of the problems or reducing the amount of work. In Jason's situation, his escape motivated problem behaviors become irrelevant because the schoolwork has been modified to remove the frustration factor.

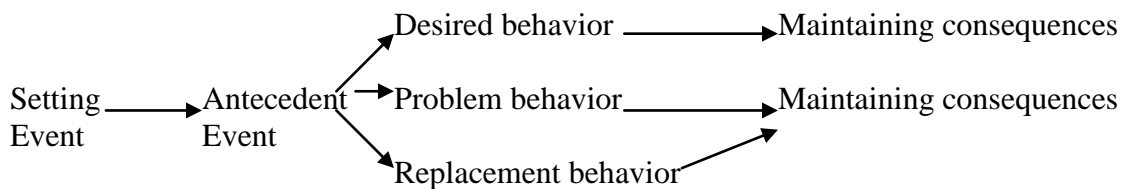
- **Inefficient** - efficiency of a behavior refers to the amount of effort required to perform a particular behavior, the number of times a person must perform the behavior before receiving reinforcement, and the time delay between the problem behavior and reinforcement. For example, a student in a classroom who makes odd noises that are reinforced by peer attention and laughter performs a very efficient behavior. The odd noises are easy to perform, the peer attention is bestowed after the first odd sound, and the peer laughter occurs immediately after the odd sound. An effective behavior intervention plan should define an alternative, socially appropriate, and more efficient way for the student to achieve the same reinforcement. In the previous example, the teacher should attempt to provide the student making the odd noises with more appropriate methods of securing both teacher and student attention and approval. This may involve casting the student in leadership roles in the class or during small group work or calling on the student more frequently for oral responses during class discussions.
 - **Ineffective** - make problem behaviors ineffective ways of obtaining reinforcement. This often involves extinction - systematically withholding or preventing access to a reinforcing outcome that was previously delivered. Returning to the above example of the student making the odd classroom noises, the teacher could attempt to extinguish the problem behavior and, thus, make that behavior ineffective by soliciting the cooperation of the other students in ignoring the student's odd noises.
- BIP must be feasible
 - School personnel and/or family members must be willing and able to implement the intervention procedures
 - If a behavior intervention plan is too costly or requires an inordinate amount of time and effort to implement, there may be resistance to implementing the plan as developed
 - Feasible behavior intervention plans have the following features⁶
 1. the intervention procedures fit the natural routines of the setting;
 2. the intervention goals and procedures are consistent with the values of the individuals in the setting;
 3. the plan must be efficient in terms of time, money, and resources;
 4. the intervention procedures must be matched to the skills of the individuals who will carry out the plan; and

⁶ O'Neill, Horner, et al.

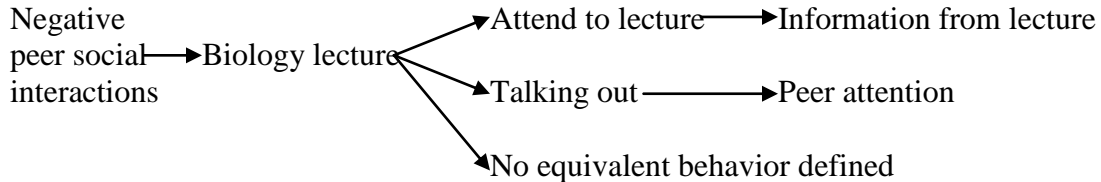
5. the plan must produce reinforcing short-term results (i.e., the plan implementers need to see some first-hand success as a result of their efforts).

How can the behavior intervention plan be systematically linked to the functional behavioral assessment results?

- A **competing behavior model** is a method of systematically linking the behavior intervention plan to the results of the FBA
 - Goal is to systematically analyze all possible environmental factors that either induce, maintain, or escalate problem behaviors
 - A competing behavior model⁷ consists of the following:



- Using the summary statement for “Marlene” [see pg.17], a competing behavior model would look like this:



- A competing behavior model assists in decision making by
 - T helping to identify intervention strategies that make the problem behavior irrelevant, ineffective, and inefficient
 - T categorizing positive interventions as
 1. setting event strategies – what sets the stage for problems (student didn’t have breakfast, not enough sleep, unstructured time)
 2. predictor strategies – more immediate antecedents (long periods of sitting still, math test student is unprepared for)
 3. teaching strategies – replacement behaviors, social skills, how and when to use those skills
 4. consequence strategies – student gets what he/she wants at least as easily; student doesn’t get reinforced for problem behaviors

T See O’Neill, Horner, et al. pg. 77-84 for further examples

⁷ O’Neill, Horner, et al. Pg. 69-84
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- See Appendices C & D for worksheet samples
- Recommendations for developing intervention procedures⁸
 - Bring together all of the individuals who will have responsibility for implementing the BIP
 - Diagram the competing behavior model and review the logic and structure of the model
 - Begin with more distant setting events and identify any changes that could make these events less likely or less influential
 - Focus next on changes in immediate antecedent events
 - List strategies for teaching and promoting the desired/alternative behavior
 - Examine how consequences should be changed to make the positive, competing behavior more likely

What are positive interventions, strategies and supports?

- In general, positive approaches are developmentally, chronologically, cognitively, and functionally appropriate for the student and focus on two areas:
 - Modify the environment - the goal is to prevent the behavior from occurring by adjusting the antecedents of the behavior, the consequences, or both
 - T Instructional strategies
 - T Curriculum and materials
 - T Classroom seating, arrangement, traffic patterns
 - T Testing and evaluation
 - T Increased opportunities for students to make choices
 - T Predictable classroom routines
 - T Foreshadowing change
 - T Cueing students
 - T Consistent expectations and consequences
 - Address behavior programmatically by teaching replacement behaviors and skills
 - T Alternative behaviors that serve the same function for the student
 - T Complementary skills (such as reading comprehension if the student is avoiding classes where reading is stressed)
 - T Self-regulatory or self-control skills; generalization; intrinsic motivation and rewards

⁸ O'Neill, Horner, et al. Pg. 73-76

- It is important to link the interventions with the function the behavior serves for the student. The following chart provides examples:

<u>Function of behavior</u>	<u>Possible interventions</u>
Attention seeking	Planned ignoring Time-out Teach appropriate attention seeking Increase schedule of social reinforcement for appropriate behaviors Social skills training
Escape/avoidance	Teach to request assistance Teach to request a “break” Alter or reduce demands & gradually introduce demands Social skills training
Control	Compliance training Choice making Response cost Reward alternative behaviors Social skills training
Communication	Functional communication training Reduce reinforcement for problem behavior
Access to tangible reinforcers	Teach appropriate request behaviors Time out from reinforcers for problem behaviors Schedule time with reinforcers Use time with tangible reinforcers to increase appropriate behaviors Social skills training

What are some examples of behavior intervention plan formats?

- Several examples are included in the appendices at the end of this study guide, and there are others in the materials included in this kit.

SECTION 4: RELATING FUNCTIONAL BEHAVIORAL ASSESSMENT TO IEPs

How does functional behavioral assessment fit into an IEP?

- The IEP is the centerpiece of instructional programming for a student with a disability. If a student has behavioral needs, the IEP must contain a plan to address that behavior, regardless of the student's disability label. The emphasis in IDEA '97 is on **positive interventions, strategies, and supports to address the behavior**. If the student's IEP contains only negative consequences and punishments, the IEP is most likely not appropriate for meeting the child's needs. If it becomes necessary for the IEP team to conduct a manifestation determination, that team must address the appropriateness of the student's current IEP and placement. If behavior has not been proactively addressed, the team will be hard pressed to say that the IEP was appropriate.
- There are several ways in which behavior may be incorporated into an IEP:
 - Information from a functional behavioral assessment may be included in the **present level of educational performance (PLOP)**. Use that data to describe the student's current level of functioning, including situations or settings in which the student is most or least appropriate, and consequences that may positively or negatively influence the behavior
 - Behavior may be addressed in an IEP in any or all of the following ways:
 - T **Special factors** – if the student's behavior interferes with his/her learning or that of others, the IEP team must consider appropriate positive interventions, strategies, and supports.
 - T **Annual goals and short-term objectives/benchmarks** – the “meat” of the IEP is found in the goals, and instructional approaches could be incorporated into the goals and objectives (i.e., replacement behaviors, social skills)
 - T **Attached behavior intervention plans** – sometimes it is awkward to try to fit an intervention plan into a goal/objective/benchmark format, and the IEP team may develop a plan and then attach it to the IEP. Anything attached to the IEP becomes part of the IEP. If it is necessary to have a crisis intervention plan for the student, be sure to also include the positive interventions, strategies and supports to balance the plan.

How do we monitor progress?

- Once a behavior plan has been developed and incorporated in the student's IEP, the next step is to evaluate the effectiveness of the plan. Consider the following⁹:
 - What type of information is needed to evaluate [the plan]?

⁹ NASDSE, pg. 14-15

- T What does the IEP say? Is the problem behavior disappearing? Is the student using the replacement/alternative behaviors? Are there differences between times, settings, people, etc.?
- T What additional outcomes are we seeing (for example, improved grades, increased appropriate participation in classes or activities and with peers, better self-control)?
- How will the IEP team collect this information?
 - T This will depend on what data is to be collected, and you may wish to review the section on data collection in this study guide and the reference materials in the kit for some suggestions
 - T The IEP team should also consider who will gather the data, how the data is to be summarized and reported, the timelines for data collection, and how will the team determine when they need to meet
- How will the IEP team use the information to make decisions?
 - T For day-to-day refinements for the student - to assist with fine-tuning the student's program
 - T To evaluate IEP progress and provide data about needed revisions
 - T When the student is being re-evaluated
- How will the IEP team communicate those decisions, to whom, and in what time frame?
 - T Parents of students with disabilities must be informed about their child's progress toward annual goals at least as often as parents of non-disabled children are informed about their child's progress
 - T The IEP document must include procedures for measuring the student's progress toward annual goals
 - T School staff who work with the student on a regular basis should be updated regarding any modifications or changes
 - T The BIP should be reviewed as needed, and more often than annually

How can we judge whether the behavioral intervention plan (BIP) is working or not?

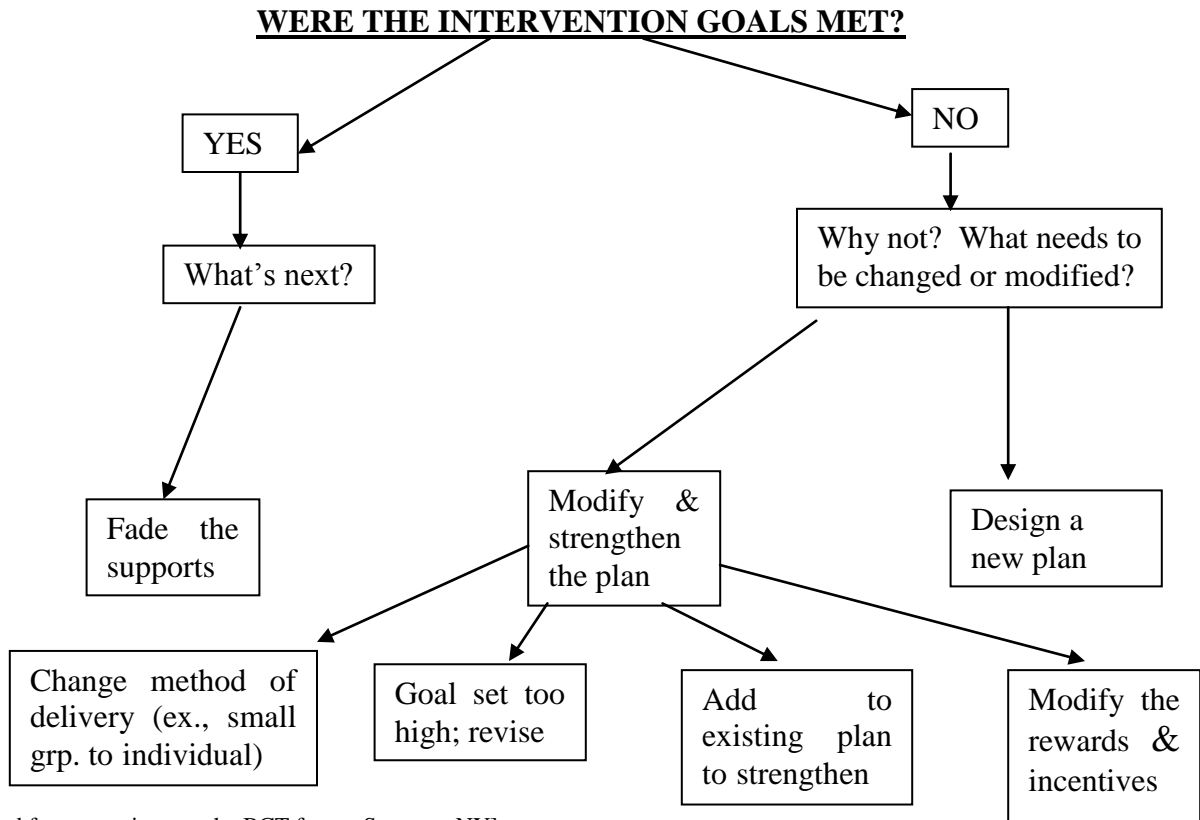
- Look at what your data tells you
 - Is the problem behavior decreasing (in frequency, intensity)?
 - Is the student using the replacement behavior regularly?
 - Has the student generalized the use of this new behavior to various settings?
 - Are there some positive fallout effects (better grades, improved self-esteem, less stress)?

- Are people satisfied with the plan (student, parents, regular education and special education staff, administrators)?

What if the behavioral intervention plan is not working?

- There may be many reasons why the plan is not working - why there have been little or no positive gains. It may be necessary to try again or try harder.
- For example:
 - The hypothesis may be inaccurate – does it need to be modified or revised?
 - The plan may have been implemented incorrectly or inconsistently – did everyone involved understand the processes and procedures? Did they adhere to schedules, consequences, and so on? Was there consistency?
 - Other events may have hindered progress – was the student frequently absent? Were there substitute teachers for significant amounts of time? Were there significant changes in the student’s life such as parents divorcing or a death?
 - The replacement behavior didn’t meet the student’s need – it takes too much time or effort, the “payoff” isn’t immediate enough, the consequences aren’t meaningful
 - Not enough time has passed – it may take a minimum of 4-8 weeks to see change in behavior; when a new intervention is introduced, the behavior may actually increase before decreasing
 - Expectations are unrealistic – the interventions are inappropriate for the student; consistency isn’t possible given all of the settings, people, and so on that are involved

- The following chart may help guide your decision-making



- Even if major changes and revisions are needed, you will have more information about the student and his/her behavior than you had previously. You will be able to narrow the list of intervention options and be that much closer to finding an effective intervention.
- After conducting a functional behavioral assessment and implementing a behavioral intervention plan in good faith, there may be a need to review the student's IEP and placement and modify or consider a different environment. A more restrictive placement may be needed for a small number of students, and the IEP team should have supporting data to document the need for such a placement. Services provided in another environment, however, must continue to address the behavior.

*When designing behavioral support plans, what should we consider in evaluating those plans?*¹⁰

- **Antecedent and Setting-Event Modifications**
 - Does the plan include antecedent and setting-event modifications to prevent problem behavior from occurring?
 - Does the plan include modifications to make desired behaviors more likely?

¹⁰ Handout by T. Knoster developed for OSEP Institute on Discipline, 9/98

- **Teaching Alternative Skills**
 - Did your team consider all three approaches to alternative-skill training (e.g., replacement skills, general skills, coping and tolerance skills)?
 - Do replacement skills serve the same function as the problem behavior?
 - Do general skills help the individual prevent problem situations from occurring?
 - If the plan targets multiple alternative skills, are the ones that produce the most immediate effect for the person taught first?
- **Consequence Interventions**
 - Does the plan include consequence strategies for (a) strengthening alternative skills, (b) reducing the payoff for problem behavior, and (c) crisis management if necessary?
 - Do consequences for alternative skills produce outcomes that are more effective or efficient than the problem behavior?
 - Are desired outcomes for the problem behavior reduced or eliminated?
 - Does the crisis management plan address the three phases of a crisis?
 - 1. Escalation
 - 2. Eruption
 - 3. De-escalation
- **Lifestyle Interventions**
 - Does the plan include supports that will improve the individual's quality of life?
 - Does the plan include long-term adaptations that will (a) help the individual maintain new skills, and (b) prevent problem behaviors from occurring?
- **Overall**
 - Are the intervention strategies logically linked to the specific and global hypotheses?
 - Does the plan reflect individual and family preferences?
 - Are all the intervention strategies (1) age-appropriate, and (2) acceptable for other people without disabilities?
 - Can the plan be carried out in everyday settings without stigmatizing the individual?

SECTION 5: CAUTIONS AND CONCERNS

This section contains cautions regarding the FBA/BIP process, and some commonly expressed concerns. Some of these statements have appeared earlier in this study guide, but are worth emphasizing again.

- The responsibility of doing a functional behavioral assessment should not be given to one person (i.e. school psychologist or ED teacher)
- All members of the IEP team addressing the behavioral needs of the student in question need to understand the process and their role in a functional behavioral assessment
- Districts may develop a policy that a functional behavioral assessment must be done on every child with a disability, not only for those students whose behavior is interfering with their learning
- This is not just an issue for students identified as having an Emotional Disturbance (ED), but includes any child with a disability whose behavior is interfering with his/her learning or that of others
- The process of functional behavioral assessment must be part of an integrated set of practices leading to a more complete and appropriate IEP being developed
- IEP teams need to make sure that they focus in on the positive and proactive aspects of behavior change/interventions and not strictly on the negative/punitive techniques and/or interventions
- Teams need to know that this process will not work with every student, but that the number of students who may require the most self contained environment is small
- This process is not a one-time event, but should be on going if positive change in behavior is to occur
- You don't have to do the same thing for every student that needs a functional behavior assessment, you may already have the information that is needed. Don't do more than is necessary in each individual situation
- Parents are an important member of the team, don't forget to involve them and incorporate their input into the assessment
- There is a legal requirement regarding when a functional behavioral assessment must be completed, but it is good practice to implement when working with any student that is experiencing behavior difficulties

- During a manifestation determination process, two of the questions that are asked are "Is the student's IEP appropriate? and Is the student's placement appropriate?" Having a functional behavioral assessment and appropriate monitoring data provides the team with ongoing information to support their answers to these questions

Finally, even though this information is being developed to address behavioral issues of students with disabilities, the process and methods can be used by pre-referral or building assistance teams with students without disabilities as a pro-active approach and intervention.