

# ALTERNATIVE EDUCATION

## Behavior Intervention and Support Module: Functional Behavioral Analysis

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### ~ Module 3, Session 4 ~ Lecture Notes

#### **Introduction**

Undesirable behavior does not “drop out of the sky”! There usually is a clear and very direct relationship between the student’s behavior and his/her home, school, and community environment. A functional analysis is the process for looking at the relationship between a behavior and the environment. To do so, one must first separate the form of the behavior from its function.

#### **The Form of Student Behavior:**

The form of behavior emanates from the word performance or what the behavior looks like. Herein lies the rub! Teachers usually respond to the form of behavior such as talking back, foul language, or obscene gestures and then apply a negative consequence, instead of looking for the function—the WHY of the behavior?? If teachers begin to think about the function of behavior, they can begin to determine the antecedents that might cause disruptive behavior, analyze the behavior and then, if needed, apply an appropriate consequence. Looking for the WHY does not mean that students can get away with dangerous and threatening behavior. It does not mean that teachers are suddenly counselors and therapists. It does mean that teachers no longer need to be trapped in the “fight or flee” cycle because they can begin to see that students are trying to get or avoid something with their undesirable behavior.

The form of behavior can be influenced by culture, subculture, experience, disability or group affiliation. Regardless of the form, analyze the function!

#### **The Function of Student Behavior**

Teachers must first begin to ask what is the function of the behavior. That is, what is the student trying to “get/obtain” or “protest/escape/avoid” from his/her behavior and WHY? Rudolf Dreikur’s research indicated that students were trying to get attention, power, and revenge or were trying to avoid failure through their misbehavior. Students also might use protest or escape behavior to get their needs met. For instance, students might protest

the relevance of instructional material or lack of choice, or escape a rather difficult English lesson by talking to a neighbor or starting an altercation. Escape behavior has an element of volition (getting out of something) and is often associated with an event such as not wanting to do an assignment in class. It is not usually part of a well-established avoidance pattern of behavior.

Though an FBA (functional behavioral analysis) can be quite elaborate and time consuming it can also be an invaluable tool to support student emotional and social growth. Educators can begin to ask rudimentary questions such as how is the behavior performed (topography), how often does it occur (frequency), how long does it last (duration) and what is the magnitude, i.e., does it cause harm (intensity) which disrupts reactive “fight or flee” responses. The following elements constitute a basic FBA:

- Describe the undesired behavior (form, frequency, duration, and intensity).
- Predict the times and situations when the undesired behavior will and will not occur.
- Define the functions that the undesirable behaviors produce for the student.
- Interview the student and those individuals who know the student best to determine the goal of the misbehavior.
- Do a direct observation over an extended period of time.
- Try to systematically manipulate the misbehavior i.e., “you were off task in math ten times today let’s see if we can get it down to five times tomorrow.”
- Try and replace the behavior with a behavior that is more appropriate.
- Begin a behavior support plan.