Turning Maladaptive Behaviors into Adaptive Behaviors

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Overview of topics covered
- Defining Behavior/Behavior management
- Antecedent Based Interventions
- The Functions of Behavior
- Assessment Tools
- Reinforcement and Punishment
- Putting together a plan

What is Behavior Management?
- Has to do with how parents/caretakers/teacher’s behavior can affect their child/student's behavior.
- Involves using a variety of strategies to decrease inappropriate behaviors, as well as increase appropriate behaviors.

What is behavior?
- Anything an individual does!
- Some examples...
- Talking
- Running
- Crying
- Eating
- Writing
- Walking

More about behavior...
- Behavior is usually learned.
- Behavior serves some function for the individual.
- The individual's behavior is in some way reinforced by engaging in the behavior.
- Behavior can be changed.
- Changing behavior is not something that always happens quickly. The longer the behavior has been occurring and the more the behavior has been reinforced, the more difficult it can be to decrease.

Why Antecedent Based Interventions
- Alters events prior to the occurrence of problem behavior
- Relatively un-intrusive interventions
- Relatively easy to implement correctly
- Require less vigilance from parent or staff because they are not contingent on the occurrence of the behavior
- Can decrease problem behavior and set the occasion for appropriate behavior to occur
Common ABI strategies

- Arranging the environment
- Changing the schedule/routine
- Using highly preferred activities/items to increase interest level
- Offering choices
- Altering the manner in which instruction is provided

Environmental Manipulations

- The goal of this ABI strategy is to arrange the environment so that specific triggers are no longer present
- For example, a child may engage in a disruptive behavior when he receives instructions in close proximity to his siblings.
- The antecedent in this example is the child being close to siblings when given instructions.
- To reduce the interfering behavior, the parent would provide instructions that may be difficult to complete in an environment where the child is not receiving additional attention from siblings.
- By changing the conditions, the parent removes the stimulus that was prompting the child to engage in the interfering behavior.

Common Environmental Manipulations

- Using visuals to label materials and schedules to assist in following directions
- Arranging the setting where a specific activity is going to occur (e.g., having the child sit facing away from the windows if the windows are distracting during meal time)
- Keeping toys in storage bins (labeled or by color)

Transitions

- Some children may engage in behaviors during transitions from one activity to the next because they do not know what is expected of them.
- The antecedent stimulus that causes the interfering behavior often is the transition itself. For example, a child might begin engaging in a behavior as soon as the transition begins.
- The goal is to change the transitions themselves so that they no longer prompt children to engage in the problematic behaviors.

Transition Strategies

- Balance activities across the day (e.g., quiet/noisy, active/passive, large group/small group, adult-directed/child-directed);
- Minimize the number of transitions when possible
- Implement the schedule consistently
- Alert the child about upcoming transitions (e.g., use a timer, countdown)
- Structure transitions so that children do not spend a significant amount of time waiting with nothing to do (Grisham-Brown et al., 2005) before the transition

Predictable Schedules

- A predictable schedule is one of the most effective ways to prevent interfering behaviors from occurring in the first place (Grisham-Brown et al., 2005)
- Although a predictable schedule/routine is highly effective, many children still need additional supports such as a visual schedule or transition objects.
- The combination of a predictable schedule and the use of visual supports changes the conditions within the environment so that specific factors (e.g., too much verbal interaction, unpredictable schedule) no longer prompt the child to engage in interfering behaviors.
Examples of Visual Supports

- Visual Schedules
- Choice Boards
- Behavior Charts
- Social Stories
- Rule Reminder Cards
- Self Monitoring Supports
- Textual Supports

Visual Schedules

- Breaks the child's day or individual task into several steps represented by pictures or words
- Be aware that even smaller steps (such as turning on the water during tooth brushing) may need to be included
- Represent each activity so the child knows what is expected
- Indicate when activities are completed (e.g., finished pockets or strips)

Offering Choices

- Offering choices is a highly effective strategy because it gives the child control of the situation and offers motivation to participate.
- Choice making is particularly important when a child may refuses to engage in an activity

Choice Boards

- The primary purpose of a choice board is to present a visual display of options.
- It is a strategy that may aid or support the comprehension of an auditory message and choice situation by bypassing the rapid disappearance of the spoken message regarding choices.
- Under most circumstances, if you say, "Do you want the puzzle or the book?" the message is over in less than a few seconds.
- The visual display of choices can be reviewed indefinitely and allow the child to see all of the possibilities
Behavior Charts

- Behavior charts can be a way to monitor more than one behavior at a time.
- They identify target behaviors.
- They may help to ensure that the child is behaving appropriately, but also serve as a reminder to the adult to reward the child for behaving appropriately.

Using Behavior Charts

- A few rules of thumb when creating behavior charts:
  - Spell out tasks/behaviors students can earn rewards for doing.
  - Be as concrete as possible.
  - Include visuals if the child benefits from these.

Using Behavior Charts

- Emphasize positive behaviors (more “to dos” than “not to dos”).
- Determine how many points, stars, etc... are needed to earn the reward.
- Students can earn the reward weekly, daily, or even more often.
- Start out with a chart in which the student gets rewards the majority of the time.

Using Behavior Charts

- If child never receives a reward, you may see a decrease in appropriate behavior.
- Can gradually increase expectations, as you see the child consistently being successful.
- Continually rotate reinforcers to avoid the child being “bored” or satiated with the current choices.

Behavior Charts

Social Stories

- A social story describes a situation or concept in terms of relevant social cues, perspectives, and common responses in a specifically defined style and format.
- The goal is to share accurate social information in a patient and reassuring manner that is easily understood by the child.
Social Story Content

- **Descriptive Sentences**: these are accurate, opinion-and-assumption-free statements of fact ("when you see someone for the first time, you should greet them")
- **Perspective Sentences**: these are statements that refer to or describe an individual's thoughts, feelings, beliefs, or physical condition (Mom enjoys spending time with Andy)
- **Directive Sentences**: these sentences describe desired responses to social situations. (When Jamie says "hello" you can reply "hello" or "hi" in return)
- **Affirmative Sentences**: these often express a common social expectation that the child will be learning ("I will try to greet my friends when I see them")

Rule Reminder Cards

- Visual representation of the expectations for behavior
- Can help children learn behavior that is acceptable and remind them of the consequences for not following the rules.

Rule Reminders

- Visual representation of the expectations for behavior
- Can help children learn behavior that is acceptable and remind them of the consequences for not following the rules.

Supports for Self-Monitoring

- Measure of Social Skills
- Helps track progress in social skills development
Incorporate Highly Preferred Items/Activities

- Using highly preferred activities/items is often effective when children engage in problematic or off-task behaviors during activities that they do not like.
- Often, children use interfering behaviors during non-preferred activities because they wish to escape or avoid them.
- The goal of this strategy is to include highly preferred items within these activities so that children are motivated to participate and are no longer prompted to engage in interfering behaviors.

Examples

- Caleb engages in escape maintained behavior (screaming, crying, and aggression) when it is time to brush his teeth
- Caleb really enjoys music so Caleb’s mother bought him a toothbrush that plays music when you put pressure on the bristles

Example

- Molly has a difficult time sitting at the kitchen table during meal time
- Molly’s behavior therapist suggested allowing Molly to eat her favorite food only if she is sitting at the kitchen table
- After Molly was able to sit at the table to consume her favorite food, new foods were slowly introduced

Altering Instruction

- Decrease the task length
  - Present a variety of brief activities instead of one longer task.
- Change the way the task is presented
  - Provide written rather than verbal directions
  - Provide a checklist rather than a paragraph
  - Use a computer-based activity rather than textbook based
- Model appropriate responses immediately after presenting an instruction
Prompting

- A prompt is assistance you give your child to help them emit the desired response.
- Prompts can help to decrease errors
- Utilize prompts when your child is not able to independently perform a skill in a given situation.
- Fade prompts as your child begins to demonstrate the skill
- Example of a Verbal Prompt Hierarchy
  - Full verbal model
  - Partial verbal model
  - Mouth Model
  - Independent
- What responses can we prompt to decrease the likelihood of problem behaviors?
  - Functional Communication Responses

Pre-Teaching and Priming

- Expose your child ahead of time to activities or environments they may find difficult
- Provide a reminder or an overview of rules and expectations prior to an activity or event.
- Show pictures of a new place prior to going or a new person prior to meeting him or her.
- When may pre-teaching and priming be helpful?

Role Playing

- Acting out scenarios that will occur in the natural environment outside of natural opportunity.
- It is often easier for students in the moment if they have practiced using different strategies in advance.
- Students can also learn from watching others role play.
- When possible, utilize peer role models as these tend to be most effective.

Functions of Behavior

- When looking at how we want to target a behavior, it is helpful to look at why the behavior occurs.
- The “why” is what we refer to as the function.
- Without the “why”, you cannot be sure what type of intervention may be most appropriate.

Some reasons behavior can occur...

- To get attention
- To escape/avoid something
- To gain access to an object/person/location
- Because it feels good/sensory stimulation

How can we determine behavior functions?

- Watching the behavior as it occurs
- Completing assessments
- Keeping a log of different events surrounding the behavior
Functions continued...

- Many times you will need to use more than one of these methods to determine why a behavior is happening.
- Just watching the behavior is often not enough to absolutely determine why behavior is occurring, because it can be very complex at times.

Assessment Methods

- Direct Assessment
  - Observing the behavior as it occurs
  - Recording anecdotal notes detailing what happened right before and right after the target behavior
  - Record information regarding the time behavior occurs, what activities are occurring during that time, who is present

Assessment Methods

- Indirect Assessment
  - Interviewing significant people in the individual’s life (e.g. parents, teachers, caregivers)
  - Can use standardized assessments or create your own depending on what information you are interested in
  - Assessments may be structured or unstructured

Types of standardized assessments

- QABF (Questions About Behavior Function)
- FAST (Functional Assessment Screening Tool)
- MAS (Motivation Assessment Scale)

Assessments

- Typically, several of these assessments should be completed, in addition to watching the behavior as it occurs, to determine if you get the same function using different tools.

Let’s practice using the QABF

- Standardized assessment tool
- 25 question rating scale
- Used to help determine behavior function
- 5 potential functions: attention, escape, non-social, physical, tangible
1. Choose an inappropriate or troublesome behavior that your child displays.
2. Think about the behavior and the circumstances around when it occurs. Develop a hypothesis.
3. For each question, indicate the number that most closely matches how often this behavior occurs.

4. Turn to the back page
5. Write the scores from page 1 (the front page) next to their corresponding statements on page 2 (the back page)
6. Add each section (e.g., attention) and circle the total number on the left side of the page above the corresponding section (e.g., attention)
7. What are the scores?
8. Do the assessment results match your hypothesis?

Recording behavior information as it occurs
- It can be very helpful to record information about behaviors as they occur.
- Even though you may think you know why a behavior is occurring, it is always good to confirm hypotheses by completing assessments.
- Sometimes this will confirm your hypothesis and sometimes you may be surprised.

Recording information as it occurs
- One way is to use ABC recording.
  - A=Antecedent – what happened immediately before the behavior.
  - B=Behavior – what the person did
  - C=Consequence – what other people did or what happened as a result of the behavior

Uses of ABC data
- Can use to assess a variety of behaviors:
  - Self injurious
  - Aggressive (hitting, throwing, pushing, kicking)
  - Non-compliance
Uses of ABC data

- You can also use ABC to record information regarding challenging sleep, eating, or toileting behaviors.
- These behaviors can be quite complex and may have a medical basis, so it is always best to first consult your doctor to rule out these causes.

We’ve determined a probable function!

- Once you have determined what the probable function of the behavior may be, then you can decide what might be an appropriate strategy or intervention.

Let’s Practice Collecting ABC Data

- Johnny is completing his math homework. He asks if he can have a snack and his mom says, “Not until you’re finished.” Johnny throws his homework on the floor. His mother tells him to go to his room.

Let’s Practice Collecting ABC Data

- Susan is sitting at the computer playing a game. She pulls her hair. Susan’s mom tells her to “Stop doing that.”

Let’s Practice Collecting ABC Data

- Jeremy is eating at the table. He finishes his meal and asks for dessert. His dad asks him if he can wait one minute until everyone is finished eating. Jeremy bangs his head on the table. Jeremy’s dad does not acknowledge the behavior.

Using Reinforcement and Punishment Procedures

- Reinforcement is a very powerful and effective tool to help shape and change behavior.
- The ultimate goal of reinforcement is to help children learn new skills or appropriate behaviors and maintain their use over time in a variety of settings with many different individuals.
- Reinforcement procedures should always be implemented prior to the implementation of a punishment procedure.
A few terms

- **Reinforcer**
  - anything that is given to the child following a certain behavior, resulting in an increase in this behavior in the future.
  - anything that is taken away from the child following a certain behavior, resulting in an increase in this behavior in the future.

Reinforcers

- Both positive and negative reinforcers
  - **Positive** refers to adding something to the environment
  - **Negative** refers to removing something from the environment
  - Both result in an increase in behavior in future

A few terms

- **Punisher**
  - anything that is given to the child following a certain behavior, resulting in a decrease in this behavior in the future.
  - anything that is taken away from a child following a certain behavior, resulting in a decrease in this behavior in the future.

Punishers

- The same as reinforcers, there are positive and negative punishers
  - All punishers, serve to decrease behavior in the future

Reinforcement and Punishment

- When we talk about punishers and reinforcers in respect to behavior, we talk about reinforcing or punishing the behavior, not the child.
Reinforcers and Punishers cont.
• It is important to remember that a reinforcer or punisher is not defined by the item, rather the effect the item has on the behavior.
• For example, social praise may not be a reinforcer for everyone...for some, it may actually be a punisher.

• Initially, you want to reinforce as many possible appropriate responses as possible.
• Can gradually and systematically fade out reinforcement when significant, consistent change in behavior is demonstrated.
• If possible, keep most potent reinforcers on “reserve” for target behaviors.
• If given free access to reinforcers, the child will become satiated more quickly.

Reinforcement
• Always want to choose a behavior to reward, if you have chosen a behavior to punish/decrease.
• When possible, choose a behavior that is functionally similar to inappropriate behavior.
• If not possible, choose another behavior already in the child’s repertoire to reinforce while teaching a functionally equivalent replacement behavior.

• When choosing replacement behaviors, think about the amount of effort it takes to complete a behavior.
• We usually choose the behavior that requires the least amount of effort and is reinforcing.
• Ex. If the target behavior is headbanging and the function is to obtain access to something, you may teach and reinforce requesting.

Replacement Behaviors
• For every behavior we aim to decrease, there needs to be another we aim to increase.
• If we decrease a behavior without increasing another, the change will be temporary.
• Ideally, the behavior we are aiming to increase has the same function as the behavior being decreased.
• Goal is for replacement behavior to contact reinforcer more than maladaptive behavior.
• Ideally replacement behavior is already in repertoire, but may need to select another behavior in student’s behavior while teaching functionally equivalent replacement behavior.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Maladaptive Behavior</th>
<th>Function</th>
<th>Replacement Behavior</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Property Destruction</td>
<td>Denied Access</td>
<td>Waiting for preferred items</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bolting</td>
<td>Escape</td>
<td>Asking for a break</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aggression</td>
<td>Attention</td>
<td>Requesting Attention</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yelling</td>
<td>Sensory Stimulation (auditory)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Calling out</td>
<td>Attention</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Replacement Behaviors
Replacement Behaviors

- What are other replacement behaviors that can be taught?
  - Attention
    - Tap on the shoulder, calling name, “look at me”, “play with me”
  - Escape
    - “can we leave”, “move”, “no thank you”
  - Access to tangibles
    - Sign, PECS, Vocal requests, pointing
  - Sensory
    - Play skills, conversation skills, behaviors to access functionally compatible sensory reinforcers

Punishment

- If using punishment for inappropriate behaviors, make sure you are also rewarding appropriate behaviors.
- Ideally, want to punish all instances of the target behavior. If you do not do this consistently, the behavior will continue.
- Behavior that is punished inconsistently becomes very resistant to punishment and maybe ultimately more difficult to decrease.

Punishment

- As with reinforcers, some things are more punishing to some people than others.
- While being sent to your room if often used as a form of punishment, for some children it may not be.
- Avoid threatening. Determine what the behavior plan will be and follow through.
- Prioritize target behaviors and start with one or a few, rather than targeting them all at once.

Putting together a plan

- Create a plan that you and other significant people in the child’s life feel you are able to commit to consistently.
- If you are not able to be consistent, the plan is not as likely to work.
- Inappropriate behaviors may actually increase because sometimes they are reinforced and sometimes they are not.

Putting together a plan

- Create plans that are manageable for your family and lifestyle.
- It is better to be consistent, than overly ambitious.
- Reinforce appropriate behaviors whenever possible.
- Increase expectations gradually depending on your child’s current behavior.
- Use clear, concrete expectations.
- Follow-through with expectations.
**Tracking Progress**

- Collect baseline data on how often the behavior occurs prior to any intervention.
- Following implementation of a plan, continue to collect data.
- Analyzing data overtime will demonstrate progress, or lack of progress and determine the effectiveness of the plan.
- Graphing gives a visual representation of your data.

**What is Generalization?**

- When a skill taught in one setting or situation is performed in another setting or situation without specific teaching.
- In order for generalization to occur, the behavior has to occur in a setting other than the original training site and in the absence of the original trainer.
  - For example: You teach your child to request to leave the grocery store when it is loud and your child requests to leave the playground when it is loud without you explicitly teaching it.
  - Skills can be generalized across people, environments, behaviors.

**Things to keep in mind...**

- If the behavior does not change right away, this does not necessarily mean that the strategies are ineffective.
- Keep a consistent plan in place for a long enough period of time (at least a couple of weeks) in order to determine if it is effectiveness.
Things to keep in mind...

- There may be an initial increase in inappropriate behaviors.
- Prepare for this as much as possible.
- If a behavior has been reinforced for a long time, and then is no longer reinforced, the behavior may increase in an attempt to access reinforcement.

Things to keep in mind...

- Each child’s intervention “package” will be different and unique, just as each child is different and unique.
- What may work for one, will not work for all.
- Knowing this, expect that changes will need to be made to plans along the way. This is often part of the process and is also part of progress.

Things to keep in mind...

- When in public settings, not everyone is understanding of children with special needs.
- They may react by staring, offering to help, or being critical.
- You can ignore inappropriate comments, explain to people the situation, or create awareness cards to give to people so that they will move on and allow you to focus on your child.

Note:

- Some behaviors are very complex, unsafe, and/or dangerous and may require consulting a professional with experience in assessing and managing behavior.

Contact Information

Feel free to contact me with any questions at ekostigen@rcsconsultingne.com

“If there is no struggle, there is no progress.”

—Frederick Douglass
References