Practical Strategies to Address Challenging Behavior

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Today...

* Common behavior problems
* Conditions that may occasion behavior problems
* Assessment methods
* Practical strategies
* Questions
Children with autism are at risk for the development of behavior problems.
Not to mention...

- Food selectivity
- Sleeping problems
- Noncompliance
- Idiosyncratic behavior problems
Why are children with autism at risk?

- Limited understanding of language
- Limited expressive language
- Skill deficits
- Sensitive to faulty contingencies
- Standard “social” reinforcement packages are not sufficient
Detrimental Effects

- Physical consequences
- Social / emotional consequences
- Educational Consequences
- Economic Consequences
We can’t go anywhere with him like this
What Can Parents Do?

- Arrange a “Life Style” that reduces the likelihood that problem behavior will emerge
- Understand the potential functions of behaviors
- Identify and alter environmental conditions that may occasion problem behavior
- Be proactive
Most Behavior Serves a Function

To avoid or escape conditions that are experienced as unpleasant

AHHHHH! I Hate Having my Hair Cut!!
Most Behavior Serve a Function

To gain access to tangible items or activities

I want a cookie and I want it now!!
Most Behavior Serves a Function

This is fun, every time I hit my head my mom picks me up!

To gain access to attention...
Most Behavior Serves a Function

To gain access to sensory stimulation

Wow! when I turn my head like this, I get dizzy!
Most Behavior Serves a Function

Don’t forget to rule out medical reasons
Behavior may serve multiple functions and functions can change over time.

- Attention
- Sensory
- Escape
- Tangible
Events that may lead to problem behavior

- Demands / Anything unpleasant
  - Homework
  - Chores
  - Noise
  - Social interaction
  - Self-care routines
    - Tooth brushing
    - Hair washing
    - Haircuts
Events that may lead to problem behavior

- When access to items or activities is denied or delayed
  - Being told “no”
  - Having to wait for something

No you can’t have the IPad!!
Events that may lead to problem behavior

- When activities are terminated
- When transitioning from one activity to the next
- When repetitive behavior is interrupted

Come here, it’s time for a bath!
Events that may lead to problem behavior

- When your attention is not available
Events that may lead to problem behavior

- When environment is under enriched
- In “alone” conditions
When things are confusing
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Condition</th>
<th>Potential reason</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Task demands</td>
<td>Escape</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When denied access</td>
<td>To gain access</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When attention is diverted</td>
<td>To gain attention</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Under enriched environment or when alone</td>
<td>To gain access to sensory stimulation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Let's get practical...
Skills to teach that may prevent problem behavior

- Teach your child to ask for:
  - Tangible items “Can I have a cookie?”
  - Activities “I want to go swimming”
  - Attention “Can you play with me?”
  - A break “Can I take a break?”
  - More time “Can I have more time?”
  - Another turn / opportunity “I want to do it again”
  - Termination of something unpleasant “Stop please”
Skills to teach that may prevent problem behavior

- Waiting for
  - Tangible items, activities, adult attention
- Sharing toys
- Appropriate play with toys
- Sustaining engagement with tasks
- Working for delayed contingencies
- Following picture activity schedule
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Before</th>
<th>Behavior</th>
<th>After</th>
<th>Possible Reason</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6/17</td>
<td>2:00</td>
<td>asked to put hands down</td>
<td>crying</td>
<td>continued to cry until lesson</td>
<td>wants something, wants attention, self sensory, other</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6/17</td>
<td>3:27</td>
<td>asked to eat quietly</td>
<td>crying</td>
<td>continued to cry until lesson</td>
<td>wants something, wants attention, self sensory, other</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6/18</td>
<td>11:00</td>
<td>missed instruction</td>
<td>crying</td>
<td>continued to cry until lesson</td>
<td>wants something, wants attention, self sensory, other</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5/19</td>
<td>4:30</td>
<td>asked to put hands down</td>
<td>kicking</td>
<td>continued to kick</td>
<td>wants something, wants attention, self sensory, other</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
To increase compliance...
When you place demands

- Be clear
- State it as a directive not a question
  “Put the toys away”
  versus
  “Do you want to clean up now?”
- Make instructions short and specific
Billy, come here
VERSUS...

Hey, come on over here, Billy, I said come here, get over here now!
To increase compliance...
When you place demands

* Identify a reinforcer contingency “When you clean up then you can go outside”
* State direction once
* Follow through with the demand and prompt if necessary
* Provide praise and reinforcers following response
To increase compliance...
When you place demands

- **Before tasks**
  - Use lists / pictures to signal tasks
  - Create a predictable routine that builds in an incentive
    - After you brush your teeth... you can watch your favorite movie
    - Put your shoes on and we can go outside
For demands that multiple steps or require a period of time

- For example... tooth brushing
  - Slowly shape participation with the task
  - Use counting
  - Timers
  - Pictures to cue steps
- Timers for how long the task will be
- Stickers or tokens for the number of trials until a break
Let’s count..
One, two, three
Four…
When your attention has to be diverted

- Set up child with preferred activity
- Provide regularly scheduled attention
- Provide signal when attention will be available
- Rotate activities
When you have to deny access

* Provide a reasonable alternative (before problem behavior is demonstrated).
* Let the child know when he/she can have access again (e.g., use a timer).
* Reinforce child for accepting and cooperating with denied access.
When you have to transition or terminate an activity

- Prepare child for the termination or sequence
- Use timers or counting procedures
- Provide reinforcers for cooperating with the transition
- Transition to a moderately preferred activity
But what if your child engages challenging behavior?

Respond in a way that disrupts the Response - reinforcer relationship
Response (hitting)… reinforcer (reprimand) relationship

STOP IT!
Responding by yelling potentially strengthens the relationship between hitting and attention (yelling)
Generally,
think about what is happening BEFORE you respond

He is having a tantrum because he wants me to carry him. If I carry him now, he will tantrum the next time he wants me to carry him.
Ok, he’s throwing his toys while I’m on the phone. Looks like he wants some attention. I’ll stay on the phone and when he’s playing nicely, I’ll talk to him.

For Example…
When interrupting problem behavior

- Be neutral
- Avoid eye contact
- Limit language
- State “do” requests as opposed to “don’t” requests
- Stay calm
Get down please
Don’t climb
On the couch!

VERSUS
When you are concerned about a particular behavior

* Define the behavior
* Assess behavior
* Develop interventions
* Assess intervention
* Modify interventions
Assessment Procedures

- Functional assessment procedures / Descriptive assessments
  - ABC analyses
- Published assessment scales (e.g., Motivational Assessment Scale, Durand & Crimmins, 1992)
- Analogue functional analyses (e.g., Iwata et al., 1982)
Define behavior

- Objective measurable terms
  - Yells when it's time for homework
  - Bands desk with fists
  - Rips paper
Assess the behavior

- Set up a time during the day to observe the behavior
- Note the activity the where the behavior occurs
- What occurs before the behavior
- What occurs after
Interpreting the Data

Learner: John S.
Target Behavior: Self Injury

sessions

Percentage of intervals engaged in target behavior

Sessions
Interpreting the Data

Learner: Sally D.
Target Behavior: Stereotypic Hand Movements

Sessions

Percentage of Intervals Engaged in Target Behavior

Sessions
Intervention Strategies

* At least 3 strategic approaches:
  * Alter Antecedent Variables
    * Eliminate the MO or the SD that triggers the behavior
  * Alter Consequence Variables
    * Eliminate a source of reinforcement
  * Teach Alternative Behaviors
    * Must serve the same function as the problem behavior!
## Function-Based Treatments

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Escape</th>
<th>Attention</th>
<th>Tangible</th>
<th>Sensory</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Extinction</strong></td>
<td>Do not allow escape (escape extinction)</td>
<td>Do not provide attention</td>
<td>Block access to tangible item</td>
<td>Block access to sensory stimulation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(blocking/removing source of reinforcement)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>DRA</strong></td>
<td>Teach learner to request a break</td>
<td>Teach learner to request attention</td>
<td>Teach learner to request tangible item</td>
<td>Teach learner to request functional alternative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(teaching a functional alternative)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Fixed Time</strong></td>
<td>Provide escape (e.g., access to a break) on a fixed schedule (e.g., FI-10 min)</td>
<td>Provide attention on a fixed schedule (e.g., FI-10 min)</td>
<td>Provide access to tangible item on a fixed schedule (e.g., FI-10 min)</td>
<td>Provide access to a functional alternative on a fixed schedule (e.g., FI-10 min)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(providing the reinforcer on a fixed schedule)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>DRO</strong></td>
<td>Provide escape (e.g., access to a break) after a designated amount of time has passed in the absence of the target behavior</td>
<td>Provide attention after a designated amount of time has passed in the absence of the target behavior</td>
<td>Provide access to the tangible item after a designated amount of time has passed in the absence of the target behavior</td>
<td>Provide access to a functional alternative behavior after a designated amount of time has passed in the absence of the target behavior</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(provide reinforcer when the behavior is not occurring)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Behavior maintained by attention

- Do not provide attention – attention extinction
- Teach child to ask for attention in more appropriate way
- Make attention predictable and scheduled
- Teach child to wait for attention
- Provide attention when behavior ceases

Hmm should I get a cuppaccino or latte??
The behavior may get worse before it gets better
Behavior maintained by escape

- Do not allow escape – continue with demand (escape extinction)
- Teach skill of asking for a break
- Make breaks predictable
- Provide incentive for task
- Reward compliance with the task
Behavior maintained by tangible

- Do not provide the tangible (tangible extinction)
- Teach child to ask for tangible in more appropriate ways
- Offer reasonable alternative prior to behavior
- Provide predictable signal when it will be available (timers, scheduled cues)
- Redirect / walk away / secure safety
Behavior maintained by tangible

- Use cues to signal endings
- Teach waiting
- Teach child to ask for more time / another turn
Behavior maintained by sensory stimulation

- Block behavior
- Redirect to more appropriate behavior
- Identify similar appropriate alternative activity
Behavior maintained by sensory stimulation

- Teach play and leisure
- Provide reinforcement for engaging in alternative behavior
- Schedule activity changes
- Use photographic activity schedules
Differential Reinforcement

- Reinforcing the non-occurrence of the behavior (or other behavior) for a predetermined interval of time
  - Variable interval
  - Fixed interval
  - Reset criteria


Thank you!

- For more information about applied behavior analysis and resources for addressing challenging behavior:
  - ASATonline.org
  - Autism Speaks Challenging Behavior Tool Kit
  - Cambridge Center for Behavioral Studies [www.behavior.org](http://www.behavior.org)
  - Rethink [https://www.rethinkfirst.com/](https://www.rethinkfirst.com/)
Thank you!

- Association for Applied Behavior Analysis International
  www.abainternational.org

- Books:
  - Optimistic Parenting: Hope and Help for You and Your Challenging Child by Mark Durand
  - Sleep Better a Guide to Improving Sleep for Children with Special Needs by Mark Durand