ReReplacing Challenging Behaviors and Improving Quality of Life through

FUNCTIONAL COMMUNICATION TRAINING

Melissa L. Rinaldi, Ph.D.

Objectives

1) Define functional communication, challenging behavior, and functionally equivalent alternative behavior.

2) Describe the process of identifying the function of a behavior.

3) Identify the steps to teach communication skills through Functional Communication Training.
WHAT IS FUNCTIONAL COMMUNICATION?

Functional: 
*adjective*
1) of or having a special activity, purpose, or task
2) designed to be practical and useful, rather than attractive
3) in operation; working

Communication:
*noun*
the imparting or exchanging of information by speaking, writing, or using some other medium
CHALLENGING BEHAVIOR: Actions that significantly interfere with the quality of life of persons engaging in these behaviors and those with whom they live or work.

FUNCTIONAL COMMUNICATION TRAINING:
A procedure used to reduce challenging behaviors by assessing the consequences maintaining the challenging behavior then providing the same consequences for a different constructive behavior.
FUNCTIONAL EQUIVALENT ALTERNATIVE BEHAVIOR: A behavior that is taught to replace an unwanted behavior that has the same function as the unwanted behavior.

WHAT DO WE KNOW ABOUT HOW INDIVIDUALS WITH ASD COMMUNICATE?
Recent review of literature (Tager-Flusberg, Paul, & Lord, 2005)
• 20-50% of children with autism do not use words to speak (i.e. are nonverbal)
  – Recent studies suggest a decrease in this population as EI becomes more prevalent
  – Communication most likely affected by “deficits in the ability to process information about social situations”
• By 2nd yr of life, communication of most children with ASD different from others
• Very low rates of initiation of spontaneous communication
• Use of functional language by school-age related to better long-term outcomes
BEHAVIOR IS COMMUNICATION.
Step 1: Identify the Interfering Behavior

- Look for patterns of behaviors
- Prioritize behaviors that significantly impact quality of life
- Behavior can take many forms (i.e., aggression, self-injury, stereotyped behaviors, inappropriate speech)

"Challenging behavior should not be viewed as a major barrier to teaching communication." – Durand, 1990

Step 2: Complete a Functional Behavior Assessment (FBA)

- Remember the goal
- Look for patterns
  - Interviews, rating scales (Motivation Assessment Scale), scatter plots, ABC logs
  - Examining what occurs both before and after the challenging behavior (and more pro-social behaviors!)
  - Keep data collection *simple* – yet *objective*
Antecedent Behavior Consequence (ABC) Recording Form

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Antecedents</th>
<th>Behavior</th>
<th>Consequence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

A-B-C Behavior Card

Child:
- Antecedents:
  - Demand/Request
  - Alone (no attention)
  - Alone (no apparent assignment)
  - Attention given to others
  - Transition
  - New task
  - Specific Peer
  - Specific Adult
  - Preferred object/activity removed
  - Unpreferred activity/object
  - Difficult task/activity
  - Told "no"
  - Other

Date/Time:

Activity:

Challenging behavior:
Describe briefly in specific terms

Perceived Function:
- Escape/void
  - What?
  - Other

Consequences:
- Verbal redirect
- Physical redirect
- Ignored
- Activity/material/task taken away
- Isolation (in room)
- Sent to office or out of room
- Calming/supporting of student
- Verbal
- Physical
- Both
- Physical restraint
- Peer remarks/laughter
- Help/attention given
- Other

Observer:

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Possible Functions of Challenging Behaviors During Transitions

- Doesn’t want to leave activity
- Doesn’t want to leave parent
- Doesn’t like or want to go to next activity
- Doesn’t understand where to go or what to do
- Get attention from peers/adults

Classes of Stimuli Influencing Severe Behavior Problems (Durand, 1990)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Setting Events</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Biological Contexts</td>
<td>Social Contexts</td>
<td>Physical Contexts</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stimulus Events</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Social Attention</td>
<td>Escape</td>
<td>Tangibles</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Severe Behavior Problems
Step 3: Identify a Replacement Behavior as a Substitute for the Interfering Behavior

Based on the function, what is the student trying to communicate?

- Doesn’t want to leave activity
- Doesn’t want to leave parent
- Doesn’t like or want to go to next activity
- Doesn’t understand where to go or what to do
- Get attention from peers/adults
The Replacement Behavior should be:
✓ Efficient
✓ Able to be taught in a short amount of time
✓ Allow learner to quickly gain access to the reinforcement
✓ Acceptable and appropriate to the environment and learner
✓ Recognizable


Communicative Response Modality Checklist (Durand, 1990)

1) Does the student use one of the followings methods of communication on a regular basis?
   VERBAL SIGN/GESTURAL SYMBOLIC NO

1) Does the student use one or more a) verbal responses, b) signs or understandable gestures, or c) symbolic forms of communication to communicate on an occasional basis?

2) Is one method of communication being emphasized in speech/language training?
Determining Relevance (Durand, 1990)

- Skill should be chronologically age-appropriate
- Materials and activities need to perform the skill should be present in the student’s environment
- Skill should make student more independent
- Skill should prepare student to function in community environments

Step 4: Design and Implement Data Collection Procedures

Two main purposes of data collection:

1) Establish baseline and monitor the frequency/duration/intensity of problem behavior and replacement behavior
   Ongoing
2) Identify the function of the behavior
   May or may not be ongoing
# Functional Communication Training Data Sheet (Durand, 1990)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Training Date</th>
<th>Number of Training Trials Attempted</th>
<th>Number of Successful Trials</th>
<th>Best Response</th>
<th>Frequency of Problem Behavior</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>9/13/12</td>
<td>IIII</td>
<td>II</td>
<td>Phys prompt</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9/14/12</td>
<td>IIII</td>
<td>III</td>
<td>Phys prompt</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9/15/12</td>
<td>IIII</td>
<td>III</td>
<td>Touch to arm</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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### Module: Functional Communication Training (FCT)

**Blank FCT Data Collection Sheet**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Activity/setting</th>
<th>Antecedent (record what happens right before the IB or RB)</th>
<th>IB or RB?</th>
<th>Prompts (record what happens right after the IB or RB)</th>
<th>Consequence</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>I P G V</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>I P G V</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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Step 5: Manipulate the Environment to Elicit the Interfering Behavior

- To maximize generalization and maintenance, should teach student in the environment where they will need to use the skill or an environment closely resembling it
- Ideally set up opportunities to use the behavior throughout the day

Step 6: Plan Opportunities for Generalization

- Plan to teach individual to use the replacement behavior in multiple settings and/or with multiple people
- Ensure others in the student’s environment will respond appropriately to the student’s behavior
Step 7: Prompt Learners to Use Replacement Behaviors

- Start with success

- Individualize prompt to student’s needs
  - Many types of prompts (natural, gesture, verbal, visual, model, partial physical, full physical)

Step 8: Stop Reinforcing the Interfering Behavior

- The ultimate goal is to make new behavior *work better* than the old behavior

- Can prompt the individual to use the replacement behavior if they begin to engage in the challenging behavior
  - Be cautious of chaining
  - Be careful to only reinforce the replacement behavior

- If the challenging behavior is dangerous to the person or others, intervene minimally
Step 9: Provide Reinforcement

• It is imperative that reinforcement is powerful, immediate, and consistent!
• Reinforcement of the alternative behavior should meet the same function as the challenging behavior – this is powerful!
• Every attempt needs to be reinforced initially
Step 10: Shape the Response

• After the individual begins to show some learning, the response can begin to be shaped
• To shape the behavior, provide reinforcement for behavior that more closely approximates the desired response
• Remember the goal is for the communication to be efficient and recognizable
  – Children with profound disabilities have been taught functional communication (Durand, 1990)
  – Some children may not achieve an “ideal” response, but can still be taught to effectively replace challenging behavior with something more acceptable

Step 11: Fade the Use of Prompts

• The goal is for the student to be as independent as possible
• Move from more intrusive prompts to more natural cues once learning is acquired
• Can use time delay to assess the type of prompt required
**Step 12: Increase the Time Between the Replacement Behavior and Reinforcement**

- Once student has learned how to communicate with the replacement behavior, the trainer can slowly increase the amount of time before the reinforcement is delivered.
- Can also increase the distance between the communicative partner.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phase</th>
<th>Prompt Level 1</th>
<th>Prompt Level 2</th>
<th>Prompt Level 3</th>
<th>Prompt Level 4</th>
<th>Student Response</th>
<th>Trainer Response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I</td>
<td>Sitting in front of the computer</td>
<td>Trainer points to the picture</td>
<td>Trainer says, “Hand me the picture”</td>
<td>Trainer physically prompts handing the picture</td>
<td>Hands Picture of “More Time”</td>
<td>Gives student another minute</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II</td>
<td>Sitting in front of the computer</td>
<td>Trainer points to the picture</td>
<td>Trainer says, “Hand me the picture”</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III</td>
<td>Sitting in front of the computer</td>
<td>Trainer points to the picture</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV</td>
<td>Sitting in front of the computer</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Step 13: Monitor Learner Progress

• Continue to collect data to determine
  – Effectiveness of intervention to decrease challenging behavior and increase replacement behavior
  – Level of independence in using the replacement behavior
    • Assists with prompt fading

Tackling Common Hesitations when using FCT

• Remembering the Purpose
• Satiation
• Shaping and Fading
• Teaching Prosocial Behaviors
Troubleshooting

- Incorrect or Multiple Functions
- Inconsistent or Delayed Reinforcement
- The Challenging Behavior Still “WORKS”

Prosocial Behaviors
Prosocial Behaviors

• Often have different function
• Can teach simultaneously or following FCT
• Reinforcement needs to be powerful (*greater* than the reinforcement of the functionally equivalent behavior)

**References**
