

THREE TIER CONSULTING, INC.

Dr. Michael Friga, Board Certified Behavior Analyst

Functional Assessment &
Behavior Intervention Plans

THREE TIER CONSULTING

Professional Development White Paper

© Three Tier Consulting
130 Landon Rd.
Ithaca, NY 14850
Phone 877.651.1038 • Fax 877.651.1038

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Functional Behavioral Assessment & Behavior Intervention Plans (FBA- BIPs)

Intensive Individual Intervention: PBIS Tier 3

Schoolwide Positive Behavior Intervention and Support (PBIS) effectively prevents problem behavior for many students. Within this framework, explicit behavior instruction, positive classroom management strategies and targeted interventions provide the necessary support for many “at risk” students. But even with these prevention-based strategies, almost every teacher encounters a few students for whom standard classroom management techniques are ineffective. Even one or two students with challenging behavior can bring a classroom to a standstill. In such cases, teachers often call upon expertise from psychologists, social workers or behavior analysts to help develop a plan for intensive individual intervention.

A Functional Behavioral Assessment-Behavior Intervention Plan (FBA-BIP) is a formal process to evaluate student behavior and develop strategies to change the behavior. This White Paper explains the process of developing an FBA-BIP and challenges several commonly held assumptions:

- Assumption 1: The primary purpose of a behavior plan is to eliminate problem behaviors.
- Assumption 2: The initial step in this process is to change student behavior.
- Assumption 3: An FBA-BIP is completed when the CSE/CPSE team meets.

Effective FBA-BIPS are Teaching Plans

Assumption 1. Referring teachers usually request behavior plans to eliminate problem behaviors that interfere with teaching, disrupt the class, or cause risk of injury. Behavior plans focused on eliminating behaviors as the primary goal are often ineffective. While one behavior is eliminated, another problem behavior pops up to take its place. The primary goal of a behavior plan is to teach socially desired behaviors (“replacement behaviors”) that serve the same function as the problem behavior. As the new behaviors are established, the problem behaviors decrease and are eventually eliminated.

FBA-BIPs require change in staff behavior

Assumption 2. The initial goal of a behavior is not a change in student behavior, but a change staff behavior. If teachers and assistants are using behavior management strategies that are not effective for a particular student, new strategies are needed. Although this sounds obvious, it is often the most difficult challenge in implementing an FBA-BIP. As adults, the routines of interacting with children are well established—even habitual. Responding and reacting to students in a different way requires a clear plan, collegial support, and determination. Though the initial goal is a change in adult behavior, the outcome is a change in student behavior

An FBA-BIP is a process, not a product

Assumption 3. Although an FBA-BIP is a written summary of an evaluation, it is not a static document. The purpose of an FBA-BIP is to provide a formal analysis of the challenge, a clear plan for agreed-upon strategies, and an objective criteria for progress. Teams that view the FBA-BIP as a *product* may fail to recognize that its most important purpose is to guide a *process*.

The Process

In regulations, FBAs and BIPs should be considered for a student with a disability when:

- ✓ The student exhibits persistent behaviors that impede his or her learning or that of others, despite consistently implemented general school-wide or classroom-wide interventions;
- ✓ The student’s behavior places the student or others at risk of harm or injury;
- ✓ The CSE or CPSE is considering more restrictive programs or placements as a result of the student’s behavior;
- ✓ And/or whenever a student’s behavior resulting in suspensions or removals has been determined to be related to (a “manifestation” of) the student’s disability.

Permission for assessment

FBA-BIPs are treated like any other formal student assessment. As with a Psycho-Educational or Speech assessment, parents must provide informed consent for evaluation that follows state-determined timelines and requirements. Review of the results of the FBA-BIP assessment must be conducted in a formal special education meeting (CSE-CPSE).

The Team

Members of the team should include staff members who know the student across multiple settings. The classroom teacher is a key participant. In secondary settings, where students have many teachers, the teacher who has the greatest familiarity with the challenging behaviors should participate. Additionally, the team should have a member who understands the behavioral problem solving process. Frequently, school psychologists, social workers, or behavior analysts serve this role.

Effective teams require clearly defined roles and a focused process¹. Although the composition of the team may vary, every team should include:

- Facilitator: Attends to the process, insures participation, and redirects the discussion when it gets off task. The facilitator monitors and clarifies comments and checks in with the referring teacher regarding the behavioral descriptions, assessment and interventions.
- Recorder: Takes notes of the meeting with enough detail to draft the plan.
- Timekeeper: Based on the meeting agenda, the timekeeper tracks and notifies the team when agreed upon time segments have been reached.
- Case Liaison: The Case Liaison works with the referring teacher to collect student data prior to the meeting. This person also provides follow-up with the teacher after the meeting in ensure implementation and resolve obstacles that may arise. The case liaison is a key member of the team who provides continuity to the process between meetings.

¹ A detailed description and forms used in problem solving teaming may be found at the websites of [Intervention Central](#) and at [Albemarle County Public Schools](#). The “School Based Intervention Teams” described on these sites focus on academic issues, but the process is identical for behavioral referrals.

The Meetings

Including the CSE meeting, a minimum of three meetings are usually needed to complete an FBA/BIP. More complex behavioral issues may necessitate additional meetings. Also, regularly scheduled follow-up meetings are necessary to assess the student's progress and make minor adjustments to the plan. While these are recommended practices, districts are free to establish their own procedures for the functional assessment.

Meeting 1	The initial meeting brings the team together to clearly define and “operationalize” the behavior. The team examines information already collected by the referring teacher and completes brief rating scales to create an initial hypothesis about <i>why</i> the student engages in the behavior
➤ Define Behavior	
➤ Develop Initial Guess at Function of Behavior	
➤ Plan for Data Collection	From this discussion, the team determines the most efficient means of collecting data to test the hypothesis. The first meeting concludes by scheduling a second meeting to verify the initial guess about function and draft an intervention strategy.
Meeting 2	The second meeting begins with a review of the data collected since the first meeting. Based on the review, the team refines the hypothesis and drafts a behavior plan. The plan proposes strategies to avoid problem behaviors before they occur, address behaviors when they occur. The plan focuses on teaching new “replacement” behaviors, and determines the best ways to support the desired behaviors when they occur. When the strategies are determined, the team creates a plan for continued data collection, assigns one individual to collect the team notes and write the draft plan. The second meeting concludes by scheduling the CSE/CPSE meeting date.
➤ Review Data	
➤ Refine Hypothesis	
➤ Draft Behavior Plan	
➤ Plan for Monitoring	
➤ Assign individual to write FBA/BIP	
Meeting 3 – CSE	The third meeting is the formal CSE/CPSE meeting to review the data and the draft FBA-BIP. By this point, the team should feel confident about the function of the student's behavior, have a well developed plan to teach the desired “replacement behaviors,” and strategies to avoid problem behaviors and respond to them if necessary. The team should schedule regular follow-up meetings to review the data (team meetings, not CSE/CPSE). The frequency of these meetings should be determined by the severity and frequency of the behaviors. The team should set a criteria for “success” of the plan, which would indicate that regular team meetings are no longer necessary. Additionally, if the CSE determines that a one-on-one aide is needed to implement the plan, criteria should be set for fading and
➤ Review & revise plan w/new data	
➤ Determine review timeline	
➤ Set discontinuation criteria	

ultimately eliminating the assistance as the student independently demonstrates the replacement behaviors and reduces occurrences of the problem behavior.

Functional Behavioral Assessment

“Why does he do that?”

Most behavior plans are written descriptions of how adults should respond to problem behaviors exhibited by students. The “traditional” behavior plan identifies specific behaviors and describes how the teacher should react to the behavior. The plan attempts to answer the question: “What should I do?”

The Behavior-Response approach does not address the fact that people may engage in similar behavior for different reasons. For example, a behavior plan may dictate that a student who blurts out an obscenity is sent to the office as a punishment. However, it may be that the reason the student swears is because he wants to leave the room. In order to answer the question, “what should I do?” the teacher must first answer the question, “why does he do that?” By first assessing the underlying function a behavior serves, intervention plans become more effective.²

To emphasize the importance of functional assessment in behavior plans, state and federal regulations began referring to behavior plans as “Functional Behavior Assessment/Behavior Intervention Plans” (FBA-BIPs).

Defining a Behavior

Target Behaviors.

A behavior is an observable action taken by a student in an environment. Behaviors of concern, which lead to a functional assessment, are referred to as “target behaviors.” To complete a functional assessment, the team must define the target behaviors. Target

² There are still intervention “cookbooks” on the market that catalogue specific behaviors and list interventions. The strategies listed in these books are only useful after the behavior’s function is determined.

behaviors must be defined in concrete, measurable and observable terms, with only one behavior described at a time. Only one behavior is described at a time.

Complex Behaviors

Clusters of combined behaviors that occur together are referred to as “complex behaviors”. For example, “tantrums,” “melt-downs,” and “confrontations” are not measurable unless the component behaviors are defined. In order to be included in a behavior plan, complex behaviors must be defined enough detail to be reliably measured.

Escalation Chains

Sequences of behaviors that consistently occur prior to the occurrence of the problem behavior are referred to as “escalation chains”. For example, in the case of the boy who consistently makes a whining noise prior to throwing his learning materials, the behavior of concern is the whining noise, rather than the throwing of materials. The goal is to determine the least disruptive behavior that reliably predicts the problem behavior. By addressing this behavior, teachers may be able to avoid the problem behavior entirely.

The Stranger Test

Given a written description of the behavior, could a stranger who never met the student reliably recognize the occurrence of the described behavior? When a behavior is vaguely described, different people may interpret student actions unreliably. Does “assaults staff members” mean slapping at people, punching them or throwing objects at them? When writing descriptions of behavior, the team should use the “stranger test” to assess whether the explanation is detailed enough.

Behavioral Parameters

The measurable dimensions of behavior are called parameters. The most common parameters are: frequency, intensity and duration.

- Frequency – The number of occurrences over a period of time. Frequency is common to all behavior; whether it occurs 100 times per minute or once in a lifetime.
- Intensity – The degree of severity of a behavior. Measuring intensity requires the observer to objectively define levels of severity prior to measurement. For example, pinching might be defined with three levels of intensity – 1) caused pain, but no marks; 2) left marks that lasted 30 minutes or more; 3) broke skin. Intensity is a useful parameter for discrete behaviors, where the frequency remains relatively stable. In such a case, the initial effectiveness of the FBA/BIP may be determined by a decrease in the intensity of the behavior.
- Duration – The length of an occurrence of a behavior.

Discrete and Continuous Behaviors

Discrete behaviors are brief behaviors tend not to reoccur during a short time. Shoving, head butting, hitting would be considered discrete if the student usually does it one time and does not repeat it. The most relevant parameters for discrete behaviors are *frequency* and *intensity*. Continuous Behaviors are extended behaviors that may last minutes or hours. The most relevant parameter for continuous behavior is *duration*.

Data Collection

Functional Behavior Assessment requires the team to collect information from multiple sources. These include a review of records, interviews, rating scales, surveys or checklists, and most importantly, direct observation of student behavior.

Direct observation

The most important source of information about student behavior is direct observation. All other sources provide only second-hand information. FBAs *must* include direct observational data, collected by the teacher or an outside observer. It is only through direct observation that hypotheses about behaviors can be evaluated.

Review of Student Records

Challenging behaviors rarely occur in their “full blown” form without documentation of previous occurrences. Teacher comments, office referrals, and CSE notes often provide a record of the outlining the historical development of behavior patterns.

Interviews

Conversations with Parent(s) or Caregivers and the Student can provide relevant background and insight into the function of behaviors.

Rating Surveys & Checklists

Written scales and checklists allow a systematic method for comparing the opinions of multiple sources. The Motivation Assessment Scale and the Behavior Assessment Scale are two frequently used checklists serve to determine behavioral function.

DATA COLLECTION TOOLS

Direct Observation

	Qualitative or Quantitative	What is Measured	Comments
Scatter Plot	Quantitative	- Frequency - (intensity) - Time of event	Good for high frequency; discrete behaviors only. Can measure Intensity by using different color marks. Gives information on time of day; day of month
FA Chart (F unctional A ssessment)	Quantitative	- Frequency - Function - Time of event	Combines data collection w/hypothesis building
ABC Chart (A ntecedent- B ehavior C onsequence)	Qualitative; can count # of events (quant)	- Frequency - Time of event - Antecedents - Consequences	Good for low frequency & complex behaviors.
Continuous Time Sampling	Quantitative	- Any parameters selected by observer	Requires intensive observation (cannot do anything else during observation); most accurate and detailed method. Usually for short block of time (e.g. 15-30 minutes)
Interval Time Sampling	Quantitative	- All parameters selected by observer	Requires intensive observation; rate the occurrence of behavior at the beginning of specific intervals (e.g. at the beginning of every minute. Usually for short block of time (e.g. 15-30 minutes)

Indirect Data Tools

Motivation Assessment Scale	Quantitative	- Primary Function of Behavior	If completed by individual Team members at first meeting, aides to guide discussion about “first guess” about primary function; does not assess second-level, deep functions
Behavior Assessment Scale	Quantitative	- Primary Function of Behavior	If completed by individual Team members at first meeting, aides to guide discussion about “first guess” about primary function; does not assess second-level, deep functions
FACTS	Quantitative	- Time - Triggers	

Determining Function

Function explains *why* the student engages in a behavior. By determining the purpose of a behavior, the team can formulate more adaptive “replacement behaviors” that serve the same function in a socially appropriate way.

Function versus Attribution

Teams new to the Functional Assessment often mistake an attribution for a function when answering the “why?” question. Attributions are our beliefs about the *feelings* of the student. For example, statements such as: “he hates me,” “he’s trying to manipulate me,” and “he likes to bully others,” are all examples of attributions. The key difference between attributions and functions is that hypotheses about the function of behaviors are testable and attributions are not.

Dimensions of Surface (Primary) Function

From a behavioral perspective, all organisms act to either seek or avoid stimuli. Almost all behavior can be described as seeking or avoiding attention, activities, tangible objects, environments, or sensory stimulation.

Surface Functions

	Attention	Activities	Tangible	Environment	Sensory
Seek	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Avoid	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

The student who keeps pestering the child next to him until the child yells at him is seeking attention (albeit negative attention); the student who makes burping noises during a math quiz and gets sent from the room is avoiding an activity (the math test). This list of 10 primary-level, or surface functions provide an initial guess at why a student engages in a particular behavior.

Deep (Second-Level) Function

Determining the Surface Function of a behavior is just the first step in a functional assessment. To complete the process, the Team must delve a little deeper into the question of *why*. For example, why does the student pester his peer instead of using a more appropriate attention seeking strategy? Perhaps the child has been ignored when using appropriate strategies and attended to only when he pesters. Why does the other student want to avoid the math quiz? Is it too long (motivation deficit)? Is it too hard (skill deficit)?

Environmental Conditions (Setting Events)

Factors in a student’s environment often correlate with the occurrence of target behaviors. Reliably predicting these environmental factors allow for a more focused hypothesis regarding function. Type of activity, specific people, and time of day are

common environmental factors that may influence behavior. Detailed data collection should include information regarding environmental factors suspected to be related to the target behaviors. Some environmental conditions occur many minutes or hours before the target behavior, yet make it more likely the behaviors will occur. These conditions are referred to as motivating operations or “Slow Triggers” for the target behaviors

Functional Hypothesis

Once the Primary Function, Environmental Factors, and Second Level Functions are determined, the Team is ready to propose a Functional Hypothesis. The Hypothesis should include information regarding the Behavior, Primary and Secondary Functions, and the Environment Conditions in which the behavior is likely to occur. As with any hypothesis, a functional hypothesis is written in a format that can be tested.

Format of the Functional Hypotheses

When _____(Conditions), the student _____(Behavior) in order to _____ (Surface Function) because _____ (Deep Function).

Examples

When taking math tests, the student crawls under the desk in order to avoid the task because he lacks the math computation skills to be successful (pass the test).

When engaged in free play, the student pushes other students in order to gain peer attention because he lacks the communication skills to initiate conversation.

On writing tasks that last more than 10 minutes, the student gets out of seat and wanders around the room to escape from the task because fine-motor writing tasks are difficult and he is not receiving regular reinforcement for his efforts. [Notice the combination of two deep functions).

Rating Scales are often used to help teams identify the surface functions of behaviors. The two most common tools are the Motivation Assessment Scale & the Problem Behavior Questionnaire. Googling these titles will provide web versions of the tools for teams who wish to use them.

The Behavior Intervention Plan

“What should we do?”

The Behavior Intervention Plan is based on the analysis of data from the Functional Assessment. From this analysis the Team generates a Functional Hypothesis and related measurable behavioral goals for the student. The goals that are developed should specify the desired replacement behavior as well as the targeted problem behavior.

Every behavior intervention plan use four strategies to answer four questions:

- What can we do to prevent the problem behavior from occurring in the first place? Antecedent Control.
- How can we teach the student to engage in appropriate replacement behaviors? Modeling & Prompting.
- How do we encourage the student when she or he engages in appropriate replacement behaviors? Reinforcement.
- What do we do if the problem behavior occurs? Extinction or Negative Consequence (Punishment).

Setting Up for Success (Prevention)

Historically, “behavior modification” was primarily interested in changing behavior by changing consequences. The child who is praised for good work is likely to do it again (*reinforcement*), the child who is scolded for cutting in the lunch line will cut less often in the future (*punishment*). Today, Positive Behavior Support places increased emphasis on preventing behaviors from occurring in the first place.

Classroom Management

The first step in preventing target behaviors is to insure that most common behavioral issues are addressed in advance through a classroom management plan. The key components of effective management plans include: 1) A small list of positively stated expectations; 2) Class time used to teach students to follow the expectations; 3) A means of tracking and acknowledging student success and providing consistent consequences for problem behaviors. Once this general practice is in place, the plan should outline prevention practices specific to the student with challenges.

Antecedent Control

Anything that happens before a behavior occurs is called an antecedent. This is the “A” in the ABC Chart described in the previous section. The most common class of classroom antecedents are questions or requests presented by the teacher. In behavioral terms, these requests are called Discriminative Stimuli (or SD’s). Additionally, many unplanned things occur before a behavior as well. The girl who did not get a good night’s sleep, the boy who was bullied on the bus coming to school, and the classroom that is sweltering because the thermostat is stuck all influence how a child may react when called upon. The environmental factors that affect a child’s behavioral response are called Establishing Operations (EOs). The person doing the teaching, seating arrangements, choices & options during assignments can all trigger challenging behaviors. The EOs are sometimes referred to as “slow triggers” and SDs the “fast triggers” of a behavior because of their temporal proximity to the target behavior. Through detailed descriptions of behavioral incidents (using the ABC Chart, for example), the Team can determine the antecedents to avoid and adjust the environment accordingly. The first questions the team should ask when writing the Behavior Intervention Plan are:

- What can we do to make it hard for the target behavior to occur in the first place?
- What can we do to make it easier for the replacement behavior to occur?

Teaching Replacement Behaviors

Replacement Behaviors

The most common error in otherwise well-designed behavior plans is that they often lack clearly defined *Replacement Behaviors* that are based upon the results of the Functional Assessment. Plans commonly focus on the behaviors that we want to stop rather than behaviors we want to start. In some cases, there will be several replacement behaviors. For example, the child who tears up his math test without completing it must first learn to say “I need a break,” or “this is too hard, can you help me” (surface function). But the goal is to educate the student, so deeper analysis should lead us to the *skill deficit* (“can’t do it”) or *motivational deficit* (“won’t do it”) that must also be addressed. Notice in this example, if the teacher recognized the assignment above the student’s ability, she might have revised the demand prior to giving it to him (*antecedent control*).

Strategies for Teaching Replacement Behaviors:

- Make sure the behavior is within the child’s repertoire of skills
- Explicitly teach the skill—do not assume the child knows what you want
- Teach the skill when the child is not upset or engaged in the problem behavior
- The strategies used to teach the replacement behavior will vary based on the level of the student’s cognitive level. For students with higher level skills, modeling the behavior in a practice session may be enough. For students with greater deficits, the skills may need to be broken down and taught a step at a time through imitation.
- Insure that the child has generalized the replacement behavior: *Generalization* means that the child will fluently engage in the behavior across settings and with different people. Fluently means both quickly and accurately (*Fluency*).
- After the child is fluent in the new behavior and has generalized its use, it is time to begin using it to replace the problem/target behavior. Identify occasions when the behavior is likely to occur and in those moments, prompt the replacement behavior.
- When the student first engages in the replacement behaviors, provide powerful, student-specific reinforcement.³
- In the early stages of replacing the behavior, it is helpful to plan and even set up events within the natural context of classroom activities that give the student a greater chance of exhibiting the replacement behavior. The proximity of the teacher, the use of prompting for the replacement, even “meaningful looks” prior to presenting the antecedent that usually triggers the Target behavior will make it more likely that the student will display the replacement behavior.

Important Behavioral Principles

From a behavioral perspective, the reason children learn problem behavior in the first place is that they are reinforced. A child who cries gets hugs, a child who throws

³ When developing a behavior plan, the team should do a formal inventory (*Reinforcement Inventory*) of all the things a child likes and is willing to work for. These include tangible reinforcers, such as food and toys, activities, such as using the computer, and social reinforcers, such as praise and adult attention. Remember that the same things may not be reinforcing to all children and that the same things may not be reinforcing to the same child under different conditions (e.g. the child who loves fish crackers may not love them right after lunch). As much as possible, the reinforcers used to reward behavior should be similar to the natural rewards common in the classroom.

schoolwork gets sent from the room, a child who pokes his peers gets attention (albeit negative attention):

The key to addressing problem behaviors is to insure that they are no longer reinforced.

Planned Ignoring

One way to not reinforce a behavior is to ignore it (*extinction*). While extinction has been shown to work for many behaviors, it is a difficult strategy to apply in many classrooms. First, everyone who interacts with the child must participate in the planned ignoring. If the teacher ignores the child who cries for attention and the aide gives her a hug, the behavior will actually become stronger. Additionally, even if everyone ignores a behavior, the child will usually increase the intensity of the behavior for a period of time before the behavior subsides. This *extinction burst* may be hard to ignore: the child who does not get attention for crying may start screaming so loudly that the teacher cannot teach. Although extinction bursts are relatively short, many classroom staff members find it difficult to continue to ignore the behavior in this context. Once again, if the team ceases the extinction procedure during the burst, it will actually make the behavior stronger.

Response Blocking & Prompting

A variation of the extinction procedure, called *response blocking*, involves physically preventing the child from engaging in the behavior. For example, the teacher who sees a child getting ready to shove another child and steps between the two children is blocking the behavior. Response blocking prevents a behavior from occurring without using any form of restraint. Because the teacher neither comments on, nor reinforces the attempted behavior, response blocking is a variant of the reinforcement procedure. *Prompting* is another variation that occurs when the behavior is ignored and the student is then prompted to demonstrate the replacement behavior. The student who says “gimme that!” to the teacher, after a pause (extinction) the teacher prompts “may I use that, please?” and the child imitates the prompted request. Care must be taken to avoid “*prompt dependency*” by gradually reducing the amount (“may I...”) or form (use a written cue card) of the prompt.

Negative Consequences (Punishment)

The most common way that problem behaviors are addressed by teachers is in some form of negative consequence imposed upon the student. In behavioral terms, any action that occurs after a behavior in order to reduce the behavior is termed a *punishment*. Punishments can take two forms: in the first, *something is done to the child* to reduce future occurrences of the behavior. The second form, *something is taken away* from the child to reduce behaviors. Due to ethical and legal considerations, this type of punishment is not frequently used in behavior intervention plans. Examples of this type of punishment include things like spanking or even yelling at the student. More common examples are usually milder in form, including public reprimands by teachers, having one’s name put on the board, and being “called to the office” over the intercom

system. These milder forms of actively punishing students often occur in classrooms, but have not been shown to be effective for the persistent and severe behaviors commonly addressed in behavior intervention plans.

Response Cost Consequences

When something is taken away from a student in order to reduce the future occurrence of a behavior it is called a *response cost punishment*. The most common example occurs when a child loses recess or other fun activities because of a behavioral infraction. While losing privileges can be a powerful deterrent for some behaviors, there are several important cautions that should be considered:

- Punishment may reduce a behavior, but it does not teach children what they *should do* instead.
- The effectiveness of punishment to reduce behaviors is greatly diminished when the punisher is not present. The teacher who runs the classroom with an iron fist may have obedient students; but if there is a substitute, that class will be the one most likely to run amok.

Systems of negative consequences (punishments) are most effective when:

- Behavioral expectations and consequences are clearly defined, put in writing and explicitly taught.
- The student participates in the determination and implementation of consequences.
- The teacher is consistent in the use of punishments. This does not mean that every child receives the same consequence for a behavior, but for each child there is consistency. This is especially important in the case of the student whose behavior plan specifies consequences that differ from the classroom management plan for a given behavior. It is important that school staff members take the time to explain to the class that “fair does not always mean equal.”

Managing Escalating Behaviors

In the perfect world, the Functional Assessment would correctly identify why the student engages in a behavior, educators identify and avoid the antecedents that trigger the behavior and would teach the replacement behavior, and the problem behavior would stop immediately. Unfortunately, children take time to learn new behaviors and are likely to continue to demonstrate problem behaviors even with the best plan in place. Therefore, a Behavior Intervention Plan must include explicit strategies to be used by staff members in responding to problem behaviors.

As mentioned in a previous section, problem behaviors often arise after a chain of prior, less severe behaviors. Each of the early behaviors either elicited a response from the adults (and possibly other children) or they were ignored. These adult responses (or non-responses) resulted in an escalation of the behavior. Therefore, managing target behaviors requires a close examination of teacher-student interactions during the escalation cycle.

The chain of behavioral escalation follows a predictable sequence beginning with an otherwise calm student encountering behavioral triggers that result in agitation, acceleration, and peaking of problem behaviors. After the behaviors peak, they eventually de-escalate and the student returns to a relatively calm state (Colvin, 2004)⁴.

Prevention strategies, described in the previous section, address the first two phases (calm phase & trigger phase). Target behaviors occur in the next three phases (agitation, acceleration, and peaking). Specific actions by teachers during the agitation and escalation phases can potentially defuse the cycle. As behaviors escalate and peak, the focus shifts from teaching to maintaining safety.

Agitation

This phase of the cycle gives the first clue that the student may be starting an escalation cycle.⁵ The clues may include increases in behaviors (e.g. whining, humming, picking at skin, etc.) or decreases in behaviors (e.g. becoming quiet, putting head on desk, staring off into space). As adults become more attuned to recognizing these behaviors, they will have greater opportunity to avert escalation.

The plan for addressing behaviors in the agitation phase is based on the understanding of function. Since the “target behavior” has not yet occurred during this phase, there is still an opportunity to pre-correct the student. Depending on function, one of the following strategies may be useful:

- Change task format/length
- Provide choices in the activity
- Allow a short break
- Allow the student to work in a different location
- Assign an alternate “job”
- “Think aloud” with the teacher

⁴ Colvin, Geoff (2004). *Managing the Cycle of Acting-Out Behavior in the Classroom*. Eugene, OR: Behavior Associates.

⁵ Vigilant teachers may already recognize other clues, based on their awareness of setting events that may increase the potential for the behavior’s occurrence.

- Peer tutoring
- Ask student to help distribute materials or other classroom tasks
- Ask the student to answer questions you're relatively sure they can answer

Acceleration

If de-escalation strategies are not effective, the student may begin to quickly accelerate toward the peak behaviors. It is important to recognize that the student's ability to verbally interact becomes greatly diminished as behaviors escalate. Teachers should engage in less talking rather than more. Additionally, they should provide more space rather than less. Make clear, simple instructions and give the student time and space. Appearing to disengage from the student and attend to other children is one strategy that allows the student a chance to pull together while avoiding confrontation. It also gives the teacher a chance to think through options.

After the student has had a chance to regroup, the teacher should return to follow through with negative consequences or reinforcing the student's successful de-escalation. It is important that the negative consequences for behaviors be clearly thought out in advance and explained to students when they are calm and cooperative. Many escalations are exacerbated by teachers who create new punishments and threats while engaged in escalation.

Peak "Target" Behavior

When student behaviors are peaking, it is not time to teach. The student who is flailing and screaming on the floor is not going to respond to "use your words." At this phase, safety of the student and others in the room are first priority. If the peak behaviors are non-disruptive but oppositional (e.g. refuses to do work and swears at the teacher), the teacher should briefly explain the consequences and move on to the other students. It is important to avoid consequences that would require physical contact with the student (e.g. "if you don't move away from her, I'm going to move you."). If the behaviors are not dangerous, but make teaching impossible, the teacher has several choices. If the student is able and willing to leave the area or room (under supervision), this is one option. If the student is oppositional, will not leave and does not appear capable of de-escalating, the teacher can leave the room with the other students. A "room clear" requires the assistance of another adult who can supervise (either the student or the rest of the class). "Room clears" should only be used after all other options are exhausted. If this method is required frequently, the behavior plan should be revised.

Restraint

Students with behaviors that represent safety issues require the team to plan for intervening in a crisis. Behavior plans are strategic plans that explicitly define why a student engages in a problem behavior and how the team plans to replace those behaviors by teaching adaptive behaviors. The occurrence of a crisis/emergency indicates that a behavior plan did not work. Crisis intervention plans do not teach behaviors; they insure the safety of the student, peers and adults. Although emergency intervention

procedures are not a part of the teaching plan, they are typically attached to the behavior plan so that all staff members are clear about their responsibilities. Any staff member involved in emergency interventions should be trained in de-escalation and crisis response procedures. If an emergency intervention is used to guarantee safety, it should be documented and reported to the parent. If emergency interventions are continually needed, the team must review and revise the FBA/BIP.

De-escalation & Debriefing

After the student has calmed down and is once again able to manage behavior, the teacher has another opportunity to teach. In the debriefing process, the teacher objectively asks the student a series of questions with the goal of assisting the student in using replacement behaviors in the future:

Debriefing Questions

- What did you do? (acknowledgement of behavior)
- Who was involved? When? Where? Why? (student's understanding of function)
- What were your choices? (alternative behaviors)
- What will you do differently next time? (replacement behaviors)
- What help do you need to do it? (teacher assistance)
- What do you need to do now? (accepting consequences)

It is often useful to create a form and write the student's comments during the debriefing. These written comments objectify and structure the discussion. They also insure the student feels heard by the teacher. Additionally, the written comments of the debriefing are also useful for the FBA/BIP team as they work to improve the teaching plan.

Frequently Asked Questions

1. What do you do if there is more than one problematic behavior?
 - Identify if there's a common behavior that precedes the set of problematic behaviors. For example, if a child consistently whines prior to throwing things, hitting staff members, and running away, focus on the whining behavior.
 - Identify if there's a common function for multiple behaviors. In the previous example, the child may engage in all the behaviors to escape a task. One replacement behavior may be enough to substitute all the behaviors.
 - Pick the behavior that addresses the most common function first. That way you can see if your intervention is working.
 - However, if the behaviors present safety issues don't wait, work on them all as quickly as you can.
2. What do you do if there is more than one function of the behavior?
 - Work on the function that affects the greatest percentage of the behaviors.
 - However, if the behaviors present safety issues don't wait, work on them all as quickly as you can.
3. How do you write a behavior plan for a high functioning high school student?
 - There is very little guidance in the literature on writing behavior plans for high functioning high school students, but these plans may make the difference between the student staying in school or dropping out.
 - The same principles apply; however, the importance of social context becomes much more relevant. Additionally, cultural responsiveness is an important consideration in developing these plans
 - Self-management of behavior becomes an important component in BIPs developed for older/higher functioning students.

4. Do you write a behavior plan for a student with mental health issues?
 - Any students with disabilities who engage in behaviors that interfere with their learning or the learning of their peers should have a behavior plan.
 - Mental health issues should be considered as a part of the plan, particularly when considering antecedents and “establishing operations” for the occurrence of behaviors. Depression, obsessive compulsive and bipolar disorders and many other mental health issues will exert predictable changes in student responses to the behavior plan. Adjusting the plan accordingly will make intervention more effective.

5. How do you know which data tools to use?
 - The “topography” of a behavior will determine which tool is most practical. High frequency behaviors do not lend themselves to detailed descriptive data. Continuous behaviors (such as crying) do not lend themselves to tools that only measure frequencies.

6. Do you write a behavior plan for a non-classified student?
 - Teams are encouraged, but not required by law to develop FBA/BIPs for non-classified students.
 - As part of the Response to Intervention Model, problem-solving teams (e.g. the SST) work to intervene with non-classified students to avoid special education referrals. When the referral issue is behavior, it is appropriate (and best practice) for the team to develop a behavior plan to address the student’s need in a non-classified setting

7. Who collects the data? How long do you collect it?
 - The team should assign roles early in the process (at the 1st meeting). If the student has a 1:1 aide, that person should be trained to collect the data. All the rest of the classroom staff should be available to fill in if the aide is unavailable.
 - The teacher should take primary responsibility for data collection in most cases. Since the teacher is responsible for so many things in the classroom, effort must be taken to insure that the collection procedures are quick and efficient.
 - It is very important that if there are periods of time when behavioral data is not collected, the data sheets note this. Otherwise, blank spaces suggest the behavior didn’t occur.
 - For students with complex and frequent behavior challenges, using an outside observer to take systematic sampling of the behavior is necessary. The time of the sample should be chosen to correspond with the times of greatest likelihood of occurrences.
 - After baseline data is collected and the plan is implemented, the team may choose to adjust to a sampling method, rather than collecting data for every occurrence. This will depend on the behavior; those presenting safety risks will need to be more closely monitored.

- Under no circumstances should the team stop collecting data after the plan is implemented. Behavior plans that do not continue to include data collection and analysis quickly become irrelevant documents in the student file.
8. What is the role of the parent in the FBA/BIP process?
- Research has shown that plans that include parents in the development and implementation are far more effective than those developed exclusively by school staff members. Parents are often experts on their children's likes and dislikes and are frequently witnesses to skills that their children do not readily exhibit in the classroom.
 - Parents observe their children under very different environmental conditions. Usually, there are fewer demands and greater amounts of attention in the home environment. Collecting data in the home setting can help the team develop accurate functional hypotheses.
 - Parents are often well situated to provide children with the opportunity for reinforcement after a day of classroom success. Watching a movie or spending a half hour on a computer can be logistically challenging during the school day, but more easily done at home. However, care should be taken to explain to the students what behavior they are being reinforced for doing (or not doing).
9. What is the role of the teacher in the FBA/BIP process?
- The teacher is the professional who works most closely with the student. Effective behavior plans require a commitment by the teacher to:
 - Collect data accurately
 - Contribute to the development of intervention strategies
 - Implement the interventions consistently
 - The best behavior plans are usually the ones where the teacher take the lead role, rather than the back seat.
10. What is the role of the student in the FBA/BIP process?
- The role of the student will differ, depending on maturity and cognitive ability. Even young and non-verbal students can contribute to the plan by sharing what they like and are willing to work for.
 - Older and higher functioning students benefit from behavior plans that have a strong self-management component. When students learn to take data on their own behavior, they make the connection between the behavior and consequences (both positive and negative) much more quickly.
11. Who should get a copy of the plan?
- Everyone who is working on the behavior should have access to the plan. The bus driver and cafeteria worker should be in on the plan if the target behaviors occur in those settings.

- Parents should have a copy of the plan, which is shared with them at the CSE meeting. The student's file should also contain a copy of the plan, but in New York the plan is not attached to the IEP.

12. How many times should a plan be revised before pursuing the next step?

- Minor changes to the plan can be made as needed without calling a CSE meeting. Even large changes can be made, so long as the new strategies are not more punitive or restrictive. Behavior plans will change and evolve over the course of months and this is to be expected.
- If emergency interventions and restraint procedures continue to occur at the same or greater rate than during the baseline period, the FBA/BIP requires major changes and a formal review through the CSE process.
- If, after several formal reviews and systematic changes to the behavior plan, the behavior continues to occur at or above baseline levels, the team should consider whether the student may need a higher level of support services.

13. What other supports are there other than an aide?

- Support is not a person, it is a process. An aide that does not understand effective processes is more of a hindrance than a support.
- On-going consultation with a behavior analyst, psychologist, social worker or even an administrator can help highlight effective interventions.
- Many problem behaviors result from a skill deficit. Skill building groups that focus on social or academic deficits can increase a student's competency and thus reduce problem behaviors. Many schools have support programs for developing social skills and Academic Intervention Services (AIS) that can provide additional assistance in building academic skills

14. How do you address behaviors while data is being collected?

- That depends on the severity of the behavior. Behaviors that are dangerous should be addressed immediately, with safety as the primary concern.
- Those behaviors that are extremely disruptive and bring classroom activities to a complete halt may also be addressed even before the plan is developed. The strategies attempted during this baseline should be documented to evaluate their effectiveness.
- For other behaviors, it is useful to collect baseline data without changing the interventions until a stable assessment is completed. This could be three days or up to two weeks. Establishing a stable baseline will insure that we will know if our interventions are successful.

15. How will we be trained in data collection?

- Most district school psychologists are trained in data collection and can share their skills with the team.

- This manual on FBA/BIPs includes samples of behavioral data collection tools as well as information on how to use them.

16. How long should the behavior plan be used?

- The behavior plan should continue until the pre-determined levels of target and replacement behaviors are reached. The discontinuation of a behavior plan necessitates a formal CSE meeting. Frequently, effective behavior plans are left in place until the child's next annual review.

17. How frequently should the behavior plan be reviewed?

- That depends on the severity of the behavior. Behaviors that are extreme (dangerous or highly disruptive) and frequent, should be reviewed weekly. For less severe behaviors, bi-weekly meetings may be sufficient.
- The team leader should review the student data prior to a scheduled meeting to determine if the meeting is necessary. If the student's target behavior is continuing to decrease and the replacement behavior is increasing, a summary report on progress may be shared with the team via email instead of through a formal meeting. However, it is important that the meetings are regularly scheduled to insure the team members are sticking with the plan.

Appendix A: Synopsis

Individual Intervention Plan Synopsis

Date _____

Student's Name _____ Birthdate _____

Intervention Team _____

Form Completed By _____ Position _____

Target Behavior	Replacement Behavior
Topographies/Conditions	
Frequency Intensity: Duration: Time of Day: Type of Activity: Staff Member:	Frequency Intensity: Duration: Time of Day: Type of Activity: Staff Member:
Function: Behavior's Presumed Function (choose one main function and specific conditions):	
<input type="checkbox"/> Escape from/avoidance of:	
<input type="checkbox"/> Gains or seeks tangible/activity:	
<input type="checkbox"/> Gains or seeks attention from:	
<input type="checkbox"/> Sensory:	
Establishing Operations:	
Data System: <input type="checkbox"/> ABC <input type="checkbox"/> Scatterplot <input type="checkbox"/> FA Chart <input type="checkbox"/> Interval = <input type="checkbox"/> Other	
Collector(s): _____ Review frequency: _____	
To do so the target behavior(s) don't occur: _____ To do if the target behavior(s) occur: _____	
To do so the replacement behavior(s) occur: _____ To do if the replacement behavior(s) occur: _____	
Primary Reinforcers	Secondary Reinforcers

Appendix B: Scatter Plot

Scatterplot

Client: _____

Month: _____

Behavior:

Intensity: level 1 Blue
 (optional) level 2 Green
 level 3 Red

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31
8:00-8:30																															
8:30-9:00																															
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2:30-3:00																															

Behavior:

Intensity: level 1 Blue
 (optional) level 2 Green
 level 3 Red

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31
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2:30-3:00																															

Instructions: Draw a line through the time intervals when the child was not present or data not collected.
 Plotting: Draw a line for the first two incidents; fill in triangles for additional four incidents.

1 Incident = <input style="width: 20px; height: 15px;" type="checkbox"/>	4 Incidents = <input style="width: 20px; height: 15px;" type="checkbox"/>
2 Incidents = <input style="width: 20px; height: 15px;" type="checkbox"/>	5 Incidents = <input style="width: 20px; height: 15px;" type="checkbox"/>
3 Incidents = <input style="width: 20px; height: 15px;" type="checkbox"/>	6 Incidents = <input style="width: 20px; height: 15px;" type="checkbox"/>

Intensity: If measuring Intensity, Define 3 levels of Intensity and use separate color for each

