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The Link between Functional Behavioral Assessments (FBAs) and Behavioral Intervention Plans (BIPs). ERIC Digest E592.

The 1997 Amendments to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) require functional behavioral assessments (FBAs) and behavioral intervention plans (BIPs) to be conducted prior to a change in placement or suspension for more than 10 days based on inappropriate behavior(s) for students with disabilities. When an FBA and a BIP are developed, written, and implemented, both become part of the student's IEP records.

Most research efforts have focused on procedures for conducting an FBA. Fitzsimmons (1998) summarized the typical processes of conducting FBAs, which include five core steps: (1) verify the seriousness of the problem; (2) define the problem behavior in concrete terms; (3) collect data on possible causes of problem behavior; (4) analyze the data; and (5) formulate and test a hypothesis. However, individuals who conduct FBAs do not necessarily incorporate these data into the student's BIP.

LINK BETWEEN ASSESSMENT AND INTERVENTION

Research has demonstrated that FBAs can lead to the development of effective, proactive BIPs (Gable, Hendrickson, & Sasso, 1995). Depending on the hypotheses resulting from the FBA, the BIP might include changing the variables that precede the inappropriate behavior(s), teaching alternative forms of appropriate behavior, and providing reinforcement for appropriate behavior (Flannery, O'Neill, & Horner, 1995). Thus, BIPs tied to the FBA data are child-, behavior-, and setting-specific (Iwata, Vollmer, & Zarcone, 1990; Rutherford & Nelson, 1995) and therefore enhance the likelihood that the expected behavioral change will occur. Also, an FBA can aid in the early identification (Feil, Severson, & Walker, 1995) and understanding future behavior problems (Iwata et al., 1990).
Scott and Nelson (1999) have proposed a ten-step process to help school personnel infuse the FBA data into the BIP:

1. Determine the function of the undesired behavior. Based on data from the FBA, understanding the purpose the behavior serves for the student is requisite to the BIP process. Common functions for school-based behavioral problems include gaining teacher or peer attention, escaping or avoiding specific tasks or persons, or gaining access to specific items.

2. Determine an appropriate replacement behavior. After the inappropriate behavior has been objectively defined and its function has been identified, an alternative, appropriate replacement behavior is selected. A replacement behavior should be readily acceptable to others in the environment (socially valid) and serve the same function as the inappropriate behavior. For example, if a student's inappropriate behavior is reinforced by teacher attention, then the replacement behavior also should result in teacher attention. It is important that school personnel agree on what constitutes an appropriate

replacement behavior given the specific data (e.g., persons, settings, conditions) gleaned from the FBA. O'Neill et al. (1997) suggest that in some cases, a primary (i.e., long-term) replacement behavior needs to be identified along with several short-term replacement behaviors. These short-term behaviors are taught, modeled, and reinforced to assist the student in achieving the replacement behavior and the written behavioral goal and objective.

3. Determine when the replacement behavior should occur. Once a replacement behavior is identified, we must teach the student to use the new skill. This is accomplished by determining the conditions under which that behavior will serve the same function. A student who uses a replacement behavior when reinforcement is unavailable is less likely to attempt the replacement behavior again, even when reinforcement is likely. Thus, we must clearly define and teach the specific conditions under which the replacement behavior should be used. The student must be taught to discriminate the conditions in which to use the replacement behavior in order to achieve the desired outcome for it. At the same time, the conditions under which reinforcement is unlikely to occur for the replacement behavior should be identified and taught as non-examples.

4. Design a teaching sequence. As with academic instruction, social and behavioral skills need to be taught through a planned sequence of instruction within ongoing school routines. After steps 1-3 are completed, a plan for teaching the replacement behavior is implemented by providing the student with examples and non-examples of when, where, and with whom to display the replacement behavior, what he/she will gain by exhibiting the new behavior, and the circumstances in which the replacement behavior is not likely to be reinforced. Actually reinforcing the replacement behavior during the examples may make its outcomes clearer.

5. Manipulate the environment to increase the probability of success. Based on the FBA data (e.g., specific settings, people, times, tasks), the student's environment should be arranged so that reinforcing each instance of the replacement behavior is likely. However, reinforcement will not be possible if the student does not use the replacement behavior. This step involves procedures to increase the likelihood that the replacement behavior will be used at the appropriate time so that reinforcement can be delivered. Prompts, cues, and pre-correction strategies may be used to increase the likelihood of replacement behaviors. As a general rule, we should use the least intrusive prompts necessary to predict success.

6. Manipulate the environment to decrease the probability of failure. The environment is also analyzed to identify and remove barriers that might prevent the replacement behavior from being demonstrated under the appropriate conditions. For example, if we know that a student is unlikely to engage in a replacement behavior when seated next to a particular peer, then we also know that reinforcement will be unlikely. We can increase the likelihood of success by removing the predictors of failure. That is, we can

separate the student from the peer during initial stages of intervention so that the student can receive reinforcement for appropriate replacement behavior.

7. Determine how positive behavior will be reinforced. The goal of this step is to provide natural (functionally equivalent and naturally occurring) reinforcement for replacement behaviors. Initially, reinforcement must be immediate and consistent. But over time, reinforcement will be delivered on a more natural schedule by the natural environment. A plan is needed to assist school personnel and researchers to naturally reinforce instances of the replacement behavior. At this step, reinforcement for displays of the replacement behavior will vary in terms of type (e.g., verbal or tangible reinforcement) and schedule (e.g., reinforcement every second display of the replacement behavior).

8. Determine consequences for instances of problem behavior. Even the most appropriate BIP will not immediately negate the student's history of reinforcement for prior inappropriate behavior. Therefore, the BIP should include consequences for inappropriate behavior and strategies for their use. This step clearly establishes a distinction between outcomes for the replacement behavior as opposed to the consequences of inappropriate behavior. Such a clear distinction increases the chances that the replacement behavior will be used more often, since the function of that behavior is being reinforced.

9. Develop a data collection system. In order to ascertain whether the replacement behavior has been effective in decreasing the frequency, duration, or intensity of the targeted inappropriate behavior, data must be collected. Data should be collected on the targeted behavior before intervention to provide a baseline and during intervention. Comparing baseline and intervention data facilitates evaluation of intervention effectiveness. School personnel and researchers should carefully select a data collection method that best matches the settings in which the BIP will be implemented.

10. Develop behavioral goals and objectives. To assess overall effectiveness and positive changes in the student's behavior, school personnel and researchers should write measurable behavioral goals and objectives related to the replacement behavior. These student-specific behavioral goals and objectives provide standards for evaluating whether changes in the frequency, duration, and/or intensity of the target and replacement behaviors have met objective criteria. O'Neill and colleagues (1997) provide examples of measurable and objective behavioral goals.

VIEWING FBAS AND BIPS AS A UNIT

Overall, it may be more appropriate to view the IDEA mandates on FBAs and BIPs as a single, continuous process rather as a separate process and a subsequent product. Such a view may ensure that (a) the FBA is not interpreted to be "an intervention in itself" (Nelson, Roberts, Mathur, & Rutherford, 1999), (b) the FBA does not occur without the intention of developing a BIP, (c) the FBA data are incorporated into an

actual BIP, and (d) both the FBA data and the BIP become integral components of the student's IEP (stressing both academic and behavioral instruction and goals). BIPs tied to the function maintaining the student's behavior (as identified through the FBA), which are consistently implemented and continuously monitored, may not only increase the student's repertoire of appropriate behaviors, but also may have positive effects on the student's educational outcomes.

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