

Function-Based Support: An Overview

Students benefit from **function-based support**—when educators consider the specific purpose or “function” of behavior when selecting, implementing, and adjusting practices to support students’ social, emotional, and behavioral (SEB) needs. Decades of research document positive effects of implementing function-based behavior support for students with a wide range of SEB needs (Lloyd et al., 2019; Walker et al., 2018).

Continuum of Function-Based Support

Within a positive behavioral interventions and supports (PBIS) framework, educators use a function-based approach to (a) prevent contextually inappropriate behaviors and (b) teach and encourage SEB skills across **all tiers** of support.

- **Tier 1:** Educators use function-based thinking to anticipate common challenges and select functionally-relevant classroom behavior support strategies.
- **Tier 2:** Educators use function-based problem solving to identify and enhance the effectiveness of targeted supports for students who require an additional layer of support to be successful.
- **Tier 3:** For students with more persistent, complex, and/or intensive SEB needs, educators conduct a Functional Behavioral Assessment (FBA) to inform development and implementation of an individualized, multi-component, and function-based behavior support plan (BSP).

Implementing function-based support as a preventative practice in Tiers 1 and 2 can help to reduce the number of students needing more complex, resource-intensive supports and interventions in Tier 3 (Filter & Alvarez, 2012).

Critical Features of an Effective FBA

An effective FBA collects information from multiple informants, using multiple methods, to document patterns in behavior over time. In particular, an effective FBA includes the following critical features related to process and outcomes.

FBA Process	FBA Outcomes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Examine patterns in contextually inappropriate behavior via a records review • Describe experiences of the student, family member(s), and educator(s) via interviews • Document levels and patterns of current behavior via direct observations • Summarize data to inform FBA outcomes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Define and document baseline levels of contextually inappropriate behavior(s) • Document aspects of the environment that occasion (triggering antecedent) and maintain (reinforcing consequence) behavior • Identify function (i.e., get/obtain or escape/avoid specific stimuli)

Critical Features of an Effective BSP

An effective BSP is designed to (a) prevent contextually inappropriate behavior and prompt contextually appropriate behavior; (b) teach and reinforce SEB and academic skills; and (c) respond when the student engages in contextually inappropriate behavior.

BSP Strategies	BSP Implementation Process
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Antecedent strategies to prevent contextually inappropriate behavior (e.g., modify antecedent, provide choice, prompt) • Behavior strategies to teach functionally-relevant SEB and academic skills • Consequence strategies to reinforce SEB and academic skills, and effectively respond to SEB errors 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Document selected practices in BSP • Train and coach implementers in BSP strategies • Monitor implementation fidelity and outcomes • Adjust (e.g., modify, enhance, fade) support based on data

These categories of antecedent, behavior, and consequence strategies remain the same across all behavior support plans. However, the way function-based supports are designed and implemented can vary depending on the nature and intensity of a student's SEB need (Scott et al., 2010).

Complex vs. Basic FBA and BSP

For the most complex and intense student behaviors, the FBA process is likely to include multiple methods of assessment and data collection across a number of settings, days, and times. This process then results in a complex BSP including specific safety or crisis intervention procedures and wrap-around supports. However, many students who need behavior support can benefit from reasonably simple adaptations based on an assessment of the function of their behavior. Students who exhibit mild to moderate problem behaviors (e.g., talk-outs, off-task behaviors) that occur most often during a limited number of school routines may be successful with a simplified FBA process utilizing primarily indirect sources of data (e.g., teacher and student interviews, records reviews) and a streamlined BSP with strategies that are feasible for general educators to implement in typical classroom contexts (Strickland-Cohen & Horner, 2015).

Summary: Big Idea

By building a continuum of function-based support within a PBIS framework, educators can effectively support students' SEB needs.

References

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