Empowering Parents: Understanding Your Child’s Behavior

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Presentation Objectives

• Understand “why” a behavior is occurring

• Learn how to assess your child’s behavior

• Review treatment options for challenging behaviors
1) Behaviors are *learned*
   - Toilet Training
   - Tantrum when told to pick up toys
Learning Process

Child: Runs away and screams when given command

Parent: Removes the demand

Child’s Refusal Behavior Reinforced
Learning Process: Parent-Child Dyad

Child: Runs away and screams when given command

Parent: Removes the demand

Child: Stops screaming and running away

Parent's removal of demand is reinforced

Child's noncompliance is reinforced
The Grocery Store

- Ben and his mom are at the check-out line in the grocery store. Ben asks his mom for a candy bar and his mom says “no”. Ben begins to loudly repeat his request.
- Mom repeats “no” a few times and ignores Ben’s requests while placing the groceries on the conveyer belt.
- Ben begins screaming “I want a candy bar” and crying. Mom ignores the crying and screaming for about 45 seconds, but eventually gives Ben the candy bar.
- Ben immediately calms down and patiently holds his candy bar to be scanned. He enjoys eating the candy on the way home.

WHAT HAS BEN LEARNED?
Charlie is a 7 year old male who has difficulty falling asleep, as well as frequent waking.

He had an established (rigid) bedtime routine:
- Soothing activities – Bath, books
- His mom would then lie next to him in bed until he fell asleep
- If his mom attempts to leave, Charlie has tantrums involving crying, whining, and leaving the room. He immediately calms down when his mom returns.
- When he wakes at night, Charlie goes and wakes his mom and asks her to return to his room, which his mother eventually does.
How to Think about Behaviors: 4 Key Concepts

2) Behaviors can be *Adaptive or Maladaptive*
   - getting dressed, putting seatbelt on
   - hitting, screaming, elopement
3) Behaviors are forms of communication!
   - What is my child trying to say through this behavior???
How to Think about Behaviors: 4 Key Concepts

4) Behaviors serve a *function*
   • Their job is to get a need (or want) met
4 Possible Functions of Behavior

1) Escape: "Get away" from aversive event/stimuli 
   (task, people, place)

2) Tangible: "Get what I want"
   (preferred toy, food, video)

3) Attention: "Pay attention to me"
   (peer, caregiver, sibling)

4) Automatic: "I like the way that feels"
   (behaviors that "feel good" or reduce negative internal state)
Three-Term Contingency

Antecedent

Behavior

Consequence
Antecedent

Trigger that ‘sets off’ the behavior
Antecedent

- Demands:
  - “Sit down”
  - “get dressed”

- Restrictions:
  - Saying “no”
  - Taking toys/preferred food away

- Onset of “negative” stimuli
  - Loud noises
  - Crowded spaces
Activity Sheet Example

Identifying Antecedents

#1. Susan hits Fred after he takes the book she is looking at.
Antecedent: ____________________________________________

#2. Mary starts to interrupt her mother by screaming when she is talking on the telephone.
Antecedent: ____________________________________________

#3. Randy throws his vegetables after his mother puts them on his plate.
Antecedent: ____________________________________________
Behavior

- Anything the person does
- Observed
  - describe what I would see if I were watching
- Measured
  - Timed
  - Counted
• What comes after behavior
• All behaviors have a consequence
• Planned or unplanned
Let’s Put This Into Practice

• Look for:
  • Antecedents
  • Behaviors
  • Consequences
  • Function(s) of the child’s behavior
  • What is the child learning in this situation?
## Behavior Chart

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date/Time of day</th>
<th>What happened before</th>
<th>What happened during (describe each person’s behavior)</th>
<th>What happened after (consequences)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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Video Vignette Example
Behavior Chart

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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mom said no</td>
<td>Tantrum (stomp, yell)</td>
<td>Mom gives him the brownie</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>FUNCTION??</td>
<td>To “Get what he wants”</td>
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<td>WHAT HAS THE CHILD LEARNED IN THIS SITUATION?</td>
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</table>
Susie is playing a game on the computer when her mother tells her that it is time for her to turn it off so she can start her homework. Susie falls to the floor, screaming and kicking. In an attempt to stop Susie from waking up her baby sister from her nap, Susie’s mother tells her that she can have a few more minutes on the computer.

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<th>Antecedent</th>
<th>Behavior</th>
<th>Consequence</th>
<th>Possible Function</th>
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How Function Informs Treatment

**Example 1**
- Turns classwork into paper airplanes
- Talks to neighbors
- Makes disruptive noises

**Example 2**
- Turns classwork into paper airplanes
- Talks to neighbors
- Makes disruptive noises

TEACHER SENDS TO PRINCIPAL

Behavior is “escape-maintained”

Behavior is maintained by peer attention
Small doses: Problem behavior may be more likely when a task or outing is long

- (Clearly Defined) Solutions:
  - Smaller tasks (clean up)
  - Shorter duration tasks (family outings, meals, self-care)
Prevention Strategies

Change the order of events: Problem behavior may be more likely when asked to transition off of preferred activities

• Solutions:
  • Ensure routines are designed so that fun activities occur after demanding activities
Prevention Strategies

Change how you ask: Problem behavior may be more likely during demands, especially if the child has difficulty with verbal instructions or if the demand feels “unexpected”

• Solutions:
  • Choices
  • Warnings (verbal, timers)
Prevention Strategies

Use Visual or Auditory Cues: Enhance understanding of expectations ("hearing" vs. "seeing")

First

work

computer

Then
Visual Schedules

Helps with understanding of information provided and addresses difficulties with transitions
Reinforcement

Identify reinforcer and behavior to increase
  • Ensure behavior is reasonable (to start)
  • Properly weighted “scales of justice”

Reinforcement vs. Bribery
Ignore Child AND Behavior
  • Attention seeking behaviors
  • Nonaggressive, nondestructive
    • tantrums

Ignore Child, NOT Behavior
  • Dangerous behaviors
    • Running into street

Ignore Behavior, NOT Child
  • High frequency behaviors
    • Repetitive questions
• Strategies can take time to work
  • Child is having to ‘relearn’ new behaviors
• Protests can be a sign that the strategy is working!
• Pick one Behavior/Strategy at a time
• Consistency, predictability, and follow-through are your keys to success.