



FACT SHEET NUMBER 12

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POSITIVE BEHAVIORAL SUPPORT

Q: "My student has severely challenging behaviors. My behavior modification program doesn't seem to go far enough. What's the next step in programming for him?"

A: The answer is comprehensive positive behavioral support planning.

Through the years we've learned to use behavior modification principals to effect changes in the behavior of our hard-to-serve students. How can we get these changes to generalize to other settings? What else should be done so that the changes aren't temporary? The answer to both questions is to begin with good behavior modification and continue with positive behavioral support.

A positive behavioral support plan is developed for each individual, and is based upon information gathered across all environments the person contacts. Everyone serving the person, plus family and friends, is invited to become a member of the team which will develop the plan. The plan developed by the team is intended to be comprehensive, to result in life-style changes for the individual.

The Community: The family of the individual, his/her friends, the people serving that person, and any other interested people, make up a network which is that person's community. The concept of community is a strong one, evoking feelings of connectedness and ongoing involvement. The word "community" was chosen to describe the team surrounding the individual because of its powerful and comprehensive connotations. Members of the community will help to create a personal profile of the individual, develop a plan of action from information gathered in the personal profile, and commit as a group to implement the plan and to meet again.

Functional Assessment: Functional assessment is a process for identifying clear, predictive relationships between events in the person's environment and the occurrences of a target behavior.

(See also FACT SHEET #26 "[Functional Behavioral Assessment](#)")

Members of the person's community will gather data about settings, people, events, physiological states, and skill deficits which appear to affect the individual's behavior. The team will then develop hypotheses about the relationship of these things to the person's behavior.

The Curriculum: Behaviors are messages. Individuals with serious disabilities use the methods available to them to communicate to the people in their communities what they prefer and what they dislike. Generally, when a behavior occurs it is an expression of (a) avoidance, or (b) desire to obtain.

The best way to positively affect a person's life is to manipulate the settings, people interacting with the person, required tasks, health status, and level of skill development for that person.

"But aren't there things that *have* to be in the individual's curriculum?"

The individual's community will have gathered thorough information on what aspects of the person's curriculum seem to be causing the problem behavior. It may be that it's the manner in which content has been presented to the person, or the manner in which he/she has been required to complete a task, rather than the essential feature of the content which is causing the problem. Those things can be changed or adjusted, leaving the content in place. Sometimes the problem is the actual content. The community/team will meet to decide just how important to the individual's life-style that content is. With ongoing investigation, alternate content or alternate skills could be substituted for the problem content. People without disabilities can make choices. Choice-making opportunities are essential in effective curricula, and lead to better quality of life and higher level cognitive skill development.

Life-style Enhancement: The comprehensive positive behavioral support plan can result in a new life-style for someone who would otherwise be denied a life of social interaction, employment, happiness and dignity. The community surrounding an individual will consider service issues for that person on an ongoing basis, making assessments and adjustments in the plan throughout his/her life. Underlying all their decisions will be the question, "Would I want to change places with this person, to live his/her life?" Somehow, that question seems to clarify most decisions.

Resources

Reichle, J. & Wacker, D. (Eds.) (1993). Communicative alternatives to challenging behavior Integrating functional assessment and intervention strategies. Paul H. Brookes Publishing Company, Baltimore.

Bailey, J.S., & Pyles, D.A.M. (1989). Behavioral diagnostics. In E. Cipani (Ed.), The treatment of severe behavior disorders: Behavior analysis approaches, (pp. 85-107). Washington, D.C.: American Association on Mental Retardation.

Dunlap, G., Ferro, J. & dePerczel, M. (in press). Nonaversive behavioral intervention in the community. In E. Cipani & F. Spooner (Eds.), Curricular and instructional approaches for persons with severe handicaps. New York: Allyn and Bacon.