



PROJECT ACCESS FACT SHEET #26



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FUNCTIONAL BEHAVIORAL ASSESSMENT

Ever wonder what the federal law actually says regarding functional behavioral assessments?

The terminology Functional Behavioral Assessment (FBA) first entered federal law in the 1997 amendments to IDEA. The law mentioned FBA in the evaluation section and under procedural safeguards.

The current law, IDEA 2004, mentions positive behavior supports several times. FBAs are specifically discussed under discipline procedures in two places: Section 300.530 (d)(ii) and Section 300.530 (f)(1)(i). The first mention refers to procedures to be used when a child is removed from his/her current placement for misbehavior, and states "a child with a disability who is removed from the child's current placement pursuant to other portions of this section must (ii) receive, as appropriate, a functional behavioral assessment, and behavior intervention services and modifications, that are designed to address the behavior violation **so that it does not recur.**"

The second mention refers to procedures to be used during a manifestation determination, and states "If the LEA, the parent, and relevant members of the IEP Team make the determination that the conduct was a manifestation of the child's disability, the IEP Team must (1) Either (i) conduct a functional behavioral assessment, unless the LEA had conducted a functional behavioral assessment before the behavior that resulted in the change of placement occurred, and implement a behavioral intervention plan for the child; or (ii) if a behavioral intervention plan already has been developed, review the behavioral intervention plan, and modify it, as necessary, to address the behavior."

PBIS

Research on Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS) for persons with disabilities generated the FBA as a procedure teachers could use to choose effective behavior interventions. Prior to PBIS theory and research, teachers had to rely on clinically trained behavior experts to prescribe interventions for the children they served in their classrooms. Those prescribed programs (traditional behavior modification) often caused change initially, but the changes didn't transfer to other environments and weren't maintained over time. The PBIS movement has empowered teachers and parents, and made lasting positive change for children and adults with disabilities.

FBA

Before choosing any intervention, positive or not, it's absolutely necessary to conduct an FBA. A functional behavioral assessment can be a formal or informal assessment to identify the function or purpose that the behavior serves for the student, so classroom interventions and behavior support plans can be developed to improve behavior. The assessment could include observations of the behavior and interviews with family, teachers, and the student to determine the incidence, antecedent, and response of the targeted problem behavior.

The universally recognized best resource for information on conducting an FBA and developing a behavior intervention plan (BIP) is *Functional Assessment and Program Development for Problem Behavior: A Practical Handbook* by O'Neill, Homer, Albin, Sprague, Storey, and Newton (1997). ISBN: 0-534-26022-5. Project ACCESS emphasizes this resource in its training workshops and encourages each school district to have a copy on hand.

BIP

A good behavior intervention plan is based on the research proven procedures of positive behavioral supports. The first principal of PBIS is to support appropriate behavior by manipulating the antecedents (the circumstances) so that the child can more easily behave appropriately. Teachers and parents can modify and adapt the physical environment and the expectations of the child in that environment, as well as teach the child new skills. Reinforcing appropriate behavior is more effective than punishing inappropriate behavior, and makes each of us have a more pleasant day!

A behavior intervention plan could include the following eight components:

1. a definition of the target problem behavior in observable terms;
2. identification of goals that address the problem behavior (increase, decrease behavior);
3. a clear statement of the targeted replacement (desired) behavior and when/where/how it will occur;
4. evaluation criteria of the plan and schedule for evaluation;
5. criteria for acceptable performance of the replacement behavior by the child;
6. an outline of interventions, instruction (curricula), and resources that will be used to implement the plan;
7. a description of in-service of staff who will implement and monitor the plan;
8. a statement of each person's responsibility in implementing the plan.
9. It's acceptable to include a description of the procedures to follow in extreme circumstances, such as when the inappropriate behavior is already occurring and has become dangerous to the child or others. A strong statement should precede and follow this procedure indicating that it's to be used in emergencies only, and is NOT an instructional intervention.

The proactive first step:

It is apparent that a lot of work is required whenever strong disciplinary action follows a behavioral incident. It is also apparent that the work load would be significantly less if a student's behavior issues were functionally assessed at the time of the initial evaluation and an intervention plan was implemented along with the IEP. A good functional assessment of behavior can lead to more effective programming and eliminate many problem behaviors before they happen. The first step may be to include a functional assessment of behavior in the evaluation plan for each student for whom problem behavior might be an issue.

While it is not required to conduct a functional behavioral assessment proactively, school districts are strongly encouraged to review the circumstances that led to the child's behavior problem. Best practice research has indicated that interventions which address the function (message) of a behavior are more successful in affecting behavior change.

FBA procedures:

Project ACCESS trains individuals to use FBA procedures through its workshops. You can find a Project ACCESS workshop near you by going to www.missouristate.edu/access and clicking on the training opportunities link. Another online resource is www.pbis.org, home of the Positive Behavior Interventions & Supports research consortium. Your district professional development committee could investigate training opportunities for you and your school colleagues, and recommend the purchase of print and video resources for your school's professional library.

The resource noted above by O'Neill, et al. is an excellent place to start the learning process. Additional sources for information include the following:

E. Carr, L. Levin, G. McConnachie, J. Carlson, D. Kemp, & C. Smith. (1994). *Communication-Based Intervention for Problem Behavior: A User's Guide for Producing Positive Change*. Baltimore, MD: Paul H. Brookes Publishing Co. ISBN: 1-55766-159-6.

J. Reichle & D. Wacker. (1993). *Communicative Alternatives to Challenging Behavior: Integrating Functional Assessment and Intervention Strategies*. Baltimore, MD: Paul H. Brookes Publishing Co. ISBN: 1-55766-082-4.

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