# Managing Behaviors and the IEP

Behavior is identified as how people act, function, and/or react in a particular situation. Children can have behaviors related to their disability that are considered inappropriate. When behaviors interfere with the child's or others' ability to learn, a functional behavioral assessment can be used to examine the behavior(s) and develop a behavior intervention plan to manage, replace, reduce or eliminate the behavior(s). Children can be taught appropriate behavior skills once behaviors are analyzed and understood.

**Step One**
Once an inappropriate behavior or behaviors, have been identified by the teacher, parent, or Individualized Education Program (IEP) Team, a functional behavioral assessment (FBA) can be conducted.
- When describing the behavior use descriptive words like kicking, hitting with hands, screaming, or throwing book.
- If there are multiple concerns it is important to prioritize which behavior should be targeted first.

**Step Two**
Begin gathering data about the behavior.
- When does it occur?
- Where does it occur?
- What happened immediately before and after the behavior?
- What happens after the behavior occurs?
- What has worked to prevent the behavior?
- What has worked to reduce the behavior?
- How do others, including adults, respond?

**Step Three**
The Team will analyze the information collected about the behavior.
- Is there a pattern of when or where the behaviors occur?
- Is there a consistent trigger to the behavior?

- What is reinforcing the behavior?
- What is the function of the behavior?

Function refers to a consequence that has reinforced or strengthened a behavior; it's why a child continues to engage in the behavior. An event that occurs after a behavior and increases the chance that the behavior will occur again is a consequence. Not all consequences are negative corrective actions. Typically, the function of the behavior will fall in to one of two categories: either it helps the child gain something or it helps the child avoid something. It is very important to be accurate in identifying the function to prevent implementing an intervention that inadvertently makes the situation worse.

**Step Four**
The IEP Team then develops a behavior intervention plan (BIP) based on the conclusions drawn from the analyzed information. Behavior plans describe what adults will do to manage the behavior.
- Prevent – avoid or change the antecedents (triggers) so that the problem behavior is less likely to occur.
- Teach – a new behavior to replace the problem behavior. Replacement behaviors should serve the same function as the inappropriate behavior but, ideally, cannot be done at the same time as the targeted behavior.
- Extinguish – do not allow the problem behavior to be reinforced so that it weakens over time.
- Reinforce – the new replacement behavior so that it strengthens over time.

**Step Five**
Record data to monitor progress; there are a variety of forms available to document and track data to determine how well the plan is working. As new data is collected it may be necessary for the IEP Team to modify the behavior intervention plan.

**The following are examples of the function of some behaviors and interventions.**

Behaviors can arise when the child is trying to **obtain** something through problem behavior. Here are a few examples of behavioral interventions.

- When the child seeks to obtain adult attention, feedback, or help:

  ➢ Directly teach routines and expectations for accessing the adult.
  ➢ Make sure tasks and activities match the child's current ability.
  ➢ Directly teach steps for solving problems, in order to promote independence.

- When the child seeks to obtain peer attention or social interaction with peers:

  ➢ Directly teach relevant social interaction skills, practice in context, and give positive reinforcement when skills are used.
  ➢ Teach about accepting and including others, and review these expectations frequently.
  ➢ Teach words and strategies to use if others are trying to get their attention in an unwelcome way.

Behaviors can arise when the child is trying to **escape or avoid** something. Here are a few examples of behavioral interventions.

- When the child avoids situations, activities or work:

  ➢ Teach appropriate ways to ask for a break or activity change.

- When the child avoids unpleasant sensory or physiological sensations:

  ➢ Provide ear plugs or ear phones if needed to block out auditory stimulation.

➢ Give advance warning of fire alarms and loud noises.
➢ Allow sunglasses, visor, hoodie, etc. to block out bright lights or visual stimulation.
➢ Let the child choose "time away" instead of escaping through problem behavior.
➢ Teach about diverse abilities/needs; promote acceptance of others.

The IEP Team will work together to deduce the functions of the behaviors identified in the FBA and then develop an appropriate BIP. While each child is unique and behavior functions will vary, it is helpful if the overall behavior management philosophy of the home, classroom, and school emphasizes the direct teaching of positive behavioral expectations and the reinforcement of appropriate behaviors.

To help prevent disciplinary actions, including suspensions, parents should play an active role in their child's education and be proactive when a child begins to display behaviors that indicate a need for interventions. Parents can work with school teams to:

- request additional evaluations,
- review and revise the IEP as needed,
- conduct a FBA,
- develop a BIP, and
- develop school-wide, proactive behavior management programs.

For more information, visit the Positive Behavioral Supports website at www.pbis.org or contact a Parent Information Network Specialist by calling toll-free 877-230-PINS (7467).

The Parent Information Network Clearinghouse (PINC) document *Functional Behavioral Assessment and Positive Interventions: What Parents Need to Know (BR22)* also offers good information on what to expect during this process. For this document and other special education resources visit us online at www.azed.gov/ess/pinspals.