

Behavior Basics Module

Participant Workbook

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Setting the Scene

Classroom Scenario

Ms. Hernandez is a Grade 7 math teacher. She is concerned about her student, Tony, who is falling behind academically and does not participate appropriately during number talk discussions. Tony frequently uses inappropriate language or constantly brings up off-topic comments. Ms. Hernandez has tried redirecting Tony or ignoring off-topic remarks, but nothing has worked. Tony's behavior is disrupting everyone's learning. Feeling like she is out of options, Ms. Hernandez now sends Tony to the office when he engages in this behavior. With Tony out of the room, Ms. Hernandez feels like she has more time to teach. However, she is concerned about the amount of time Tony is spending out of the classroom, which is causing him to fall even more behind academically.

Pause and Reflect

Take a moment to reflect on the scenario above. In what ways can you relate to Ms. Hernandez? In what ways can you understand Tony's behavior?

Activity 1: Defining Behavior

Behaviors are actions or events that can be observed and measured. Precise language promotes effective communication when defining and assessing behavior. Another important consideration is that if we focus on the defined behavior, we can avoid subjective judgment or bias in interpreting what is going on. Defining behavior is a useful strategy for understanding behavior and when collecting classroom behavioral data, creating and monitoring IEP goals, assessing function of behavior, and creating behavior intervention plans.

Operational Definitions of Behavior

An operational definition of behavior describes the form of the behavior. When creating an operational definition of behavior, it is best to do the following:

- Describe the behavior in ways that can be observed and measured.
- Define the behavior in terms of what the student is doing, not what the student is not doing.
- Be clear, concise, and complete.

Examples of Operational Definitions of Behavior:

- Destruction of property is defined as damaging school or personal property, which includes breaking keyboards, damaging screens, tearing items from the bulletin board, and knocking items off desks.
- Aggression is defined as physical contact with another individual using one's body or an object with force, which includes hitting, shoving, and biting.

Target and Replacement Behaviors

A **target behavior** is the behavior that we want to decrease or eliminate (i.e., problem behavior). It should be defined in observable and measurable terms.

A **replacement behavior** is an appropriate behavior that a student is taught to use to replace a challenging behavior. It should also be something the student can currently do or can learn to do. When planning for and measuring the effects of an intervention, teachers should focus on increasing a replacement behavior. It should also be defined in observable and measurable terms.

Example

Evan's target behavior is off-task behavior. Off-task behavior is defined as engaging in activities not related to the task at hand and includes talking to other students, calling out or telling jokes during instruction, and making faces at others.

Evan's replacement behavior is on-task behavior. On-task behavior is defined as being engaged in the task and includes being oriented toward the speaker during whole-class instruction, working on assignments, or engaging with peers during group work.

Practice

For each of the following scenarios, write an operational definition of the target behavior and replacement behavior. Each behavior description should meet the following criteria:

- The definition is observable and measurable.
- The definition refers to what the student is doing, not what the student is not doing.
- The definition is clear and concise.

1. Each day, Hunter goes to his reading group where he sits in a small group with the classroom aide, Mr. Chan, and three other students at a table in the back of the room. Soon after instruction begins, he asks whether he can return to his desk. When Mr. Chan tells him he needs to remain with his group, he kicks his feet against the chair legs and screams. If Mr. Chan prompts him to focus on his book, he drops to the floor and refuses to get back in his seat. The other students in the group laugh at Hunter while he is on the floor. Hunter has engaged in these behaviors four times during the past 2 weeks.

Target Behavior:

Replacement Behavior:

2. Ms. Johnson, Kelley's teacher, is frustrated with Kelley's behavior during math class. During independent work each day, most of the class works at their desks while Ms. Johnson leads a small-group activity. While working at her desk, Kelley frequently gets out of her seat and walks around the room. She returns to her seat if Ms. Johnson redirects her but often gets out of her seat again to sharpen her pencil or throw something away. Kelley rarely finishes all of her independent work each day, and it is hard for Ms. Johnson to work with her small group when she constantly has to redirect Kelley.

Target Behavior:

Replacement Behavior:

3. At lunch, Richard sits alone at a corner table to eat each day. When he is done eating, he gets up to throw away his trash. On his way to the trash, he shouts curse words at his peers. When his peers laugh or tell him to stop, he gets into verbal arguments with them. These behaviors occur at least two times per week. On two occasions in the last month, he has initiated a physical fight with two peers. The cafeteria aides and Richard's teachers are concerned about the safety of Richard and his peers.

Target Behavior:

Replacement Behavior:

Activity 2: Positive and Negative Reinforcement

Reinforcement is one type of consequence that follows a behavior. Reinforcement **increases** the likelihood behavior will occur again. Whether or not a consequence serves as a reinforcer depends on the learner. If behavior results in a consequence that is desirable and valued by the learner, there is a high probability that the behavior will occur in the future. We do not know whether reinforcement has occurred until we see the impact on future behavior.

Positive Reinforcement

Positive reinforcement involves adding something pleasant or desirable that makes a target behavior more likely to occur.

Examples

1. On Tuesday, Bethany came home by the curfew her parents had set. Her mother praised her for being responsible and told her she could extend the weekend curfew by 30 minutes. Bethany came home on time every night for the rest of the week.
2. When his teacher called on Juan to answer a question, he told a joke that made his classmates laugh. His teacher reprimanded him and reminded him the expectation is to stay on topic when answering questions. The next time his teacher called on him, Juan told another joke, causing his classmates to laugh again.

Negative Reinforcement

Negative reinforcement involves taking something unpleasant or undesired away to make a target behavior more likely to occur.

Examples

1. Ms. Schaefer was so pleased that the entire class had turned in all their homework in science on Friday that she canceled the quiz for that day. The class turned in all their homework the next Friday.
2. Cherise strongly dislikes talking in front of the entire class. When her teacher breaks the class into cooperative learning groups, Cherise volunteers to be the notetaker for the group and doesn't have to present their work to the entire class. For the next month, Cherise volunteers to be the notetaker during every cooperative learning group.

Practice:

For each of the following scenarios, determine what behavior is being maintained or increased and whether it is an example of positive or negative reinforcement.

1. Carter prefers to work by himself and dislikes peer interactions. He frequently curses in class and makes disparaging remarks to his peers. For a project in history class, Carter's teacher assigns him to work with a peer. In response, he cursed at the teacher and said, "No way will

I work with *her*.” His teacher said, “Fine, you will work by yourself then” and had him complete the project independently. The next week, Carter was told to work with a peer for another project. He cursed at his peer, and his teacher told him to work alone.

What behavior is maintained or increased?

What does the student get or avoid?

Circle the type of reinforcement: positive reinforcement or negative reinforcement

2. In Ms. Heinz’s science class, Oliver is the class clown. He is constantly making jokes during whole-class instruction, and he uses materials to put on puppet shows during lab time. His classmates laugh at Oliver’s antics every time. Ms. Heinz has given Oliver verbal reprimands, taken away points, called his parents, moved his seat, and given him lunch detention, but his behaviors have continued. She finally decided to ignore the behavior. She was very successful at ignoring, but his classmates continue to laugh and engage with him.

What behavior is maintained or increased?

What does the student get or avoid?

Circle the type of reinforcement: positive reinforcement or negative reinforcement

3. Maggie does not like her writing teacher, Ms. Romano. She seldom completes her writing homework, stating she doesn’t have time because of her job. Concerned that she was falling behind, Ms. Romano told Maggie she would get credit for her homework if she ate lunch in the classroom and did her homework at that time. On Monday, Maggie forgot her homework and spent lunch in Ms. Romano’s room completing her work. For the rest of the week, she turned in her homework every time it was assigned and didn’t have to spend lunch with Ms. Romano.

What behavior is maintained or increased?

What does the student get or avoid?

Circle the type of reinforcement: positive reinforcement or negative reinforcement

4. Martin spends most of his day in a classroom with four other students. During his weekly computer class, he is with a large class of 20 peers that he doesn't see often. Excited to be with his peers, Martin loves to engage in conversations with them. His teacher, Mr. James, is frustrated with Martin's talking and is constantly redirecting or reprimanding Martin. Despite these efforts, Martin continues to talk to peers. Mr. James sets up a reinforcement system that allows Martin to earn a prize at the end of class if he refrains from talking to peers at inappropriate times. At the end of 2 weeks, Martin has not earned any prizes and continues to talk to his peers at inappropriate times.

What behavior is maintained or increased?

What does the student get or avoid?

Circle the type of reinforcement: positive reinforcement or negative reinforcement

Activity 3: Applying the Three-Term Contingency

The Three-Term Contingency, also referred to as the Antecedent-Behavior-Consequence (A-B-C) model, helps define behavior in context by identifying the events that occur *before* and *after* a behavior. This relatively simple model can help put complex behavior in context and provide insight into what environmental factors may contribute to the occurrence of a behavior.

Components of the Three-Term Contingency



- **Setting Events** indirectly “set-up” the problem behavior by temporarily increasing or decreasing the value of a consequence. Setting events can occur at a time far removed from the behavior (hours or even days). It is important to note that setting events do not always affect problem behavior and can be difficult to identify.
- **Antecedents** are events that occur immediately before a behavior (sometimes these are referred to as “triggers”).
- **Behaviors** are actions or events that can be observed and measured.
- **Consequences** are events that occur immediately after a behavior.

Applying the Three-Term Contingency

Scenario 1: Kim was agitated as she came back to English class after P.E. and complained about her P.E. teacher constantly correcting her. Kim walked to her next class confiding in her close friend that she felt she couldn’t do anything right in P.E. As soon as she entered the classroom, Mr. Xu, her ELA teacher, told her it was time to stop talking and to take out her book for a read-aloud exercise. Kim threw her book down and refused to participate in the reading activity. Her teacher sent her to the calm down corner.

Setting Event	Antecedent	Behavior	Consequence
P.E. teacher constantly correcting Kim during class, making Kim feel frustrated.	Mr. Xu tells Kim to stop talking and take out her book for the read-aloud.	Kim throws her book on the ground and refuses to participate.	Kim is sent to the calm down corner.

How can altering the A-B-C chain help to change Kim’s behavior?

Setting Event	Antecedent	Behavior	Consequence
Mr. Xu acknowledges Kim’s frustrations from P.E. class and offers her time to prepare for class.	The teacher asks for volunteers to read aloud and allows Kim to pass if called on.	Kim passes when Mr. Xu calls on her.	Kim follows along and completes the activity on her own.

Scenario 2: Sometimes, we don't know the setting event, as in this next example. Alex's science teacher calls on him to answer a question during class discussion. Alex responds by telling a joke and making off-topic comments, which result in his peers laughing.

Setting Event	Antecedent	Behavior	Consequence
Unknown	The teacher calls on Alex to answer a question.	Alex tells a joke and makes off-topic comments.	Alex's peers laugh at him.

How can altering the A-B-C chain help to change Alex's behavior?

Setting Event	Antecedent	Behavior	Consequence
Unknown	Teacher reviews expectations for class discussions and provides Alex with a pre-correction before calling on him.	When called on, Alex responds with an on-topic answer.	Alex's peers do not respond.

Practice:

Read each of the following scenarios and identify the setting event (if known), the antecedent, the behavior, and the consequence. Next, identify ways that altering the setting event, antecedent, or consequence could change the probability that the behavior will occur.

1. Mark failed the last two tests in algebra. On Tuesday, his teacher assigns the class independent work. During work time, Mark reads a book instead of completing his assignment. Mark's teacher is with a small group and doesn't notice Mark. At the end of class, Mark has not completed the assignment.

Setting Event	Antecedent	Behavior	Consequence

Are there any changes that could be made in the A-B-C chain to alter Mark's behavior?

Setting Event	Antecedent	Behavior	Consequence

2. Each day Donte arrives early to claim the chair in the back row against the wall. He spreads his books, papers, and materials on the floor around him as a barrier to keep others from approaching him. On Tuesday, he arrives late and has to take an available seat in the center of the classroom. During independent work, his teacher stops by his desk to check his work. As she leans over him, Donte yells obscenities and tells the teacher he does not need anyone checking on him. His teacher immediately walks away and begins assisting another student.

Setting Event	Antecedent	Behavior	Consequence

Are there any changes that could be made in the A-B-C chain to alter Donte’s behavior?

Setting Event	Antecedent	Behavior	Consequence

3. Kiera is a 10-year-old who has both processing and comprehension reading deficits. Her teacher describes her as showing inadequate attention to tasks, making negative comments about herself, and using aggressive language with peers. When her partner corrected her during Peer-Assisted Learning Strategies (PALS) time, Kiera loudly called her partner names and said she wouldn’t work with her. Her teacher separated the two students and allowed Kiera to work with the classroom aide.

Setting Event	Antecedent	Behavior	Consequence

Are there any changes that could be made in the A-B-C chain to alter Kiera’s behavior?

Setting Event	Antecedent	Behavior	Consequence