Breakout Session 1: Identifying and Preventing Repetitive and Other Problem Behaviors in Children with Autism Spectrum Disorder

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Who is the presenter?

Overview

• ASD and Challenging Behavior
• How do we determine why challenging behavior occurs?
• Preventing challenging behavior
• Intervention strategies

What is Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)?

• Pervasive neurodevelopmental disorder
• Spectrum refers to a wide range of symptoms, skills, and level of impairments
• Deficits in social interaction and communication and exhibit restricted and repetitive behaviors
• Examples:
  – Avoids eye contact
  – Has trouble understanding other people’s feelings
  – Delayed speech and language
  – Does not pretend in play
  – May get upset with minor changes
  – Likes certain parts of toys
  – Body rocking or hand flapping

Challenging Behaviors

Any behavior that interferes with adaptive functioning. Not just annoying behaviors.

• Noncompliance
• Refusal
• Falling to the floor
• Property destruction
• Elopement
• Hitting or pushing others
• Kicking
• Biting
• Self-injury (hitting or biting self)
• Restrictive and repetitive behaviors (e.g., motor and vocal stereotypy)

Why are challenging behaviors so common?

• Remember the core deficits of ASD:
  – Lack of communication skills
  – Lack of social skills
  – Restricted, repetitive behaviors/interests
• All of these lead to increased frustration and minimal repertoire of appropriate skills
  – Inability to communicate wants and/or needs
  – Boredom
  – Sensory issues
Difficulties with Communication

• Cannot request items/activities
  – Sometimes engaging in problem behavior is easier than appropriate response

I want milk  I cry  I get milk

Difficulties with Social Interaction

• Children with ASD may not know how to initiate social interactions appropriately
• Negative attention may be better than no attention at all
  – Reduced ability to interpret social cues, so may not recognize that attention is negative
• May not have skills to ask to be left alone

Restricted and Repetitive Behaviors/Interests

• Social problems with talking about the same subject repeatedly
  – Ex. Spongebob or Trains
• May engage in repetitive behaviors that are stigmatizing or dangerous
  – Ex. Finger flicking

Challenging Behaviors Lead to Barriers to Instruction

• Difficult to teach a child who:
  – Consistently engages in challenging behavior
  – Is inattentive during instruction
  – Does not imitate/learn from peers
  • Required to teach everything
  – Does not work in a group
  – Does not communicate needs/wants

Children with ASD in the Classroom

• Children with autism interact with the environment differently than others
• Experience significant difficulties in behavior and social skills
• Often related to communication deficits in two ways:
  – Unable to express themselves effectively
  – They may not understand

HOW DO WE DETERMINE WHY CHALLENGING BEHAVIOR OCCURS?
Behavior does not occur in a vacuum
(Behaviors generally do not happen “out of the blue”)

Something is always going on BEFORE & AFTER a behavior occurs

All behaviors have consequences!

What Is A Consequence?
Something that happens AFTER a behavior and affects the likelihood that the behavior will happen again

All behaviors have antecedents!

What Is An Antecedent?
Something that happens BEFORE a behavior
What’s a behavior?

Anything a person says or does

The ABC’s (Three Term Contingency)

- **Antecedent:**
  - What’s going on before the behavior occurs
- **Behavior:**
  - The exact action that occurred (rather than statements about the behavior)
- **Consequence:**
  - What happened immediately after affects the probability of the occurrence of the behavior in the future

Let’s look at Jenny’s behavior

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Antecedent</th>
<th>Behavior</th>
<th>Consequence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jack has a ball</td>
<td>Jenny punches Jack</td>
<td>Jack gives Jenny the ball</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

What will Jenny do the next time she wants the ball and Jack has it?

Can we change the behavior and still have the same outcome?

The ABC’s (Three Term Contingency)

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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jack has a ball</td>
<td>Jenny asks, “Can I have that ball, please?”</td>
<td>Jack gives Jenny the ball</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The ABC’s (Three Term Contingency)

Let’s look at Jack’s behavior

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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jack has a ball</td>
<td>Jack gives the ball to Jenny</td>
<td>Jenny takes the ball and stops punching Jack</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

What will Jack do the next time he sees Jenny coming?

There are ways of dealing with challenging behavior

• Determine the function of the behavior: Why does the individual engage in challenging behavior?
  – Collect ABC (Antecedent-Behavior-Consequence) data to assist in determining the function of the behavior

All Behavior Serves a Function (often more than one)

• Social/Attention
• Tangible
• Escape/Avoidance
• Automatic

Why we need to know about function

• When you look at behavior as serving a function...
  – You understand WHY the child engages in that behavior
  – Understanding WHY guides intervention...
    – Tells us what, in the environment, influences behavior
    – Tells us how to change the environment to change behavior
    – Guides us in teaching a replacement behavior
• Remember the ABC’s of behavior:
  – The function can tell you if the consequence is reinforcing, punishing, or neutral
• Change is possible: the child is not misbehaving because he/she has autism
Social/Attention
• People behave to get positive attention
  • Example:
    – A child is sitting by himself. If he waves at a friend, the friend may come over to talk to him

• People behave to get negative attention
  • Example:
    – A child is sitting at his desk during class. When he begins to scream and jump out of his chair, his classmates look at him and laugh and the teacher stops teaching and comes over to his desk to tell him to STOP!

Tangible
• Get desired items
  • Examples:
    – During a group activity, a child may shove another child in order to get the chair they want
    – Dan is playing a game on the computer. He has been on the computer for about 20 minutes. The timer goes off and it is somebody else’s turn. Dan begins to cry and tantrum. The teacher walks over and tells Dan that he can have another 5 minutes on the computer

Escape/Avoidance
• Engage in challenging behavior to leave/avoid situations
  • Examples:
    – During a test, a child may begin to kick his aide in order to get sent to the hall or principal’s office
    – In the middle of a reading activity, a child might continually ask to go to the bathroom in order to leave the reading activity

Automatic
• Behaviors themselves provide sensory input
  • Example:
    – A child is not engaged in an activity. She flaps her hands and watches her hands move in front of her face.
    – Pick their skin because of the sensation they get.

Additional Considerations: Medical
• Medical conditions affect behavior
  • Example:
    – A child has an inner ear infection which makes it painful to eat. The child cries incoherably during lunch so he doesn’t have to eat.

• Medication affects behavior
  • Example:
    – A child is taking Carbatrol for seizures. A side effect of Carbatrol is loss of coordination. A child may be aggressive during P.E. to leave the activity.

Additional Considerations: Motivating Operations
• The presence or absence of a stimuli can impact behavior
  • Example:
    – If a child is usually happy when he gets to school, but went to bed at 4 am yesterday, he may cry all morning today.
Now you know why, what can we do about problem behavior?

TRY TO PREVENT CHALLENGING BEHAVIOR…

Be Proactive: How can we prevent challenging behaviors?
- Environmental arrangement
- Be positive
- Teach the child to follow instructions
- Change your behavior, if necessary

Environmental Arrangements
- Set up the environment for success!!
- Remove distractions
- Limit space for children to walk around

Be Positive
- Catch them being good and provide praise often
- Use descriptive praise
  – Say what you are praising
  – Ex. “Nice job gluing the eyes on the bug!”

Teach the Child to Listen
**Do**
- Get child’s attention first
- Use simple, clear, concise language the child can understand
- Be neutral when giving directions
- Use visual cues
- Give next instruction after child/children comply to previous instruction
- Give advanced warnings
- Say what to do

**Don’t**
- Repeat request over and over
- Give more instructions than child can handle
- Don’t give choices they don’t have
- Say what not to do
Change Your Behavior (Know what you want the child to do)

- Understand what you want and why
- Think before you act
- Be sure your request is reasonable and one the child can do
- Use behavior specific language

YOU HAVE:
1. DETERMINED THE FUNCTION
2. TRIED TO PREVENT CHALLENGING BEHAVIOR

AND

YOU STILL SEE CHALLENGING BEHAVIOR.

NOW WHAT?

INTERVENTION STRATEGIES

INTERVENTION STRATEGIES: MAINTAINING VARIABLES AND SIMPLE SOLUTIONS

Ask yourself some simple questions and remember that your answers will guide your interventions
Remember to...

• Make the problem behavior nonfunctional
  – Reinforcement is no longer provided for engaging in challenging behaviors
• Teach new behaviors that will achieve the same function

Questions to ask yourself (Glasberg, 2005)

• Will any attention do?
• Is it peer attention?
• Is it undivided attention?
• Is it high intensity attention?
• Is it physical attention?
• Is it a certain person’s attention?
• How long can the child go without attention?

Answers Guide the Intervention

• Make challenging behavior nonfunctional
  – NEVER give attention for inappropriate behavior
  – Even negative attention can maintain behavior
  – Example: Reprimand
• Teach a more appropriate way to achieve attention
  – Example: teach them to greet someone or ask them to come play
  – Use prompts and reinforcements to establish a response

When no reinforcement is provided for engaging in challenging behaviors...

It gets worse before it gets better!!!

More Ideas...

• Use games/activities that naturally provide preferred types of attention and teach skills
  – Example: tickle tag
• Catch ‘em Being Good (“Fill their bucket”)
  – Example: If the child has challenging behavior every 10 minutes, give attention every 8 minutes
• Peer Attention
  – Train the peers to provide attention for appropriate behavior and ignore inappropriate behavior
  – Use classroom contingencies for ALL students
INTERVENTION FOR ESCAPE-MAINTAINED BEHAVIOR

Questions to ask yourself (Glasberg, 2005)

• What is he/she escaping?
• Is it too challenging?
• Is it too boring?
• Is it centered around nonpreferred items?
• Is it associated with a certain type of stimulation?
• Is it social?
• Is it specific to a certain person?
• Is it too long?

Answers Guide the Intervention

• Make the problem behavior nonfunctional
  – Do not stop demands contingent on inappropriate behavior if you must stop momentarily, return to the demand before taking a break
  – Teach a response that will achieve a break from demands
    – Example: a sign or picture to request a break
    – Use prompts and reinforcers to teach a communicative response

When a Break is Not Feasible

• Cannot be removed from certain people, certain activities (i.e. a teacher and bath)
• Incorporate fun items into activities and pair fun items with people
• Isolate aversive stimulus (perfume, wash cloth) and remove that from the environment, if possible

INTERVENTION FOR ACCESS TO A TANGIBLE-MAINTAINED BEHAVIOR

Questions to ask yourself (Glasberg, 2005)

• What activities or objects does he/she get from behavior?
• Does it occur when it’s time to give up an object?
• Does it occur when waiting for an object?
• Does it occur when it’s time to share?
• Does it occur when it’s time to take turns?
Answers Guide the Intervention

- Make challenging behavior **nonfunctional**
  - NEVER provide tangible items after inappropriate behavior
  - Do not start presenting tangible items contingent on inappropriate behavior
- Establish communicative response to request tangible item or activity

Example

- When you know the child is trying to request an item, prompt them to give you the picture of the desired item
- Present the desired item to the child for a few seconds. Then withhold the item while prompting child to use an appropriate form of communication to get the item

More Simple Solutions

- Give more access throughout the day
- Give a “warning” about how much time is left
- Teach to request more time with the object

CHALLENGING BEHAVIOR MAINTAINED BY SENSORY REINFORCEMENT

Questions to Ask Yourself (Glasberg, 2005)

- What exactly is the sensation that he/she is obtaining with problem behavior?
  - Vestibular stimulation = rocking/spinning
  - Feeling pleasurable textures = rubbing materials
  - Reliving pleasurable experiences = self-talk/singing
- Is the behavior related to a medical problem?
  - Example: headache = hitting forehead

Answers Guide the Intervention

- If cause is medical, treat illness
- What is an appropriate means of achieving that stimulation?
  - Teach the person to request it
  - Prompt the child to emit appropriate ways of seeking sensory reinforcement
Examples
• If the child is spinning around, give the child a sit and spin
• If the child is kicking his feet on the floor, give him a ball to kick

Preferred Sensory Stimuli
• Use as instructional materials to promote engagement (as natural reinforcers) and contingently as possible response reinforcers

Ongoing Data Collection
• Once an intervention has been implemented, data collection is important to track whether the intervention is doing the job of decreasing the challenging behavior or if the intervention needs to be modified

Remember:
A child does not misbehave because he/she has autism.

A child misbehaves because the environment supports his/her behavior.

Questions???

Thank you!!!
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