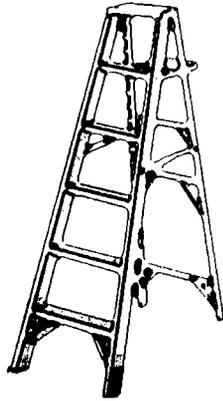


# Developing Behavioral Intervention Plans: A Sequential Approach



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The 1997 Amendments to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and the 1999 Final Regulations have brought about a number of changes in policy concerning special education. In particular, IDEA now requires school personnel to develop a functional behavioral assessment and behavioral intervention plan for students with disabilities who experience significant behavioral problems in the schools. This article includes a brief discussion of the legal requirement for developing functional behavioral assessment and behavioral intervention plans (especially as they pertain to disciplinary actions). This discussion is followed by an outline of elements related to behavioral intervention planning with specific guidelines for school personnel who seek to put such plans into practice.

**W**ith the passage of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act Amendments in 1997 (IDEA), and with the publication of the Final Regulations in March 1999, a number of changes have been made in policies governing special education. Of particular note, school district personnel are now faced with a more formal requirement to address the strategies that will be employed for students with disabilities who have significant behavior problems. Specifically, schools must conduct a functional behavioral assessment and develop a behavioral intervention plan for any student with a disability who exhibits severe behavior difficulties and/or who puts peers at risk because of these behaviors (e.g., selling drugs). Likewise, the requirement applies when a student with a disability is being considered for serious disciplinary action (e.g., a change in placement or expul-

sion). Specifically, either before or not later than 10 days after such disciplinary action is taken, the agency must conduct a functional behavioral assessment and implement a behavioral intervention plan for the behavior that led to the disciplinary action. If a plan is already in effect, the professionals must review the plan and modify it, as necessary, to respond to the behavior.

The implementation of both functional behavioral assessments and behavioral intervention plans can present formidable challenges for many schools. Lack of time and administrative support, differences in philosophical orientations toward discipline, negative attitudes about special education, and a general lack of knowledge regarding the legal and procedural aspects of behavior assessments and interventions are among the important factors that can impede the development of effective behavior plans. In order to overcome these barriers, it is

important for educators to understand the elements of effective planning, positive behavioral supports, parental communication, compliance with federal regulations, and evaluation that provide the basis for subsequent decision making. Therefore, the primary purpose of this manuscript is to familiarize the reader with different aspects of functional behavior assessments and behavior intervention plans and the strategies that can be employed to make them useful and effective.

## Why the New Mandates?

The new requirements in IDEA that relate to behavior and disciplinary problems are based on two major assumptions:

- Behavior problems are best addressed when the cause of the behavior is known; and cause can be determined best when a functional assessment of the student's behavior is conducted.
- Behavior interventions based on positive intervention strategies are more effective in changing maladaptive behavior than are punitive strategies (e.g., suspension). Such intervention strategies should be well thought out, implemented in a systematic fashion, and evaluated periodically so that changes can be made when needed.

Although these concepts are not new to special educators, their formalized inclusion within IDEA and the Final Regulations is significant. Added mandates to existing law typically emerge in response to perceived deficiencies in practice. In the case of discipline, the inclusion of functional behavior assessment and behavioral intervention plans was due to evidence that students with special needs were not realizing positive behavior changes to a level deemed acceptable. In particular, the rate of suspensions and expulsions for students with disabilities was too high.

Three reasons stand out to explain the failure of schools in addressing the behavior problems of students with disabilities. First, in many instances, school person-

nel often provide inappropriate interventions because they fail to identify the true cause of the disruptive behavior. Second, behavioral interventions are often implemented haphazardly (e.g., lack of consistency, with little attention to the monitoring and evaluation of their implementation). Third, disciplinary actions in schools have tended toward punitive rather than positive behavioral intervention plans.

Complaints by parents, students, and educators, as well as subsequent court cases, further reinforced the need for legislators to include detailed guidelines for the discipline of students with disabilities.

## Intervention Planning

Three distinct steps can be identified within the behavioral intervention planning process (see Figure 1). These steps are consistent with federal regulations and are reflected in the program developed by Fad, Patton, and Polloway (1998) for behavioral intervention planning and are discussed below.

### Background Information/Data Collection and Review

In order to initiate the process of behavioral intervention planning, the first step is to collect background information regarding the student and his or her behavior. As with any initial assessment process, data can be obtained from the student's academic and disciplinary records, from interviews with the parents, from observation of the student in multiple settings, from a face-to-face interview with the student (particularly for older students), by soliciting anecdotal or objective data from teachers, and by completing relevant checklists or behavior-rating scales. This information should also reflect the student's strengths to complement the identified areas of deficit or difficulty (Epstein, 1999).

Collecting background information is not only beneficial for planning, but for elucidating the reasons for conducting the behavioral intervention planning process. In individual cases, documentation should focus on

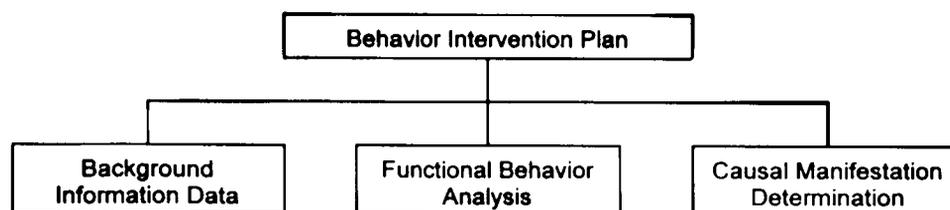


Figure 1. Steps in developing a behavioral intervention plan.

the reasons for initiating the intervention process. These rationales may include a consistent pattern of behavior that interferes with the learning of the child and/or others; class removal, suspension, and/or expulsion; and difficulty in understanding or following the rules of the classroom or school. Two additional instances are specifically mentioned in the federal statute as necessitating this process: if the student has knowingly possessed or used illegal drugs or has sold or solicited the sale of a controlled substance at school or school-related functions; if the student has brought a weapon to the school or to a school-related function. The latter issue has led to further considerations for more restrictive federal legislation.

While collecting the background data, the school should also document whether a change in placement has been made as a consequence of the student's behavior. In particular, it must be noted whether the planning process included a review by a hearing officer of the need for such a change due to an identified, or potential, risk of injury to the student or to others.

### Functional Behavioral Assessment

The purpose of the functional behavioral assessment is to provide a review of specific behaviors and behavioral patterns within an environmental context. Formally, it has been defined as "an analysis of the contingencies responsible for behavioral problems" (Malott, Whaley, & Malott, 1997, p. 433). It requires that professionals understand and evaluate the behaviors of concern within the broader perspective of the student's home and school environment.

In order to conduct a functional behavioral assessment, educational professionals should analyze the contextual aspects of a behavior by describing the specific behavior in question and summarizing related information concerning precipitating conditions, consequences following the behavior, and possible reasons for the behavior's purpose. Fad et al. (1998) suggested that a functional behavior assessment can initially be developed based on the following typical informal questions (p. 9):

- What happened?
- What happened before?
- What has been happening?
- What happened after?
- What are the facts?
- What do you think?
- What do they think?
- What part does the disability play in understanding the behavior?

A 10-step procedure for conducting a functional assessment has recently been provided by McConnell, Hilvitz, and Cox (1998) that includes the writing of a be-

havioral intervention plan as part of the assessment process. The inclusion of the intervention plan within the context of the functional assessment is due to the empirical nature of determining functional causes of behavior. The only way to reach a valid conclusion about influences is to change the setting and/or the events associated with the behavior, then observe whether or not a change in behavior results. Within this context, behavior that triggers a temporary or permanent change in placement is itself now legally regarded as an indication that the functional influences on behavior need reassessment.

Figure 2 presents a functional behavioral assessment based on a 13-year-old whose behaviors of concern include verbal threats, inappropriate language, and physical aggression. The form illustrates elements implicit in the functional behavior assessment process.

### Is the Behavior Related to the Disability?

Under federal guidelines, a determination must be made as to whether the behavior in question could be a manifestation of the student's disability. The essential question is whether the student's disability impaired his or her ability to control the behavior or interfered with his or her awareness of possible disciplinary action that would be expected to follow. Although the amount of direction provided in the regulations is somewhat limited, the issue is a critical one in terms of both basic legal rights and access to appropriate education. When implemented appropriately, this statute neither excludes students with disabilities from normal disciplinary routines nor prevents educators from taking action to redirect troublesome behaviors. Rather, the purpose is to prevent misapplication of disciplinary actions that, owing to a student's disability, may fail to achieve the desired objective and create needless frustration for both the student involved as well for students and teachers in the individual's environment.

Several examples illustrate the need for the manifestation determination process. Extreme instances of mismatches between discipline problems and their respective interventions include suspension for self-injurious behavior in a student with Lesch-Nyhan syndrome; inappropriate vocalizations in a student with Tourette's syndrome; and food hoarding in a person with Prader-Willi syndrome. Although each of these difficulties may warrant behavioral intervention, none is susceptible to successful change via punitive measures. The standard disciplinary procedures would therefore underserve both the student in question and those in the environment seeking to establish an effective course of action. However, there are numerous other examples in which the relationship between the disability and the problem behavior is not nearly as clear (e.g., stealing by a young student with

### III. Functional Behavioral Assessment (FBA)

The Functional Behavioral Assessment (FBA) addresses the relationship among precipitating conditions, the behavior, its consequences, and the function of the behavior. The FBA also reflects a consideration of all relevant data gathered, both as background information and by using specific assessment techniques. Refer to the Functional Behavioral Assessment Discussion Guide (found on page 16 of the manual) for assistance in completing this form.

Behavior # <u>3</u> <u>Physical aggression/fighting</u>			
Precipitating Conditions (Setting, time, or other situations typically occurring <i>before</i> the behavior)	Specific Behavior ( <i>Exactly</i> what the student does or does not do)	Consequences (Events that typically <i>follow</i> the behavior)	Function of the Behavior ( <i>Hypothesized purposes</i> the behavior serves)
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> unstructured time in hallways/on the bus <input type="checkbox"/> academic instruction in _____ <input type="checkbox"/> when given a directive to _____ <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> when close to smaller students <input type="checkbox"/> when provoked by _____ <input type="checkbox"/> when unable to _____ <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> other when unsupervised <input type="checkbox"/> none observed _____	<u>Casey pushes, hits, trips other students, often students who are smaller. Casey's aggression occurs more often when no adults are watching her (on bus, in halls).</u> _____ _____ _____ _____ _____	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> teacher attention <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> peer attention <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> verbal warning/reprimand <input type="checkbox"/> loss of privilege (what kind?) _____ <input type="checkbox"/> time out (where/how long?) _____ <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> detention (how long?) after school <input type="checkbox"/> removal from class <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> in-school suspension (how long?) 3 days <input type="checkbox"/> other _____	<input type="checkbox"/> escape/avoidance <input type="checkbox"/> gaining attention <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> expression of anger <input type="checkbox"/> frustration <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> vengeance <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> seeking of power/control <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> intimidation <input type="checkbox"/> sensory stimulation <input type="checkbox"/> relief of fear/anxiety <input type="checkbox"/> other _____
<b>Specific Assessment Techniques Used To Analyze This Behavior</b> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Observation <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Behavior Checklist/Rating Scale <input type="checkbox"/> Student Interview <input type="checkbox"/> Video/Audio Taping			
<b>Related Information/Considerations</b> Academic: <u>Low grades—homework not turned in</u> Social/Peer: <u>Few friends</u>			
		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Administrator Interview <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Teacher Interview	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Parent Interview <input type="checkbox"/> Other _____
		Family: <u>Casey's behavior has disrupted family life. Mother reports she is afraid of Casey.</u>	Other: _____

Figure 2. Sample functional behavioral assessment.

mild retardation or use of profanity by an adolescent with learning disabilities). In these cases, the process of determining manifestation would be more complex, requiring more time to assess functional causes. In some cases, a relationship between the behavior and the disability would not be substantiated and the student would be subject to standard disciplinary procedures.

According to Yell (2000), the team can determine that the misconduct was not a manifestation of a student's disability only when the following three criteria are met:

1. The student's Individualized Education Program (IEP) and placement were appropriate (including the behavioral intervention plan), and the IEP was implemented as written;
2. The student's disability did not impair the student's ability to understand the impact and consequences of the behavior subject to the disciplinary sanction;
3. The student's disability did not impair his or her ability to control the behavior at issue.

To complete a manifestation determination, school personnel should carefully consider the student's disability and the nature of the behavior to determine the possible relationship. Representative questions that can be reviewed in this process include the following:

- Does the student know right from wrong?
- Does the disability lead to impulsivity?
- Does the disability lead to violence or defiance?
- Is the specific problem an example of the behavioral concerns caused by the disability?
- Does the disability limit the student's ability to handle stressful situations?
- Does the disability interfere with a student's ability to build or maintain appropriate peer and/or teacher relationships?
- Does the disability interfere with the ability of the student to express appropriate feelings?

If by using questions such as these, professionals determine that the behavior does not reflect a manifestation of the student's disability, the disciplinary procedures that would be relevant and appropriate are similar to those that are applicable to students without disabilities.

## Developing the Behavioral Intervention Plan

After gathering background information about the student and his or her relevant behavior, completing a functional behavioral assessment, and considering the behavior as a possible manifestation of the student's disability, school personnel have completed the necessary foundation for writing behavioral intervention plans. In order to do so, Fad et al. (1998) recommended that personnel focus on the following:

- Review of the behavior targeted in the functional behavioral assessment.
- Determination of behavioral goals that relate to increasing or decreasing the specific behavior.
- Determination of the specific intervention strategies appropriate for the behavior. Designation of the individual (or individuals) responsible for implementing the plan.
- Determination of the appropriate dates for review of the plan and evaluation of its success.

- Determination of the appropriate methods for evaluation of the plan.

## ... disciplinary actions in schools have tended toward punitive rather than positive behavioral intervention plans.

A sample behavioral intervention plan is included in Figure 3; it is derived from the same case example represented in Figure 2. As reflected in the figure, the plan illustrates the key components of a behavioral intervention plan developed from a sequential approach as described in this article.

Although the general principles involved in the development and implementation of the behavioral intervention plan are consistent with the research literature concerning appropriate practices for students with disabilities, careful consideration must be given to selecting appropriate interventions to fit IEPs under IDEA. Thus the review and the approval of the behavior intervention plan should involve many participants to ensure that the due process requirements have been met and that all participants have an opportunity to indicate their agreement or disagreement of the plan. In the case of disagreement, a subsequent meeting should be scheduled to review additional information, gain additional assistance, and/or consider alternative approaches with a reconvening of the team within 10 days to review the revised plan. Finally, careful review and planning does not automatically eliminate temporary removal or change in placement as a cogent part of the intervention.

## V. Behavioral Intervention Plan (BIP)

This plan provides strategies for improving the student's behavior.

			Evaluation		
Specific Goal(s)	Proposed Intervention(s)	Person(s) Responsible	Methods	Criteria	Progress Codes
					Date
<p>1. Casey will increase respectful language in class, including saying "yes, sir" or "yes, ma'am" when requested to do something.</p> <p>2. Casey will decrease verbal threats and teasing.</p>	<p>1. Contract for</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>positive comments</li> <li>saying "yes, ma'am" or "yes, sir"</li> <li>refrain from verbal threats</li> </ul> <p>2. Delay release from classroom to hallway by 5 minutes</p>	<p>1. Student Teachers Counselor</p> <p>2. Teachers</p>	<p>—Contract forms</p> <p>—Discipline referrals</p>	<p>1. Respectful language 90% of time</p> <p>2. Contract</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>positive comments: 5 per day</li> <li>"yes" responses: 80% of time</li> <li>verbal threats: fewer than 8 per 6 weeks</li> </ul> <p>3. Aggression: No incidents in next 6 weeks</p>	<p>9/1/99</p> <p>10/15/99</p> <p>12/1/99</p> <p>1/15/00</p> <p>3/1/00</p> <p>4/15/00</p> <p>6/1/00</p>
<p>3. Casey will decrease aggressive incidents toward peers (fighting, hitting, tripping).</p>	<p>3. Continuum of responses to aggression:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Parent-Asst. Principal conference and suspension to AEP for 3 days</li> <li>Go to 3 antiaggression classes</li> <li>Notify probation officer</li> </ul>	<p>3. Parents Assistant Principal Counselor</p>			

These goals were developed with consideration of the following information:

Parent concerns regarding special circumstances: \_\_\_\_\_

Teacher/administrator concerns regarding special circumstances: \_\_\_\_\_

Outside agency/professional concerns regarding special circumstances: Probation officer requires notification

Figure 3. Sample behavioral intervention plan.

## Discussion

The requirement to develop behavioral intervention plans adds another demand on educational personnel in implementing the guidelines of IDEA. Although the paperwork that accompanies this process places additional stress on the system, such planning does represent a tangible way to ensure that a free and appropriate education is provided. Planning also helps to ensure that careful attention is given to serious behaviors that must become key components of educational planning and programming for the individual students with special needs. It will be necessary for school administrators and teachers to appreciate the benefits that may be derived from meeting the new disciplinary mandates. However, time, personnel resources, and teacher training will be necessary if schools are to realize these benefits.

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