

**Behavior Assessment and Problem Solving Using Positive Behavior Supports for Students with Traumatic Brain Injury**

By the Health Resources & Services Administration's Federal TBI Program

Thursday, April 27, 2006  
2:00-4:00pm Eastern

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**Presenter**  
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Most traumatic brain injuries (TBI) occur to the frontal lobe according to trauma registry and insurance claims documentation.

This has some significant implications for behavior.

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It is critical that school personnel understand that many of the difficult behaviors exhibited at school are a direct result of the brain injury not just willful behavior by the student.

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Behavior is what we do that others can **observe and measure** -- good or bad.

To study behavior it's necessary to look at the bigger picture of behavior and not just "bad" behavior.

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Vague terminology is one of the major hindrances to effectively understanding and managing behavior.

- Happy
- Sad
- Aggressive
- Noncompliant
- Tardy

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Good behavioral assessment is the key to understanding and changing/maintaining behaviors. Without thorough assessment, any plan that is developed will not be useful in understanding or changing behaviors.

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When children misbehave at school there is a thought process that precedes that behavior.

**Clearly**, it is a faulty process but this is a **key point** to remember when doing the assessment. How do we alter that faulty process?

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Behaviors that are reinforced will continue to occur.

Look for primary and secondary payoff.  
Example: slot machines

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Emotional states have two components, one is **physical** and the other is **conscious**.

Example - heart pounding when you feel afraid or excited.

What if one or both of these components doesn't work correctly?

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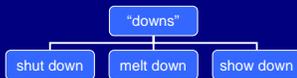
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## Problem "downs" for schools



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Four triggers to behavior problems following BI:

1. Weak social skills
2. Language/communication weaknesses – receptive and expressive deficits
3. Poor classroom/environmental control
4. Unrealistic academic expectations

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**Social skills deficits:**

Play a game of UNO with a small group and immediately you will see who:

- Can't wait their turn
- Bosses others
- Cheats to win
- Changes the rules mid-game
- Can't lose a game
- Quits when they get frustrated

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Inappropriate social skills lead to social isolation and problems with:

- Behaviors at school
- Future employment
- Community living
- Maintaining friendships (quality of life)

They don't **JUST** interrupt your class.

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With impaired social skills there is often:

- Loss of relationships
- Isolation
- High unemployment
- Family distress
- Increased risk for divorce (parent-student)

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Language/communication deficits:

- Poor receptive skills
- Poor expressive skills
- Topic management
- Turn taking
- Expressing information in a logical manner
- Comprehending indirect speech
- Use of conversational implicature

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Impaired discourse:

- Disorganized tangential conversation
- Monologues
- Imprecise language
- Restricted output
- Lack of initiation
- Inappropriate maturity level

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The speech and language therapy literature shows that the ability to **reinforce others** socially is THE core skill necessary for establishing and maintaining friendships.

Two specific behaviors for demonstrating social skills conversationally, **prompts** and **turn duration**.

**Look for these behaviors when they talk with you.**

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Physical aggression is the most severe form of communication.

(It serves a purpose and is easily reinforced.)

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Communication behavior can begin as unintended but develop into increasingly deliberate acts.

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Don't just extinguish a behavior that is being used as a form of communication, give an appropriate alternative.

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The presence of stressors will impact communication skills, social skills, and cognitive functioning.

(skills learned in "therapeutic/learning settings" may fall apart in natural settings) Subway...

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**Poor classroom or environmental control**

Myth: core academic subjects require the most "external" assistance. (ex: para support) Most students have more difficulty in settings that we think should be easier for them....art, PE, cooking ect...

Classroom structure not strictly subject matter should dictate external supports. (para)

Chaos in....chaos out

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Sometimes a “bad match” is a “bad match”

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Look for triggers like:

- Seating
- Classmates
- Personalities
- Energy in the classroom
- Demands on teacher

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**Unrealistic academic expectations**

Often the schools report that the student “can do it” but “won’t do it”

Upon observation, there is little evidence that this is actually the case.....

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Children with neurologically based disabilities may show subtle cognitive weaknesses and often exhibit inconsistent performance.

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Confrontations are won by the person with the most “stamina” not necessarily the person that’s the most “right.”

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**Never** underestimate an adolescent’s need to protect their image. They will, at all cost, “save face” when confronted with an embarrassing situation, **especially** in front of peers.

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Over time, power struggles lead to extremely negative “cycles of confrontation” between the student and staff. Once it begins it is very difficult to break that cycle and take on new roles.

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Cycles of confrontation are sometimes created by inconsistency between teacher and staff in dealing with student issues.

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Cycles of confrontation happen when there is a negative exchange, with a particular person, on several occasions in multiple locations.

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Features of power struggles:

- Repetitive topic
- Disrespectful
- Default phrasing
- Circular
- Resolves nothing
- Can't clearly tell who wins argument
- Escalates with each confrontation
- Overly aggressive and negative in nature

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If you are engaged in a power struggle with a student, ask yourself these questions?

- Did they get what they wanted from the conversation?
- Was there any peer involvement?
- Am I the only one not getting along with this kid?

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If your behavior management plan is not working—you **may** have targeted the wrong behavior to correct **OR** you abandoned it too soon.

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## Function of Behavior

**Obtaining** desired objects, events, people, and activities.

**Avoiding** objects, events, people, and activities.

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Good Cop



Bad Cop

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## Functional Behavioral Assessment (FBA)

The purpose of FBA is to determine the **cause** or **function** of a behavior **BEFORE** developing behavior interventions.

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Functional assessment should be child centered, outcome driven, and preventive in nature not just the “cookie cutter” behavior plan used by some schools.

The plans designed to eliminate blurting out answers should not be the same plans used to eliminate dangerous physical aggression—but sometimes are....

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### **Why Positive Behavioral Supports ?**

Punitive behavior management plans work inconsistently (and sometimes not at all) with more difficult behavior problems.

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### **Why Positive Behavioral Supports ?**

A C-141 was preparing for departure from a base in Greenland and they were waiting for the truck to arrive to pump out the aircraft's sewage holding tank. The aircraft commander was in a hurry, but the truck was late in arriving, and the airman performing the job was extremely slow in getting the tank pumped out. When the aircraft commander berated the airman for his lack of speed and promised to pursue punitive action, the airman responded:

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"Sir, I have no stripes, it is 20 below zero, I am stationed in Greenland and I am pumping sewage out of airplanes. Just what are you planning to do to punish me?"

Have you ever had this talk with a kid in the hall?

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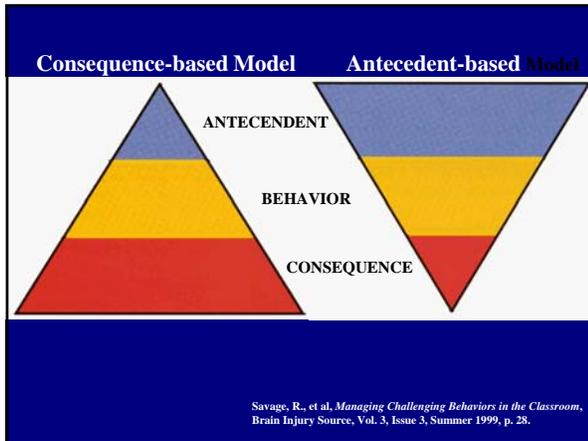
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### Steps to FBA

1. Develop a hypothesis
2. Identify the operational description (tardy)
3. Identify the predictor variables
4. Identify the consequence
5. Take data
6. Verify the predictors and response
7. Define replacement behaviors
8. Shape desired behavior
9. Write a plan

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## Hypothesis

After we develop the hypothesis of function, we need to verify that we are correct.

In order to do that, we need to manipulate and observe target behaviors. Through this manipulation we can then determine if we are “on target” or if we need to change our hypothesis.

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## Data Collection

Data collection does not need to be an all consuming process. In fact even in self-contained environments there is little need for data that is exhaustive in nature. There are many different types of data collection tools.

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## Predictor Variables

Typically, these are events that occur just **prior** to the behavior.

What: activities, people, requests, locations, corrections, times of day, are associated with the behavior?

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## Identify Consequence

The actual consequence - not the “punishment response.”

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## Maintaining Consequences

In order to change behavior we must be able to provide a **replacement behavior** with which the student can obtain the desired consequence.

For example:

Brad tantrums, and as a result of the tantrum is removed from the setting. Brad is able to communicate his desire to leave the setting through tantruming. In order for Brad to reduce his tantruming behavior, we must maintain the consequence of his **present behavior**.

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## Qualities of Reinforcement

Reinforcement must have these qualities to be effective:

- Controlled object or event
- Desired
- Occurring at a rate that is appropriate
- Commensurate with the change wanted

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## Reinforcers \*

Intrinsic  
Social  
Activity  
Token  
Edible

\*Continuously trying to move up the reinforcer ladder

What will be the problem with the top 2 levels?

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## Visual Systems

Examples of visual systems:

- Point Sheets
- Sticker Sheets
- Written Strategies
- Visual Strategies
- Planners

Memory impairments may **require** you to use visual systems. Most plans should use them.

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## Thank You!

For more information please contact:  
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