

# ***WHY DOES MY CHILD DO THAT?***

**[dslackman-consultant@greatneck.k12.ny.us](mailto:dslackman-consultant@greatneck.k12.ny.us)**

**Dana Slackman MS Ed, L-BCBA, TSHH**

**Licensed-Board Certified Behavior Analyst**

# A little about me...

- BA in Speech-Language Pathology (TSHH certification)
- MS in Special Education (Permanent certification)
- Advanced Degree in Behavior Analysis
- Licensed/Board Certified Behavior Analyst
- Provide Behavioral Consultations for Great Neck Public Schools

**Most importantly...**



**I'm a parent.**

**(of two children, one husband and three dogs)**

# WHY DOES MY CHILD DO THAT?

We will discuss...

- What **behavior** *really* is.
- What **reinforcement** *really* is.
- The primary **functions** of behavior and how to identify the function of the behavior.

# WHAT IS BEHAVIOR?

- Behavior is observable. It is what we see or hear (sitting, standing, speaking, whispering, yelling or writing).
- Behavior is measurable. It can be defined and described.
- Behavior **IS NOT** what a person is feeling, but rather how the person expresses the feeling.

Example: a child may show feelings by making a face, yelling, crossing his arms and turning away from his/her parents. These observable actions are more descriptive than just stating that the child looks “angry” or “anxious”.

# Understanding Behavior

Why do children continue behaving?

**IT IS WORKING FOR THEM!**

# Understanding Behavior

If a child is repeatedly engaging in problem behavior, he/she is most likely doing it for a reason.

- It is **PAYING OFF** for them.
- The behavior is **FUNCTIONAL** or serves a purpose.

**Behavior** is a form of **communication**, unfortunately some children learn that problem behavior is the best way to get their needs met.

# Understanding Behavior

- We (parents/caregivers/teachers etc.) must recognize that recurring problem behavior occurs for a reason.
- We **MUST** consider this when deciding on how to respond to a behavior.
- We can understand how to intervene most effectively with a child, by identifying the function (or reason) of their behavior.

# What is the PAY OFF?

We need to understand behavior from the child's perspective...

- What is the child gaining (or trying to get) from engaging in this behavior?
- What is the most important thing that the child is **gaining** or **avoiding** by using this behavior?

# Behavior is Functional, not “GOOD” or “BAD”

- **Functional** = it **pays off** in some way for the child, so they do it again.
- **WE** may see the behavior as “good” or “bad”, but the child does it because it is effective, it pays off for them.

# STOP and THINK

- What is the child trying to communicate by his/her behavior?
- What does the **ADULT THINK** is the consequence? Vs. What the **CHILD SEES** as the **real consequence (gained or avoided what)?**
- *So what can we do to do change or decrease the (problem) behavior?*

# Understanding Behavior

## **A-B-C's**

**A = Antecedent** (what happens before the behavior occurs...what is the trigger??)

**B = Behavior** (anything a person does-behavior of concern)

**C = Consequence** What happens after the behavior (consequence) ...what is the outcome?

# A-B-C's

**A = Antecedent** (what happens before the behavior occurs...what is the trigger??)

Examples:

- A bright flickering light.
- It gets cold outside.
- A parent tells their child, “come sit down for dinner.”

# A-B-C's

**B = Behavior (anything a person does-behavior of concern)**

Examples:

The child puts his hands over his ears and screams.

The child bites his sibling.

The child yells “no” and drops to the floor.

The child says, “I want a turn please.”

**(note that behavior doesn't have to be negative!)**

# A-B-C's

**C = Consequence** (The consequence is what immediately follows the behavior. It can be anything in the environment.)

Examples:

- A light is turned off.
- The child is removed from the environment.
- The parent reprimands the child.

# Reinforcement

## What does that really mean ???

- Reinforcement is used to help increase the likelihood that a specific behavior will occur again in the future.

# Reinforcement

## Reinforcement should be:

- Contingent on behavior (behavior occurs, reinforcement is delivered immediately).
- Delivered immediately after the behavior occurs.
- Appropriate to the person (what is reinforcing to one child MAY NOT be for another (hugs, tickles, praise)).

# Types of Reinforcement

## Positive

- Presenting a thing such as a toy (or tangible item), social praise, high five.

## Examples of **Positive** Reinforcement

- A mother gives her child praise for doing homework.
- A father gives his daughter candy for cleaning up toys.

# Types of Reinforcement

## Negative

- Removal of a thing - escape/avoidance (allowing the child to escape from what is being asked of them).

## Examples of **Negative** Reinforcement-

- Johnny can get up from the dinner table when he eats two bites of his broccoli (behavior).
- Carly does the dishes (behavior) in order to avoid her mother continually asking her.

# Reinforcement

- Critical piece of learning.
- Good behavior will not continue without it.
- What you deliver is important.  
(Needs to be cost effective for the child)
- How you deliver is important.

**\*\*IF A BEHAVIOR CONTINUES TO OCCUR, IT IS BEING REINFORCED.**

# Primary Functions of Behavior

**Attention**

**Escape**

**Tangible**

**Sensory**

# Functions Defined

**Attention:** desire for attention from adults or peers.

**Escape:** from person, task, environment, etc.

**Tangible:** desire for specific item or activity.

**Sensory:** the behavior feels good or meets a sensory need.

# Function

## Attention

- Behavior usually occurs when specific people are present.
- Peer attention: may be all of the time.
- Person specific **not** event or location specific.

# Function

A

Child is playing with brother.

Child is in the supermarket with mom.

Mom is cooking dinner.

B

Child **bites** brother.

Child **bites** Mom.

Child comes over and **bites** Mom.

C

Parent comes over and says “don’t bite your brother!”

Someone in the store gasps, “oh my!”

Mom says, “Ouch! Stop that!”

The function in this example is **attention**. All antecedents include a low attention condition. All consequences include some form of attention. It is important to note that the attention may be delivered in the form of a reprimand. You may think you are punishing a behavior, but remember that sometimes negative attention is better than no attention at all.

# Functions

## Escape

- Behavior usually occurs in response to specific person, event or request to perform activity.

# Function

A

Child is told to help set the table.

Child is told to get into the car to go to the store.

Dad is helping the child do homework worksheet.

B

Child **bites** Mom.

Child **bites** Mom.

Child **bites** Dad.

C

Mom sends the child to his room.

Mom says, "You're going to stay home with Dad."

Dad replaces the worksheet with an easier one.

The function in this example is **escape**. All antecedents include some sort of demand. All consequences include escaping the demand in some way. Again, you may think you are punishing the child's behavior when you are actually reinforcing him by allowing escape. Keep this in mind when you implement a time-out procedure. Is the behavior actually decreasing?

# Function

## **Tangible**

- Behavior often occurs when something has been denied or taken away.
- It is not person or event specific.

# Function

A

Mom is cooking dinner.

Child is sitting at dinner with the family.

Child is playing with his brother.

B

Child comes over and yells, "I'm hungry!"

Child bites Mom.

Child bites brother and yells, "I want the ball."

C

Mom says, "ok, ok. Here is a snack," and gives the child some food.

Child is given a book to look at.

Brother gives child the ball.

In this example, the function is **tangible**. The antecedent can vary, but the consequence is always followed with some sort of tangible reinforcement. Think back to a time you gave in to your child's crying because you just wanted them to stop. Any time you give into a behavior like that, it will increase in the future.

# Function

## **Sensory (Automatic)**

- Behavior occurs any time, anywhere.
- Not person, event or location specific.
- May occur more often when under stress.

# Function

A

Child is playing by himself with his toys.

Child is sitting at dinner with family

Child is working on a homework sheet.

B

Child bites his own hand.

Child bites his shirt

Child bites his pencil

C

Child keeps playing.

Mom looks over and child keeps eating.

Child keeps working.

In this example, the function is **sensory** (automatic). This includes self-stimulatory behaviors such as hand flapping, thumb sucking etc. In automatically reinforced behavior (sensory), there is no pattern in the antecedent or consequence.

# Rule Out Possible Physiological Causes

Perhaps you are seeing an increase in aggressive behavior, crying, or any other behavior because of an underlying medical cause. The behavior could be caused by factors such as headaches, seizures, fever, allergies and many other possible issues. It is important to consider this before determining the function of the behavior.

# Possible Interventions Based on Function...

## **Attention Seeking**

- Teach how to appropriately ask for/get attention.
- Increase attention for appropriate behaviors.

# Possible Interventions Based on Function...

## **Escape/Avoidance**

- Teach how to appropriately ask for help or a break.
- Reinforce and praise for compliance.

# Possible Interventions Based on Function...

## **Seeking Access to Materials**

- Teach how to appropriately ask for the item/  
material.
- Deny access when not appropriately requested.

# Possible Interventions Based on Function...

## **Sensory Stimulation**

- Redirect/interrupt the behavior.
- Increase access to alternative sources of stimulation.

Remember...

**Stop and think...**

What is my child trying tell me with his/her behavior?

THANK YOU SO MUCH FOR COMING  
TONIGHT.

Please Drive Home Safely.

[dslackman-consultant@greatneck.k12.ny.us](mailto:dslackman-consultant@greatneck.k12.ny.us)