

Functional Behaviour Assessment

What is the function of behaviour?

Functional Behaviour Assessment (FBA) is a systematic approach for identifying and understanding the form, function and context of student behaviours.

Observing the elements of behaviour

Behaviour occurs in response to a mixture of biological, psychological and social conditions that may not be immediately obvious.

- The **form** of behaviour is the observable manifestation. What are they actually doing?
- The **context** of behaviour includes the environmental setting and the personal circumstances that influence an individual response. Where does the behaviour occur and what happens immediately before and after?
- Less obviously, the function is the underlying cause. What is the **purpose** of the behaviour?

Assessing the function of behaviour is not easy. Generally speaking, most behaviour is demonstrated to either **gain** something or **avoid** something. This 'something' may have elements that are tangible, sensory and/or psychological. Conducting an FBA will identify key information so that effective strategies and interventions can be designed and implemented.

Functional Behaviour Assessment tools

Various assessment tools are useful for identifying the primary function of specific behaviours. The more information you gather and analyse, the more reliable your investigation will be. However, it is important to have a specific purpose for each tool you employ.

Indirect assessment

- Structured interviews, questionnaires, motivational scales and checklists can all be helpful when assessing behaviour and will elicit useful information from various perspectives, typically from students, parents and teachers.
- Talk with your school counsellor/psychologist for further ideas.

Direct assessment

Observing and recording details of situational factors surrounding behaviour. Tools include antecedent, behaviour, consequent (ABC) charts, scatterplots and observation of behaviour in timed increments. Observations should be made across various times and locations, and include both quantitative and qualitative measures.

Conducting an FBA and analysing the data to develop individual behaviour support plans is best undertaken by a team of school learning and support staff in collaboration with stakeholders. This is not a task for an individual staff member.

Step by step

Describe the problem

- Define the behaviour of concern in concrete terms.
- Consider individual factors such as age, disability, additional needs, developmental level.
- Does it interfere with learning (self and/or others)?
- Is there a threat to safety (self and/or others)?
- What interventions/support has been tried so far?
- What was the result of past efforts to address the behaviour?

Collect information about the possible function/s of the inappropriate behaviour

- Information about the social and environmental context, antecedent/consequent events and past events will help the team:
 - make predictions about future behaviour
 - select appropriate interventions.

Analyse the information

- Compare and analyse all the information compiled from data collection.
- Utilise triangulation of data sources to identify possible patterns and triggers.
- Remember that each behaviour may impact on other behaviours demonstrated.

Generate a hypothesis statement regarding behaviour

- Determine a likely function of the inappropriate behaviour based on careful consideration of collected information.
- Test the hypothesis by manipulating the variables to see if the team's assumptions are accurate.

Develop and implement a support plan

- When the team is reasonably confident about the function of inappropriate behaviour, they can develop (or revise) the behaviour support plan.
- The plan should include positive strategies, program modifications and adjustments and appropriate supports to address the behavioural need.
- It should allow the student to access education in the least restrictive environment.
- It should contain strategies to teach 'functionally equivalent' replacement behaviours. That is, behaviours that serve the same 'function' or purpose for the student.
- Determine whether the behaviour may arise due to skill or performance deficits and respond accordingly.

Monitor and regularly evaluate the plan

- Develop a system to monitor the effectiveness of the intervention that outlines when, where, by whom, and how data is collected.
- Collect data both in the setting where the behaviour occurs and in other settings that focus on:
 - the frequency of the behaviour: how often it occurs (e.g. time sampling, event sampling)
 - the frequency of use of replacement behaviour(s)
 - how long the behaviour lasts when it occurs.
- Compare intervention data to baseline data to determine the effectiveness of the intervention.

Modify the plan if necessary

- Summarise the data to make decisions about planning.

Further information

Talk to the school counsellor or school psychologist for guidance on collecting FBA data.