



Function-Based Treatment for Problem Behavior

All behavior serves a function--children do things to get something or to get out of something. It's important to identify the function of a problem behavior in order to use the most effective strategies to reduce the behavior, increase inclusion and improve quality of life.

What is the function?

What does the behavior look like?

What evidence-based strategies work?

Sensory



Hand flapping, rocking, smelling objects, licking objects, rubbing the skin with an object, tapping ear, making vocal sounds, repetitive blinking, staring at lights, snapping fingers, grinding teeth, etc.

- Provide sensory breaks
- Block the behavior
- Reinforce the absence of the behavior
- Teach a replacement behavior
- Teach self-monitoring
- Use the behavior as a reinforcer

Escape



Hiding or arguing when told to clean their room;
Being disruptive right before a math test; or
Putting head down on the desk when presented with academic work, etc.

- Continue to repeat the demand
- Teach appropriate requesting
- Reduce the demand following cooperation
- First/then rules (for example, do this work first, and then you'll get to play a video game)

Attention



Yelling or acting out when mom is on the phone;
Blurting out an answer in class; or
Throwing an item across the room to get the therapist's attention, etc.

- Planned ignoring
- Teach appropriate ways to get attention
- Make attention a reinforcer for behavior you want to see
- Use attention to reinforce others to do the right thing

Tangible



Throwing a tantrum in the checkout lane because they want candy;
Screaming when told to put the iPad away; or
Grabbing a toy away from another student, etc.

- Use the tangible (the desired object) as a reinforcer for appropriate behavior
- Reinforce others using the preferred tangible
- Heavy emphasis on choice

