

Functional Behavioural Assessment (a brief overview)

Functional Behaviour Assessment is a systematic method of assessment for obtaining information about the purposes (functions) a challenging behaviour serves for a student. Results are used to guide the design of an intervention for decreasing challenging behaviour and increasing appropriate behaviour. If a formal Functional Behaviour Assessment is required, teachers should consult with Professional Support Services personnel. Based on the Functional Behaviour Assessment, a Behavioural Support Plan (BSP) may be developed to identify effective alternative behaviours and strategies for reducing, or replacing, challenging behaviours.

What is a Functional Behavioural Assessment?

- It is an approach to addressing behaviour problems that looks at both the likely causes of behaviour and at the characteristics or symptoms of the behaviour.
- It attempts to answer the questions: Why is *this* person engaging in *this* behaviour, in *this* setting, at *this* time, e.g., to escape, avoid, or get something?
- It attempts to identify the biological, social, affective, and environmental factors that initiate, sustain, or end the behaviour in question.
- It focuses on identifying patterns of behaviour, rather than individual occurrences.
- It recognizes that the functions of behaviour are not usually considered inappropriate. Rather, it is the behaviour of the student to satisfy the function that is the problem.
- The goal of intervention, then, is to fulfill the student's need with an appropriate alternative that serves the same function as the inappropriate behaviour.

A Functional Behavioural Assessment is not:

- a specific form or single test/instrument
- a one-time event
- a record of consequences

Key outcomes of a Functional Behavioural Assessment:

- Description of the problem behaviour(s) – clearly and reliably defined
- Identification of situations most commonly and least commonly associated with the problem behaviour(s)
- Understanding of the function(s)/purpose(s) of the problem behaviour

Who conducts a Functional Behavioural Assessment?

- Should be a team, rather than a single person – need more than one perspective
- Should include persons from a variety of environments in which the student interacts
- Ability to work in a collaborative and problem-solving context

Conducting a Functional Behavioural Assessment

- Review all available information, assessments, IEPs, Safety Plans, parent/guardian input, etc.
- Identify all behaviours of concern
 - e.g., risk of injury behaviour to self or others, running away, etc.
- Operationally define each problem behaviour in measurable/observable terms

- e.g., David pokes other students with his ruler, pencil, etc., two or three times a day.
- If a behaviour occurs as part of a chain, identify all behaviours
- e.g., David first says “you’re annoying,” then pokes the student, then laughs.
- Track behaviours for a period of time (at least one full week, preferably two) to identify:
- Antecedent – what was happening before the behaviour occurred?
 - Slow triggers (setting events) e.g., a.m. or p.m., particular day, missed meal, changes in schedule – more distant in time, but increase the probability that the problem behaviour will occur
 - Fast triggers, e.g., specific request, specific people, specific task, behaviour of others
 - Behaviour – what did the student do?
 - Operationally define the behaviour.
 - Frequency – how often does this happen? when?
 - Duration – how long does the behaviour last?
 - Intensity – how severe is the behaviour?
 - Consequence – what happened after the behaviour?
 - What did the student get, avoid, or escape?
 - How did the student react, how did others react?
- Information that can be obtained from a Functional Behavioural Assessment:
- When and where does the behaviour occur?
 - Does the behaviour occur in all settings?
 - Has the behaviour improved or deteriorated?
 - What strategies have been effective/ineffective?
 - Under what conditions does the student do well?
 - During what times or what activities is the student more/most successful, less/least successful?
 - Are varied instructional approaches used in various settings?
 - Are there specific staff who are more/less successful with the student?
 - Does the student have the skills or ability to respond appropriately?
 - Does the behaviour serve a purpose for the student?
 - Are there home, medical, or other external/internal factors?
- Assess or analyze this information to develop interventions:
- By identifying antecedents (both slow and fast triggers), can you change them or intervene to prevent/diffuse behaviour before it occurs?
 - Which aspect of the behaviour do you want to reduce?
 - Can you provide or teach an alternative behaviour to meet the same function?
 - Will changing the consequence for the student change the behaviour?