

Home Behavior Support & Functional Behavior Assessment

It can seem like challenging behaviors come out of nowhere. However, most behaviors serve some purpose.

When we know the reason behind a challenging behavior, it is easier to replace it with a better one.

Often, a behavior serves 1 of 4 purposes:

Sensory Seeking

Gain Attention

(positive or negative)

Escape or Avoidance

Gain Access to Something

Use this checklist tool to help find the reason behind a person's behavior. It can show you how you can help them.

Please talk to your doctor or therapist if you have questions.

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Is the behavior sensory based?

- ☐ Does it seem like they enjoy the behavior? Do they seem aware of others around them when they do the behavior?
- ☐ Do they do this because they need sensory input (feels good)?
- ☐ Are they trying to avoid a type of sensory input (feels bad)?
- ☐ Do they do this when others are out of the room?



You might:

- Give sensory input on a regular basis or give sensory input before they seem to need it.
- Find a different behavior that may give similar sensory input (feels the same).
- Talk to an occupational therapist (OT).

Is the behavior attention based?

- ☐ Do they smile just before doing the behavior?
- ☐ Do they get attention from others for the behavior?
- ☐ Do they look at or approach someone before doing the behavior?
- ☐ Does positive or negative attention (words, touch, eye contact) follow the behavior?



You might:

- Give positive reinforcement for appropriate behavior
- Give lots of praise and positive attention on a scheduled basis for appropriate behavior
- Help the person into a safe situation but give them as little attention as you can.
- Try not to give any attention for inappropriate behavior (Don't talk. Avoid eye contact. Use neutral body language to keep them from the dangerous behavior)

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Is the behavior to gain access to something?

- ☐ Do they ask for an item before or during the behavior?
- ☐ Does the behavior stop when they are given an item or activity they wanted?
- ☐ Does the behavior happen after it is clear they cannot have the item or activity?
- ☐ Does the behavior happen when the item or activity is not given fast enough?



You might:

- Help them find a way to ask for the item or activity. They can point at pictures or ask for something.
- Give them a visual communication system to make requests. This can be pictures of favorite items.
- Teach them to wait. You can use a timer or a “first-then board” (FIRST we use the bathroom THEN we go outside”).
- Use visual supports or schedules that show when they will get the item or activity.
- Use a visual system to show that the item is not available.

Is the behavior escape or avoidance based?

- ☐ Does the behavior happen when a task or job is presented?
- ☐ Does the behavior happen when a new activity starts?
- ☐ Does the behavior happen when something is presented that they doesn't like ? (This can be an item or activity).
- ☐ Does the behavior stop when they are able to leave the activity or escape from the item?



You might:

- Give a scheduled “escape” or break during activities. Do this before the behavior happens
- Try to make the activity easier. You can slowly make it more difficult as they tolerate it better.
- Teach them to ask for a break. They can ask or use visuals to ask.
- Have them work for an incentive or positive reinforcement. Help them pick one before they start. After they choose what to work for, remind them they will get this after they finish.

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General Questions:

- ☐ Does the behavior happen by itself?
- ☐ Does the behavior happen along with other behaviors?
- ☐ Have you identified one target behavior to address?
- ☐ Does the behavior happen more than 10 times a day?
- ☐ Does the behavior happen at a certain time of day?
- ☐ Does the behavior happen everywhere or in a certain place?

You can:

- Provide a structured environment.
Have consistent routines.
- Be aware of any sensory problems in the area
- Have favorite/security items close by
- Give simple, clear instructions
- Make tasks smaller. You can also ask less often until they can perform the task well.
- Stay close by for support but give some freedom.
- Use visuals and pictures to help communicate.
- Use a visual schedule. They can follow it for reassurance and reminders
- Remove problem items from the area if you can.
- Provide an incentive that they like. Remind them what they are working for.
- Offer an activity they don't prefer, then do a favorite one.

Talk to your doctor or therapist about any questions or concerns.

If the behavior is disrupting their education, you can ask their school to do a **functional behavior assessment**.

You will need to write your request in a letter. Ask us for a sample letter if you need.

For questions or help, call OSF Autism Pathways at 1-800-910-0770.

