

# Behavioral Concerns in Children and Adolescents with Autism Spectrum Disorder

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# Defining Challenging Behaviors

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- Aggression
  - Self-Injury
  - Disruptions
  - Noncompliance
  - Tantrums
  - Elopement
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- Behaviors that negatively impact daily functioning, learning, socialization, and/or development

# Prevalence

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- Children with developmental delays are 3x more likely to score in the clinically significant range on assessments of challenging behaviors (Baker et al., 2003)
- Prevalence of any challenging behavior as high as 64.3-93.7% (McTiernan et al., 2011; Murphy et al., 2009)

# Challenging Behavior = Communication

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- Behaviors occur because they serve a function and/or produce an outcome
- Challenging behavior is a form of communication that often serves a purpose/function for the individual
- Many are learned over time and through experiences
  - Difficulties in getting wants/needs met in other ways can lead to using challenging behaviors as a way to do so
- Delays and difficulties with communication and social skills can put individuals at increased risk for challenging behaviors

# Understanding Behavior

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- Examine the challenging behavior being used to communicate
- Assess for function(s) or purpose of behavior
  - Why is the behavior occurring?
  - What is motivating and maintaining the behavior?
- Look at the whole context – behaviors do not occur in isolation
- Work together as a team with the individual, family members, service providers, etc.
- Gather data

# Assessment of Challenging Behaviors

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- Functions of behavior
  - Attention
  - Escape/avoid
  - Tangible
  - Sensory/automatic
  
- Important!
  - Need to examine and rule out any underlying medical causes
  - Response to pain, discomfort, or illness?

# Assessment of Challenging Behaviors

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- Functional Behavior Assessment (FBA)

- Type of assessment used to determine function of challenging behavior and appropriate intervention strategies

- Areas to Assess



# Assessment of Challenging Behaviors

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Interviews

Rating Scales

Direct Observations

Cooper et al. (2007); Steege & Watson  
(2009)



# ABC's of Behavior

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- Antecedent – what happens right before the behavior
- Behavior – what does the behavior look like (specific, observable terms)
- Consequence – what happens right after the behavior

# ABC Chart

Date/Time/Setting	ANTECEDENT: what happened before the behavior	BEHAVIOR	CONSEQUENCE: what happened after the behavior
12/19 7:35am  At home	John was watching television after eating breakfast. I asked John to go downstairs and get his backpack.	Screaming, crying, hitting	I asked him one more time and then got his backpack myself.
12/20 9:53am  Reading activity at school	Amy and other students expected to be working independently on their homework assignment.	Amy stood on her chair and threw her pencil across the room.	All of her classmates laughed. I lectured her about needing to go back to work.

# Linking Assessment to Intervention

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- Better understand the patterns of behavior
  - Leads to behavior hypotheses about the purpose(s) of the behavior
  - Determine what the challenging behavior is communicating
  
- Use of FBA increases the likelihood of treatment success  
(Horner et al., 2002)
  
- Intervention: Match function of the challenging behavior  
(Brosnan & Healy, 2011; Kazdin, 2011)
  
- Help the individual be successful in getting their wants/needs met through other, appropriate behaviors

# Linking Assessment to Intervention

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- Build on individual's strengths and focus on positive behavioral intervention approaches
- Focus on behaviors you want to see increase
- Goals should be realistic and meaningful
  - Improve quality of life

# Intervention Strategies

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ABC's!

1. Use of prevention (antecedent) strategies
2. Teaching replacement behaviors
3. Examining and changing our responses to the challenging (and positive) behavior (consequent strategies)

Center on the Social and Emotional Foundations for Early Learning  
(2013)

# Prevention Strategies

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- Environmental strategies/modifications to reduce the likelihood of behavior concerns
- Possible support/adaptation strategies
  - Providing structure, routines, predictability
  - Set clear expectations for behavior
  - Foreshadow transitions and changes
  - Use of visual supports and activity schedules; Use timers
  - Modify instructions, presentation/length of tasks, way child is expected to respond
  - Provide choices
  - Set clear expectations for behavior
  - Social stories
- Modify physical/sensory characteristics of setting
  - Sound, lighting, tactile/texture
- Calming, safe spaces

Brosnan & Healy (2011); CSEFEL (2013); Lequia, Machelicek, & Rispoli (2012)

### Back to School Night!

On August 22<sup>nd</sup>, I will go to my new school with my



mom and dad. I am going to meet new teachers and new friends. It will be a lot of fun! The new school I am going to is called \_\_\_\_! When I go to my new school for the first time, I will be able to eat snacks,



play with toys,



and I will sit by my

mom and dad and listen to the teachers talk.



I will meet new people I do not know. A new person may come by me when I am with my mom or dad

### Afternoon and Evening Schedule

Get off the bus



Eat Dinner



Homework Time



Game and TV Time



Bath



Brush Teeth



Put on PJ's



Reading Time



Bed Time



### Morning Schedule

• Wake Up

• Got to the Bathroom

• Get Dressed

• Pack up Items

• Eat Breakfast

• Brush Teeth

• Watch TV



**CHOICE BOARD**

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<b>First</b>	<b>Then</b>





# Teaching Replacement Behaviors

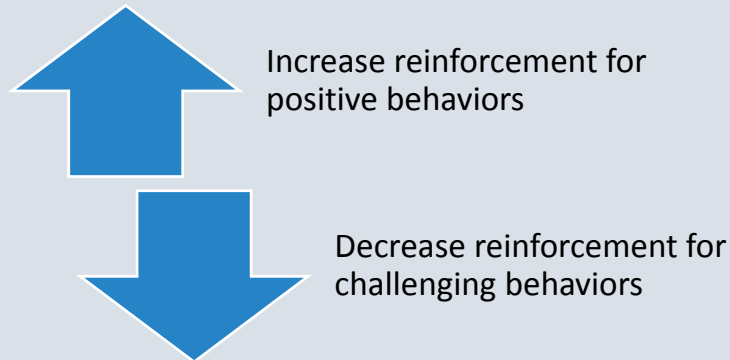
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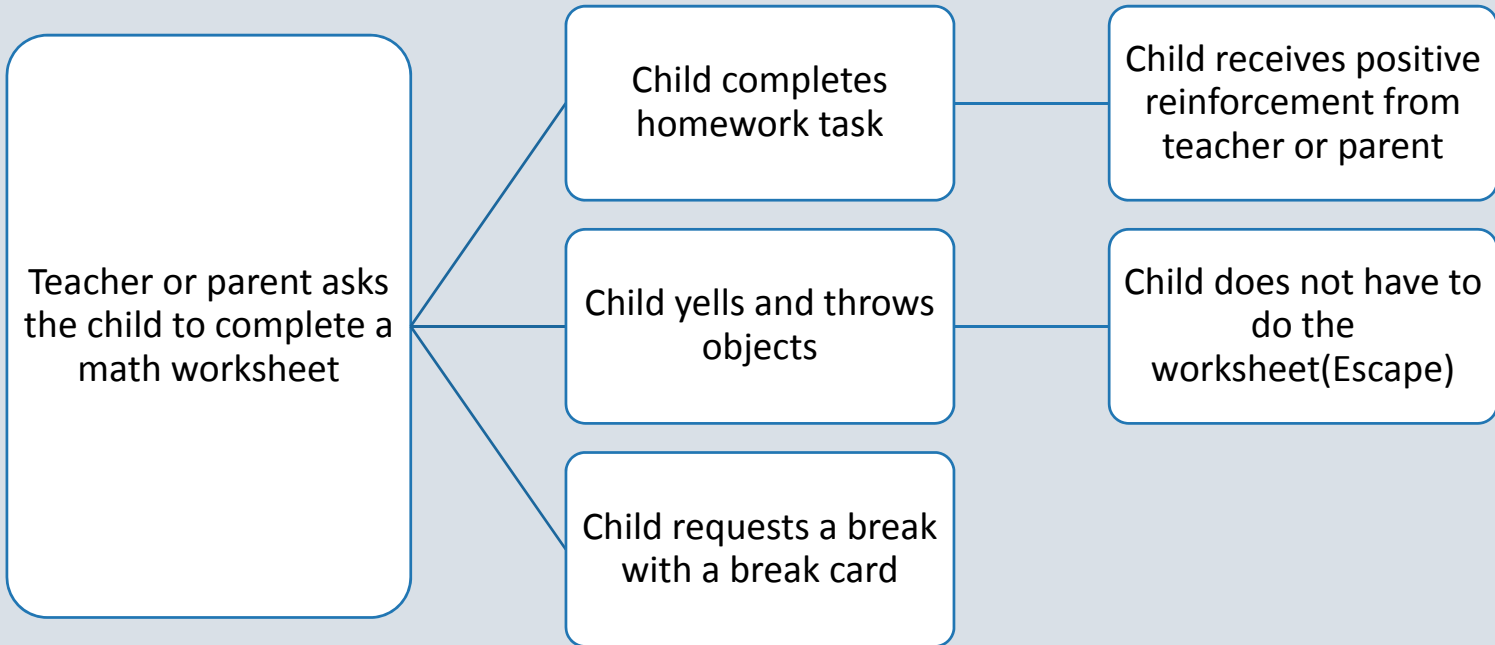
- Does the individual have another way to express their wants/needs?
- Do we need to teach alternative behaviors to replace the challenging behavior?
  - Efficient and effective
  - Patience and practice
  
- Functional Communication Training (Carr & Durand, 1985)
- Task analysis
- Video modeling
- Role play practice
- Teaching coping strategies

# Consequent Intervention Strategies

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- Changing environmental patterns of response and reinforcement
- Provide increased and more consistent attention to positive behaviors
- Reward positive behaviors (verbal, activities/items, token economy reinforcement system)





Room Cleaning Chart

Task	Mon	Tues	Wed	Thurs	Fri	Sat	Sun
1. Put dirty clothes in hamper (from room and bathroom) 2. Put clean clothes in dresser 3. Hang up dresses and uniforms in closet							



Sticker = I Completed all three Room Cleaning Tasks



Stickers = Extra Time to Play Just Dance (Computer)!

RULES:



WALK NICELY BY MOM



HOLD HAND; NO PULLING HANDS

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= Special Reward!



# Important Considerations

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- Consistency
- Patience
- Behavior change takes time
- Importance of positive behavioral supports and use of proactive strategies
- Try to remain calm and non-judgmental in the presence of challenging behavior
- Co-morbid psychopathology

# Resources

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Talk to pediatrician about local therapists and service providers

Autism Speaks – Challenging Behaviors Toolkit ([autismspeaks.org](https://autismspeaks.org))

Waisman Center COVID-19 Resources webpage - <https://www.waisman.wisc.edu/covid-19/>

Regional Centers for Children and Youth with Special Health Care Needs (CYSHCN)

- (800) 532-3321

# Questions

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