ADDRESSING CHALLENGING BEHAVIOURS IN AUTISM THOUGH FUNCTIONAL COMMUNICATION TRAINING

Presented by:

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Goals of this workshop

- To understand
- To Acquire
- To develop

A good Intervention will...

- Make the problem behaviour irrelevant
- Make the problem behaviour inefficient
- Make the problem behaviour ineffective
- Make the new response relevant
- Make the new response efficient
- Make the new response effective
What do we know about children with ASD?
- We know that the majority of their inappropriate behaviours are motivated by escape (from demand, instruction, social stimulation, etc).
- We know that a large percentage of their behaviour is motivated by automatic reinforcement (sensory stimulation).

Challenging in addressing problematic behaviours
- Behaviours may be chronic or episodic (seemingly unpredictable).
- Confusing history of previously attempted interventions (creating a slot machine effect).
- Parents and/or teachers may be “burnt out”.
- Parents need to consider siblings while teachers need to consider other students.
- Mediators may disagree about the need for intervention or what the intervention should be.

What does the research show
- All behaviour serves a function, including inappropriate behaviour.
- Focusing on the topography of the behaviour does not lead to success.
- Understanding the function of the behaviours leads to more effective intervention.
Steps to Success

1. Decide who will be involved in the intervention
2. Conduct a functional assessment of the behaviour
3. Develop a plan based on the assessment of the function
4. Implement and evaluate the plan

Identify who will aid or hinder the intervention

For example, a well intentioned grandma may be excluded from the intervention until such time as the behaviour is under the control of numerous others

ABC vs Functional Evaluation

Collecting ABC data may provide clues as to where to look for the function but does not necessarily lead to that discovery
Behaviour serves only 3 Functions

- Behaviour continues because it is:
  - A. Positively reinforced through with tangible or social reinforcement
  - B. Is negatively reinforced by avoidance or escape from an aversive
  - C. Is automatically reinforced as the behaviour provides its own reinforcement through sensory stimulation

Form and Function

- Different forms of behaviour can serve the same function
- Same or similar forms of the behaviour may serve different functions

The importance of Function

- Interventions based on an understanding of functions are more effective (Carr et al, 1999)
**Functional Assessment Methods**

- Indirect: An interview
- Direct:
  - ABC data
  - Scatter plot
  - Functional Assessment Checklist
  - Functional Assessment Cards

**Functional Assessment Methods**

- Interview:
  - Good starting place
  - May provide clues as to when to collect data on the behaviour
  - May help determine the method by which to collect data
  - Can be subjective

**ABC Data**

- Antecedents
- Behaviour
- Consequence
- Child’s reaction to the consequence
Scatter Plot
- Takes very little time
- Useful for high frequency behaviours

Functional Assessment Cards
- May take a few minutes per card
- Need many cards for comparison
- Need at least two or more recorders

Functional Assessment
- Less subjective than ABC data
- May identify patterns
- May reveal correlations between settings and behaviour
**How to Develop and Intervention based on function**

- Determine the child’s current communication repertoire
- Replace the inappropriate behaviour with verbal operants that are:
  - more efficient than the inappropriate behaviour
  - are less effortful than the inappropriate behaviour
  - are understood by many listeners

**We want to make the problem behaviour**

- 1. Irrelevant (reinforcement is available through the emission of other behaviours)
- Inefficient (the new response brings reinforcement faster and with less effort than the problem behavior)
- Ineffective (the problem behaviour no longer results in reinforcement.

**Making the behaviour ineffective**

- Research has shown that for a child to acquire a new, more appropriate response the previous inappropriate response must be effectively placed on extinction. This means that it no longer serves a function.
Caution!
- When reinforcement no longer follows a behaviour which was previously effective it gets worse before it gets better
- Sometimes effective interventions are prematurely abandoned because of this

Ways to lessen the extinction burst
- Non-contingent reinforcement
- Development of a functional alternative
- Make the alternative more efficient and effective

Making the problem Behaviour Irrelevant
- Anticipate and Prevent
  - Insert a neutralizing activity
  - Make instructions or tasks easier
  - Add aids to learning (visual cues)
  - Increase reinforcement (build it into the task)
  - Provide non-contingent reinforcement (decrease the motivation)
  - Break activities down into smaller steps and reinforcement smaller steps
High Probability Requests

- Having the child complete 4 to 5 high probability requests before issuing a low probability request will create behavioural momentum (increase the likelihood that the low probability request will be followed).

Behaviour and Communication

- There is a direct relationship between problem behaviour and communication deficits in Autism.

Manding

- In lay terms a mand is essentially a request either for something tangible or for information.
- When thirsty (EO) I see water (SD) I ask for water (mand) and receive water (reinforcement).
- When lost (EO) I see a person (SD) I ask for directions (mand) and I'm no longer lost (reinforcement).
How to teach manding

- Need to identify what is reinforcing for the child
- Need to stop reinforcing inappropriate methods of acquiring the reinforcer
- Need to determine the form of the new response to acquire the reinforcer (verbal, picture, sign, etc)
- Need to contrive an establishing operation (motivation)
- Need to identify the discriminative stimulus (cue) that signals the availability of reinforcement.

Functional Communication Training

- Select a response modality that would be successful for the child (sign, gestures, PECS, voice output)
- Select a response form that the child can learn rapidly (e.g. break card)
- Contrive numerous learning opportunities for the child to use and have the new response reinforced

Functional Communication Training, con’ted

- Provide cues/instructions for the child to use the communication response
- Provide physical prompts for the child to use the communicative response
- Verbally label the child’s request as s/he makes it
**Functional Communication Training, cont'd**

- Fade prompts and Instructions to promote independence
- Specifically teach generalization across settings in which the data indicates the behaviour may occur

**Matching the Strategy to the Function of the Behaviour**

- For attention Maintained behaviours
  - Give effective instructions
  - Provide non-contingent reinforcement
  - Use differential reinforcement
  - Use consistent planned ignoring

**For Object / Activity Maintained Behaviours**

- Response cost procedures
- Extinction
- Teach an appropriate alternative communicative response to request objects/activities
For Automatically Reinforced Maintained Behaviours

- Get a medical examination
- Interrupt and redirect
- Provide non-contingent opportunities to engage in activities that provide the same or similar sensory input

Contact us for Future Training Events

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