

*Schools and families can work together to reduce challenging behaviors in children.*

## Functional Behavioral Assessment

Most children have occasional behavior challenges with self-regulation, but for some children with sensory or emotional disabilities conforming to behavioral expectations for a long period of time can be a struggle.

School can present a significant challenge for these children, so they often spend a lot of time out of the classroom due to challenging behaviors. If your child is struggling with behavior challenges at school, you can work together with the school to make it possible for your child to spend more time with their peers. One way is to develop a behavior plan based on a Functional Behavioral Assessment (FBA).

Many challenging behaviors in school reflect your child's reaction to transitions, change of routine, undesired work, or the environment. Understanding the cause (or function) of a behavior is important in developing an appropriate intervention. An FBA identifies what behaviors may need to change and determines the cause or triggers of the behaviors. School staff can then develop a behavior plan to prepare for and redirect challenging behaviors.

### How is an FBA completed?

A person knowledgeable about behaviors, such as the school psychologist or behavior interventionist, observes your child at different times of the school day and in various settings to identify factors that may trigger challenging behaviors.

Through interviews with you, your child's teachers and other school personnel who interact with your child, they can gather data that will help determine which interventions will work best in reducing or redirecting challenging behaviors. As a parent you play an important role in this process both as a source of information and as an ally in the implementation of interventions. A consistent approach to behavior management will be most effective for your child.

### "Challenging behaviors"

Behaviors that cause the most difficulties in school are usually related to attention seeking, escape or response to environment.



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**802-876-5315**

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If your child has emotional difficulties, they may feel the need to gain the attention of their teachers or peers but lack the skills to do it in a positive manner. They may become physically aggressive with others as a way of seeking attention. Refusing to work or bolting from the classroom may be your child's way of avoiding an undesirable task or activity. Understanding the function of the behavior will help you and the school determine alternative behaviors that your child can use to achieve the same end.

Your child may be extremely sensitive to environmental factors, such as noise, lighting, and level of activity. If this is the case, reactions to environmental stressors can cause behaviors inappropriate to the setting. Making changes and accommodations to the classroom, cafeteria, or other school settings can help alleviate the stress. School personnel can teach your child appropriate techniques for coping with these stresses.

#### **If interventions do not work**

Sometimes observations and interviews do not provide enough information to really understand the cause of a challenging behavior. In this case, you can request that a qualified professional such as a trained Board-Certified Behavioral Analyst (BCBA) perform the assessment. By systematically controlling and changing environmental factors and observing resulting behaviors, the BCBA can collect data that can contribute to the development of an effective prevention plan. Once triggers are identified, making simple changes to your child's environment or routine can eliminate or lessen the frequency or severity of the behaviors.

#### **The goal**

Most children can learn appropriate behavior skills. In order for your child to do so, it is important for everyone to understand challenging behaviors, such as where they occur and what purpose they serve for your child. If you learn about the behaviors and know when, where and why they are likely to happen, you and the school can plan positive strategies to teach new behaviors. You and your child's teachers can use the information from an FBA to help your child learn new skills. The goal is to teach your child to effectively communicate their needs.

#### **Resources**

##### **BEST: Building Effective Strategies for Teaching Students**

The goal of the project is to increase and strengthen the regional capacity across Vermont so that schools and their communities are better able to anticipate and respond to the needs of students who are at risk of, or who experience emotional and behavioral challenges.  
802-656-3131

##### **University of Vermont, Center on Disability & Community Inclusion (CDCI) Interdisciplinary Team (I-Team)**

Assists school teams in the delivery of educational services to students with intensive education needs.  
800-770-6103

##### **Vermont Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (VTPBiS)**

A statewide effort designed to help school teams form a proactive, school-wide, systems approach to improving social and academic competence for all students.  
802-656-5775

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