

“Why does he do that?”
Understanding Functions of
Behavior

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People and environments affect learning.

The underlying assumption of a functional approach to addressing challenging behavior is that we can:

1. Arrange environments to prevent challenging behavior
2. Teach new behaviors to replace the challenging behavior.

- Students can learn new, more appropriate ways to get their needs met.

They require instruction about how to do that.

- We can also make changes to learning environments so the student is less likely to react to their need in a negative (challenging) way, and more likely to be able to meet their need in a positive way.



Students need what they need. We can't change what they need.



How can I tell
what a student
needs?



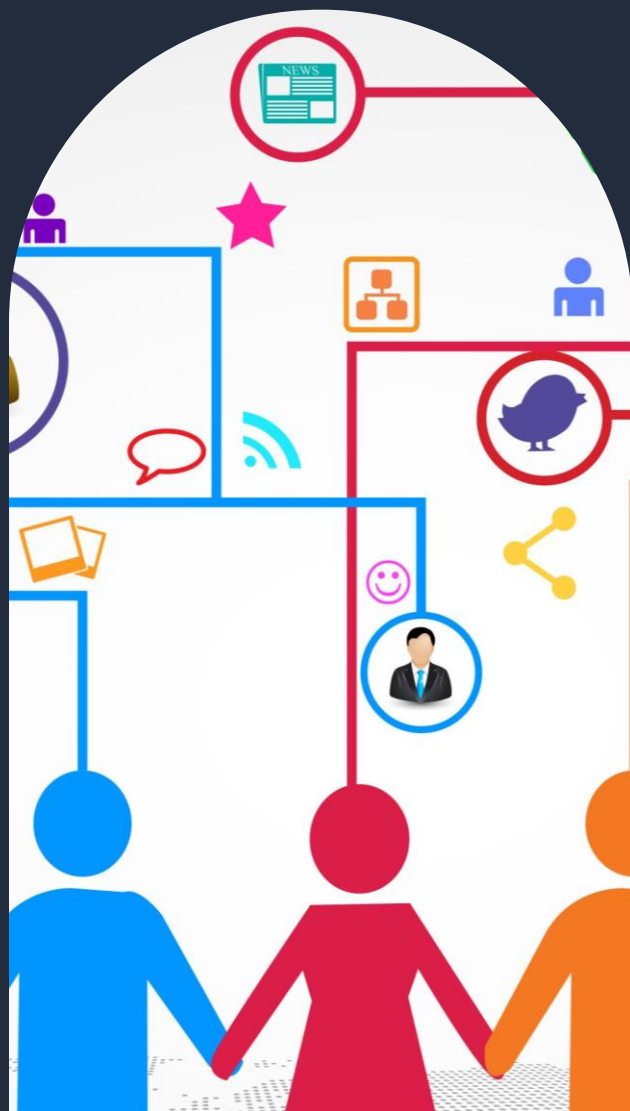
Consequences tell us why behaviors are occurring. Listen to the consequences!

- When students engage in challenging behavior, they are seeking an outcome that serves their needs. Therefore, the consequence tells us what they need.
- If the outcomes were not positive for the student, the student would not continue to engage in the behavior.
- When a student is avoiding work, it works for them because they do not experience the punishing consequence of completing the work. Their behavior is effective at avoiding work.
- When a student is seeking attention through challenging behavior, this means that their behavior is very effective at getting attention.
- We need to teach new behaviors that meet these SAME CONSEQUENCES
- We also need to alter environments – which means we need to listen to kids about what helps them.



We need to see the world
from the student's point of
view

- NOT from the perspective of compliance



All behavior is communication in some way

- Students are communicating with us through their behavior.
- Watch your students carefully.

Look at what happens directly after the behavior. What does the student achieve?

This is the need they are communicating.

Look at what happens directly before the behavior. What predicts it?

These are the environmental conditions that can be changed, affecting the need for the behavior.

Think: What skill can I teach this student to get their needs met in a more appropriate way?

Often, this is a communication skill of some kind.

Example: Student work avoidance

- Questions to ask:

What is the student trying to avoid?

Ex: written work, schoolwork that is too challenging, work that is not engaging

What can be changed about the task so that the student is less likely to avoid it?

Ex: breaking it down into smaller chunks, offering choice, accommodations for written work

What skills can I teach the student to help them manage their work in the future?

Ex: checklists and self-monitoring, work-break-work-break schedule, self-advocacy for accommodations.



REMEMBER: if you change nothing about the environment, and teach no new skills, the student's need to avoid the task will not go away.

