Strategies for Understanding & Addressing Challenging Behaviors in Young Children with ASD

What Are We Talking About?

Challenging behaviors are typically defined as behaviors that are not socially acceptable, physically dangerous, and those that negatively impact education.

From Matson, Mahan, Hess, Fodstad, & Neal (2010)

A is for Antecedent

- Antecedents also include the physical environment and any event that occurs immediately prior to the behavior
- Remember that an event can be external (an adult asks the child to put away the blocks) or internal (the child is bored)
- When someone says, “He hits for no reason,” we want to come back to the antecedents and look again

A is for Antecedent

- Try to rule out any medical/physiological issues (which will often involve a conversation with the parents or caregivers)
- Examine the environment –
  - Is it structured?
  - Are visual supports being used?
  - Is it overwhelming?
- If a request is being made of the child, is it appropriate for their developmental and skill level?

B is for Behavior

- What exactly is the behavior and what is its FUNCTION?
  In other words, what is the child trying to communicate?
  - Avoidance/escape
  - Attention-seeking
  - Tangible/edible
  - Reduction or increase of sensory stimulation
  - Expression of negative feelings
- We need to know the function of the behavior so we can figure out a way for the child to get that need met in a more appropriate way
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>B is for Behavior</strong></th>
<th><strong>C is for Consequence</strong></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• It's important that you know (and can articulate) what you want the child to do differently so that you can teach the child</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Sometimes a child needs to learn a new skill from scratch</td>
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<td>• A replacement behavior is a new, more desirable behavior that the child uses instead of their problematic behavior</td>
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<td>• The replacement behavior needs to be equally effective as the old behavior and should have a similar consequence (function)</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>C is for Consequence</strong></td>
<td><strong>Applications to ASD</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>• How do peers and adults react when the child engages in this behavior?</td>
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<td>• Does the child &quot;get&quot; anything following their behavior? What? Do they get out of something?</td>
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<td>• What does the child learn based on this consequence?</td>
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<td><strong>Applications to ASD</strong></td>
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<td>• Aggressive Behavior</td>
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<td>- what is the child's capacity for other forms of communication?</td>
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<td>- peers vs. adults vs. self-injurious behavior</td>
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<td>- is the child overstimulated?</td>
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<td>• Tantrums/Meltdowns/Breakdowns</td>
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<td>- can be related to poor emotion regulation or low frustration tolerance</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Repetitive Behaviors or Rigid Play</td>
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<td>- related to unusual sensory interests or inflexibility</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Antecedent Package (prompting)</td>
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<td>• Behavior Package (Discrete Trial Training and PBIS)</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Comprehensive Behavioral Treatment for Young Children with Autism</td>
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<td>• Joint Attention Intervention</td>
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<td>• Modeling</td>
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<td>• Naturalistic Teaching Strategies</td>
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<td>• Peer Training Package</td>
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<td>• Pivotal Response Treatments</td>
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<td>• Schedules</td>
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<td>• Self-management</td>
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<td>• Story-based Intervention Package</td>
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**Aggressive Behavior**
- teach alternate form of communicating
- reduce expectations (at least temporarily) or increase structure

**Tantrums/meltdowns/breakdowns**
- teach alternate form of communicating
- use visuals during transitions
- gradually increase delay of gratification

**Repetitive Behaviors or Rigid Play**
- slowly introduce novel ways of using materials
- reduce amount of time dedicated to those activities
### General Recommendations

**Visual Supports**
- increases predictability and clarifies expectations
- can be used on a classroom, activity, or skill level
- relevant for a variety of challenging behaviors

**Using Interests to Your Advantage**
- is there a way to teach a skill that incorporates a child's special interest?

**Address Sensory Needs**

### Common Pitfalls

**Time Out**
- presumably works best if child understands the relationship between undesirable behavior and being isolated or removed from a situation

**Social Norms as a Motivator**
- often need to combine social "rules" with skill development and/or extrinsic rewards (at least initially)

### Questions from Previous Webinar

- Social/emotional measures as screening tools
- Differing opinions about PDD-NOS vs. Autism diagnosis

### Sensory Processing

Sensory processing is the term that refers to the way the nervous system receives, interprets and responds to sensory messages from movement and the environment.

### Why Do We Care About Sensory Processing Disorder (SPD)?

- 95% of children with ASD demonstrate some degree of sensory processing dysfunction.
- The greatest differences were noted in the following categories:
  - Under-responsive/ Seeks Sensation
  - Auditory Filtering
  - Tactile Sensitivity
  - Taste and Smell Sensitivity

### Why Do We Care About Sensory Processing Disorder (SPD)?

- The severity of sensory modulation impairments appears to directly correlate with autism severity, level of functioning, and severity of social communication impairment.
- Global sensory processing dysfunction is predictive of maladaptive behaviors in children with autism
- Sensory based strategies may counteract the emergence of maladaptive behaviors and be an effective strategy for their management

*(Tomchek & Dunn, 2007; Lane et al, 2009)*
A Developmental Perspective

Adaptive Response

Sensory OVERLOAD!!

Optimal Level of sensory arousal

L-o-w Arousal

Sensory Events Over time

Sensory Processing Disorder

- **Sensory Over Responsivity**
  - Little input goes a long way
  - Small threshold easily pushed into overload

- **Sensory Under-Responsivity**
  - Need A LOT to register information
  - High threshold – need EXTRA input to go into optimal level

- **Sensory Seeking**
  - Crave and seek sensory input
  - High threshold – need a lot of input and actively seek it out

Over-Responders

- Overly sensitive to sensory input:
  - being touched by others, getting dirty, working with messy supplies, certain sounds, visually distracted by wall decorations, clutter or other activities going on
  - May be on high alert
  - Emotionally charged reactions
  - Avoids or escapes uncomfortable activities or environments
  - Develop rigid routines and compulsive and perfectionist habits

Over-Responders

- Sensory OVERLOAD!!

- Optimal Level of sensory arousal

- L-o-w Arousal

- Sensory Events Over time
### What is calming?
- Think “womb like”
- Deep pressure
- Movement against resistance
- Linear movement
- Sucking
- Positioning - Physiological flexion with arms/hands at midline

### What can YOU do?
- Provide calming sensory input WITHIN daily routines to reduce the chance for over-arousal
- Sensory calming activities/ideas:
  - Chewy tubes, sucking thick liquid through a straw, blowing bubbles
  - Weighted lap pad/weighted animals
  - “Heavy work” around classroom (pushing/pulling/dragging)
  - Rocking, swinging, bouncing

### What can YOU do?
- Environment
  - Natural lighting if possible
  - Incandescent lamps
  - Noise canceling head phones
  - Reduce visual clutter
  - Cozy corner, “break” card

### Under-Responders
- Activity level is LOW
  - May appear uninterested, bored & unaware of surroundings
  - Slow with low tone, poor endurance & hard to get moving
  - Passive: quiet and difficult to engage
  - Clumsy and awkward
  - Lack of awareness
  - Mouthing

### Under-Responders

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<td>L-o-w Arousal</td>
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<td>Sensory Events Over time</td>
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### What can YOU do?
- Intensify sensory information so thresholds are met and child will notice/respond.
  - Make activities a multi-sensory experience “Sensory salad”
  - Movement breaks
    - Swinging, spinning, jumping, pushing, bouncing on the ball, obstacle course, tug-of-war, animal walks
  - Strong smells and flavors
  - Brighter lights, next to window
  - Sensory bins
  - Be animated, enthusiastic; use gestures; generate high energy.
**Sensory Seekers**

- Activity level is HIGH
  - May take excessive risks during play; likes jumping, crashing and rough housing
  - Runs instead of walking, is constantly on the move and is often in other people's space
- May be fidgety
  - Can't sit still, excitable, needs to be physically active to attend, may frequently out of seat and is constantly touching people and objects
- Mouthing
- Clumsy and Awkward
- Disorganized

**What can YOU do?**

- Incorporate additional sensory input into the child's routine so thresholds can be met WITHIN activities
  - Frequent breaks or "jobs" around classroom (heavy work is best)
  - High movement transitions (obstacle course, jumping, bouncing, animal walks)
  - Oral input: chews, sucking thick liquid (yogurt, applesauce) through a straw at snack time, blowing bubbles, etc.

**What can YOU do?**

- Sensory Bins
- Dynamic Seating (cushion/ball)
- Begin teaching calming, self-regulatory strategies:
  - Alert Program- "How does your Engine run?"
    - Eeyore, Pooh & Tigger

**Sensory Modulation Intervention**

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<th>Under-Responsive</th>
<th>Seeking</th>
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**Sensory Ideas for Early Childhood Setting**

- Sensory bins
  - Nuts and bolts, latches, sandpaper, popcorn kernels, rice/beans, coffee, sand and/or water table, fish eggs
  - Internet search sensory bin ideas
- Cozy Corner
  - Quiet space (maybe tent) filled with pillows or bean bags, quiet activities, soft, calming music, vibrating pillow
  - Noise canceling headphones
  - Natural lighting if possible or incandescent lamps

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