

Month 3: Functions of Behavior

Let's talk about the functions of behavior. This might not be new information for you. This might be a refresher. But for me, this is always important to think about and consider and this is definitely something that you need your whole team on board with when it comes to effective Behavior change. There is an important mindset that I think is a must-have you need to have the mindset that all behavior is communication all Behavior, even the negative ones the hitting, the punching, screaming, the yelling. It's communicating something and it's communicating something in a really loud way sometimes each behavior that you and I and our students do has a purpose. It has a function. That's why we say functions and behavior these behaviors are functioning and working behaviors that we do frequently that we keep doing we keep doing them because we're getting something out of them. If we didn't get something out of it. We'd stop doing it. So we want to look at what is the purpose of each Behavior? That our kids and ourselves because it's fun to think about the functions of behavior with our own behavior as well. What is that purpose these behaviors are learned every behavior is learned positive behaviors and negative behaviors. We continue to do things that work for us. If you have a teenager right now, whether it's a student or your own child, they probably know exactly what buttons to press and what words to say to get a reaction out of you. That's a learned behavior. They've learned that hey when I say this mom or dad react this way, all of our behavior is little big complicated simple are learned and have a purpose if we continue doing them. So that's kind of really the big First Step here is having that mindset and it's our goal as Behavior Changers to figure out what the purpose of these negative behaviors is. What is our student getting out of this negative behavior, and this can be a hard thing to figure out because behaviors are complicated and for our older kids behaviors have long learning histories, but it's our goal to figure this out because we want to figure out why it's happening so we can do two things. We can starve it and replace it, that's going to be our Mantra as we go through this thread on Behavior throughout these months in our membership.

We want to starve the negative behavior. We want to make the negative behavior not work as well as it used to work. If this behavior is happening very frequently. Let me tell you something. It's working for them and it's working real well then the next step which is as essential and it's the one people forget. We want to replace it. We want to teach a new positive pro-social way to get to the same purpose. Not the purpose we think is good the purpose the child wants so that's why we need to spend so much time looking at the behaviors right now to figure out Why they're happening. Let's talk about the four functions of behavior. I'm going to give you an easy acronym to remember them. And also, of course a downloadable worksheet. So you can review this all the time. So the four functions of behavior are going to include different things that are behaviors are trying to result in all of our behavior. And I mean are you and me plus our students fall into one or multiple of these categories? So the acronym is SEAT, S, E, A, T. Sensory, Escape, Attention, Tangible. So let's break it down: sensory behaviors. We all do sensory behaviors. These are behaviors that result in some type of internal satisfaction something about it feels good.

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Maybe you're a hair twirler. Maybe you're a doodler. Maybe you crack your knuckles or crack your back. We all do behaviors that feel good inside these behaviors aren't necessarily harmful sensory behaviors sometime in the autism World become synonymous with self-injurious sensory behaviors. There are some sensory behaviors that are harmful and we'll talk more in this membership about how to identify which behaviors should be targeted to decrease some of our Learners on the Spectrum might do more frequent or more higher magnitude sensory behaviors. That's okay. That's helping them feel good if they're not hurting anyone. I have no problem with that and you shouldn't have a problem with it either with some behaviors that become extremely disruptive we might want to look at teaching the skill of discrimination teaching where and when to do these sensory behaviors, not necessarily eliminating them, but that's another conversation for another month.

Our next behavior is escape. Escape behaviors are striving to avoid or escape a situation a person an activity a sound there's all kinds of things we escaped from you and I engage them Escape behaviors all the time. Think about the last time you got a phone call and you didn't want to answer it. What did you do? You didn't force yourself to answer it? Nope, you swiped and you escaped the phone call. Think about the last time you ran to the grocery store on a Saturday morning because you're out of milk. You have your pajamas on you look like crap. And of course what happens you run into someone, you know that always happens, right? What do you do? No, you don't go over and talk to them. You duck in the other aisle, you'll put your sunglasses on you take a fake phone call you hide in the cereal aisle for a little bit wait till they leave we're constantly escaping and avoiding things that we don't like it's human nature. It's okay, but sometimes Escape behaviors can become a problem if we're escaping things like academics things like social skills, social situations. This is identifying potentially a skill deficit that will talk more about in later months as well with Escape behaviors. It's really important to consider the to and the from. Escape does not exist in isolation. We are always escaping from something to somewhere else if a Learner is escaping a work task. It's because they want to go to somewhere. They want to go to the break area. They run to go to the computer. They want to go to access preferred conversations with somewhere else. We're always escaping to something more desirable. Think about the last time maybe you played hooky from work or you took a mental health day which no judgment. No shame. Do you you escaped from work to go have a fun day to yourself. You don't just sit on the couch and stare at the wall. You watch Netflix all day. You went shopping. You want to see a midday movie you did something exciting and desirable and preferred.

So with our Escape behaviors, make sure you can identify the to and the from. now we have a tension attention behaviors. Those are fun. Right the seare behaviors that the desired outcome is to get attention from another individual that could be a peer, that could be a teacher that could be peers in the hallway any adult but let's define what attention is because this is the mistep, attention is any verbal, eye contact, talking about any stuff from a person. It doesn't have to be positive. I'm not saying positive attention here just attention.

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So attention means yelling, reprimands, nagging, eye contact, talking about the student in front of them, I hate that, all of that is attention. So you might think oh, I'm not giving the student any attention but you are prompting and you are telling them what not to do or someone is snapping at him or yelling at him. That's all attention and you and I might not think that that's desirable but for some Learners that might actually cause increases a behavior and that might be the desired outcome. Our last function is tangible. The behavior is to access some item or activity. So the behavior is to try to get access to the iPad or a break area or the trampoline. so if you are pointing to a pecs picture that behavior results in getting that item, so that is a tangible Behavior. That's the function of that behavior when I go to Starbucks and I order my coffee and I give them my credit card or my Starbucks login on my phone and they hand me coffee that behavior of me requesting the coffee. The function is tangible because I'm getting coffee. There's also a sensory component because coffee fulfills a very important sensory need for me. So which leads me right into what we call multiple controls behaviors not all of our behaviors are going to fall nice and neat into one category because that's not how life Works your yours and mine as well as our students behaviors are going to sometimes fall into multiple functions. I do this Behavior so I can get attention and it meets a sensory need I do this Behavior because it's escape and it's an attention-seeking Behavior think about social media, social media is a perfect Escape / Attention Behavior. I use social media to escape my non-preferred tasks. I don't want to do the dishes. I don't want to fold my laundry. So I'm going to scroll Instagram. I'm going to scroll Pinterest but then when I post on Instagram, it's now attention-seeking so it serves both functions so start to think about in your own life.

What functions do your behaviors fall under? What are some attention-seeking behaviors you fall into or escape and none of these are necessarily bad. This is just why we continue to do what we do, applied behavior analysis is the science of human behavior. So it's just looking at the reasons why we do what we do In your download section. I made a little handout for you with the functions of behavior. I think this would be great to give to your team members to post in your binders or in your closet just to have readily available to be reminding yourself of that mindset. We talked about that behavior is communication and all Behavior has a purpose. It's our job to figure out the purpose so we can look for that positive behavior change.