Felix is an inquisitive, resourceful 15-year-old high school student with traumatic brain injury. He has struggled academically and behaviorally for years. In middle school, when presented with a difficult or complex assignment, he would frequently whine, stomp his feet, or hit his teacher or another student. When reprimanded, Felix would often run out of the room and, on several occasions, left the school grounds without permission.

Instead of removing Felix from his neighborhood school, the school personnel conducted a functional behavioral assessment to evaluate the reasons for his problem behavior. The team determined that Felix acted inappropriately when he was frustrated with the academic demands. Therefore, the school revised his academic program to meet his individual needs. This included an adapted curriculum with individual and small group tutoring and a revised behavioral support program. The last two years of middle school were a great success for Felix, his family, and school staff.

Introduction

Functional Behavioral Assessment (FBA) is an integral component of designing effective behavior support plans. FBA is a systematic process for describing problem behavior, and identifying the environmental factors and surrounding events associated with problem behavior. This information is used to identify and teach more appropriate replacement behaviors and to develop an effective plan for reducing the frequency or severity of the problem behavior.

Why This Approach is Important

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) requires that, at a minimum, the FBA be conducted when disciplinary sanctions result in extended periods (i.e. either before or not later than 10 business days after either the first removal beyond 10 cumulative school days in a school year or commencing a removal that constitutes a change in placement) in which a student is removed from school. In addition to the IDEA requirements, the FBA gives schools valuable information about the possible causes of problem behavior. Research demonstrates that the process of positive behavioral interventions and supports (PBIS) and developing behavioral support plans is more effective when the FBA is conducted prior to developing interventions. The FBA is used to a) define the problem behaviors, b) describe the settings under which problem behaviors are and are not likely to be observed, c) identify the function (the why) of the problem behaviors, and d) collect information from direct observation to support these outcomes.

Key Principles of Practice

While there are a variety of techniques available to conduct a functional behavioral assessment, all FBA processes as a general matter, based on research, include the same basic steps:

- *Collect Information* through informal consultation as well as direct observation. Conversations, questionnaires, checklists, and structured interviews with key persons (e.g., teachers, parents, the student) who have contact and experiences with the individual student can offer insights into the contexts or conditions under which the behavior occurs.Direct observations should also be made,so that observers can watch the behaviors as they are occurring and note the environmental events (environmental factors, antecedent and consequence events) that may initiate or sustain the behaviors. Specific, concrete behaviors are defined after observational assessments have been performed.

- *Propose Testable Explanations* of the student's behavior.A testable explanation is a hypothesis that may explain the relationship between a problem behavior and environmental factors that seem to be associated with its occurrences.Variables observed may include settings or circumstances that seem either to lead to the problem behavior or reinforce it after the fact.The hypothesis should consider the possible functions of the behavior for the student.

- *Assess the Validity of Your Hypotheses* to confirm the validity of the testable explanations. In general, additional information is collected about the conditions under which the problem behavior occurs and does not occur.This information should demonstrate that occurrences of the behavior and the presence of these conditions are related and predictable.

- The results of the FBA should be used to develop an effective and efficient behavioral intervention/support plan.

- Although the FBA term was introduced formally in the IDEA '97,there has been a strong history of using FBA for reducing behavioral problems. It is a critical tool for developing effective behavior intervention/support plans.

Where To Go For More Information

Office of Special Education Programs
Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services
U.S.Department of Education
330 C Street,SW
Washington,DC 20202
Phone (202) 205-5507
Web site:http://www.ed.gov/offices/OSERS/OSEP/index.html

The OSEP Center on Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS)
Behavioral Research and Training
5262 University of Oregon
Eugene,OR 97403-5262
Phone:541-346-2505   Fax:541-346-5689
Web site:http://www.PBIS.org.
The Center was established by OSEP to give schools capacity-building information and technical assistance for identifying, adapting, and sustaining effective school-wide disciplinary practices.

The Center for Effective Collaboration and Practice (CECP)
1000 Thomas Jefferson St.,NW
Washington,DC 20007
Phone (202) 944-5000 Fax (202) 944-5454
Web site:www.air-dc.org/cecp/
CECP promotes and supports the development and adjustment of children with or at-risk of developing serious emotional disturbance. To achieve that goal, the Center collaborates at Federal, state, and local levels to contributes to and facilitate the production, exchange, and use of knowledge about effective practices.