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Functional Behavioral Assessment in SESIS

1 Introduction: When to complete a Functional Behavioral Assessment

Functional Behavioral Assessment (FBA) and Behavior Intervention Plans (BIP) are based on New York State Special Education Regulations (NYSED / P-12 / Special Education / Regulations of the Commissioner of Education - Parts 200 and 201).

200.1 (r) provides a definition: Functional behavioral assessment means the process of determining why a student engages in behaviors that impede learning and how the student's behavior relates to the environment. The functional behavioral assessment shall be developed consistent with the requirements in section 200.22(a) of this Part and shall include, but is not limited to, the identification of the problem behavior, the definition of the behavior in concrete terms, the identification of the contextual factors that contribute to the behavior (including cognitive and affective factors), and the formulation of a hypothesis regarding the general conditions under which a behavior usually occurs and probable consequences that serve to maintain it.

The following excerpt from the regulations will guide the IEP team's decision making related to the necessity of completing an FBA. A student's need for an FBA must be considered whenever:

- a student with a disability is exhibiting persistent behaviors that impede his or her learning or that of others, despite consistently implemented general school-wide or classroom-wide interventions;
- the student's behavior places the student or others at risk of harm or injury;
- the Committee on Special Education (CSE) or Committee on Preschool Special Education (CPSE) is considering more restrictive programs or placements as a result of the student's behavior; and/or;
- the student is subject to disciplinary actions and a determination has been made that the behavior is related to the student's disability.

Please reference the Official Compilation of Codes, Rules and Regulations of the State of New York for regulatory language: 8NYCRR – Sections 200.1(r), 200.5(b)(1), 200.22(a), 201.3 and 201.4. (The most current regulations may be accessed online at:

<http://www.p12.nysed.gov/specialed/lawsregs/part200.htm>)

If an FBA is determined to be necessary, then it will be conducted in accordance with New York State Regulations. Once the FBA is completed, the need for the development of a BIP will be decided after the team analyzes the results of the FBA.

2 Creating the FBA in SESIS: Guidelines

2.1 SESIS Field Heading: What observational data has been collected?¹

This section summarizes all the direct data based on observation of the student and indirect data the team collected during the FBA process:

1. Direct data includes information related to how the student behaves in various settings at various times of the day where he or she was observed. This information may include examples of actual observed situations wherein the student interacted with people and/or the environment, as well as general impressions based on the observation. A description of conditions that surround the behavior (context) must be given. This may include information about any antecedents (i.e., that occur before) and consequences (i.e., that occur after) – all of which are specific to the student's behaviors of concern. This information should also include a summary of what other people are doing or saying before and after the student displays concerning behaviors. Direct data may be obtained from:
 - ABC Charts
 - Frequency Charts
 - Duration Charts
 - Scatter Plots
 - Intensity Scales
 - Other types of recording formats
2. Indirect data may be obtained from:
 - Student interviews
 - Parent interviews
 - Staff interviews (including teachers, paraprofessionals, and cafeteria, bus, custodial, office staff)
 - Surveys or questionnaires (e.g., Motivational Assessment Survey - MAS or Problem Behavior Questionnaire-PBQ)
 - Review of the student's records
 - Psychological / psychiatric evaluations

¹ Heading is based on regulation 200.22(a)(2) The FBA shall, as appropriate, be based on multiple sources of data including, but not limited to, information obtained from direct observation of the student, information from the student, the student's teacher(s) and/or related service provider(s), a review of available data and information from the student's record and other sources including any relevant information provided by the student's parent. The FBA shall not be based solely on the student's history of presenting problem behaviors. Additionally per regulation 200.22(a)(3) The FBA shall provide a baseline of the student's problem behaviors with regard to frequency, duration, intensity and/or latency across activities, settings, people and times of the day and include the information required in section 200.1(r) of this Part [200] in sufficient detail to form the basis for a behavior intervention plan ...

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- Medical information
- Information from the IEP Present Level of Performance
- Testing data
- Attendance data
- Office Discipline Referrals received (e.g., high level OORS report)

2.2 SESIS Field Heading: What is the targeted inappropriate behavior?²

Concretely, objectively and in measureable terms, describe what the student's behavior(s) looks like, sounds like, etc. Include who, what, where, how much, and how long. (For example, student raises closed fist in air above head, drops it down in front of person's face, shakes side to side, taps fist on arm of person one time causing slight movement inward of person's skin and yells simultaneously: "leave me alone.") Prioritize the most disruptive or unsafe behavior that impedes a student's learning or the learning of others.

Based on direct observation of the student, collecting and compiling data over at least a 2-3 week period, record additional information regarding this targeted behavior under the headings: **Frequency**, **Duration**, **Intensity** (select from a drop-down), and **Setting(s)**.³ Although latency is not currently included, it is important to record and include this data. Latency is the amount of time between the antecedent and the occurrence of the targeted behavior (e.g., the teacher says: "Time to pick up the toys." 10 seconds later "Student raises fist ...").

2.2.1 Frequency

Based on direct data recorded over at least a 2-3 week period and within multiple settings and situations, indicate an average number of times the behavior occurs within a specified time period. How often does the behavior occur?

Usually frequency data is taken when the behavior occurs often and can be counted as a unit of behavior each time it occurs – even if there appear to be a chain of behaviors that occur in and around the targeted one. (See previous example under section 2.2 – although it appears the student hits, there is actually a series of behaviors surrounding the actual contact.)

² Heading is based on regulation 200.1(r) ... "shall include, but is not limited to, the identification of the problem behavior, the definition of the behavior in concrete terms..."

³ These headings are based on regulation 200.22(a)(3): "provide a baseline of the student's problem behaviors with regard to frequency, duration, intensity and/or latency across activities, settings, people and times of the day..."

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2.2.2 Duration

Based on direct data recorded over at least a 2-3 week period and within multiple settings and situations, indicate an average of how long the behavior typically occurs from beginning to end of one episode.

This type of recording is used for behaviors that last for more than a few seconds and the type of behavior warrants recording by length of time rather than just a single brief occurrence. Consider how the behavior(s) lasts and hence interrupts instruction/learning? Duration information is important to focus on for students whose behavioral episode interferes with learning due to the length of time it is taking for the student to again be “available for learning.”

2.2.3 Intensity

Based on direct data recorded over at least a 2-3 week period and within multiple settings and situations, indicate whether the behavior appears to be mild, moderate or severe. This is determined by analyzing the frequency and/or duration data as to how interfering, destructive, damaging the behavior may be. Intensity involves a description of the degree of impact the behavior has (e.g., the depth, the force, the strength). For example, the student:

- (Screams) loud enough to be heard in adjacent classrooms -- but if that behavior occurs only once per day and lasts only a few seconds, then the intensity (albeit the scream was disturbing to instruction at the moment) might be considered **mild**. There is no long lasting effect which is dangerous or which seriously affects social/physical/ mental development.
- (Hits with retracted fist) hard enough to leave bruises on person(s) – might be considered **severe** because the effect was perhaps longer lasting even if it occurred only one time and took just seconds. The severity designation comes because now all the student’s classmates avoid the student; hence, the student may become less socially developed.
- (Bites) hard enough to leave marks, but has not yet broken skin – might be considered **moderate** because such a behavior is concerning but no one has gotten seriously hurt as yet. Perhaps data indicates biting occurs only once per day; but in comparison to a Scream as in the earlier example, a bite can become dangerous, is highly interruptive, and could result in greater loss if not addressed soon.

2.2.4 Setting(s)

Review data to identify where the problem behavior occurs and does not occur, with whom, and with the presence of what other environmental factors such as activities, events, temperature, sound, etc. (See also information recorded for the following two headings related to “triggers” and “environmental conditions” in sections 2.3 and 2.4 below.)



2.3 SESIS Field Heading: What triggers or actions occur immediately before the targeted behavior?⁴

Based on direct data recorded over at least a 2-3 week period and within multiple settings and situations, summarize antecedent Information (e.g., from ABC data and other direct data). Narrow down the data to determine what occurs just prior to the student exhibiting the behavior(s) of concern.

Triggers may include the presence of certain peers or adults, something that is said directly or indirectly, nonverbal behaviors (e.g., posturing, tone, facial expressions), sensory factors, etc. (also see information related to “environmental factors” in the following section, 2.4).

2.4 SESIS Field Heading: What environmental conditions may affect the targeted behavior?⁵

Document the factors existing within different settings (social, physical, sensory, etc.) – situations/events/activities/people/surroundings/elements of Nature that appear to make the target behavior more or less likely to occur. Does there seem to be a pattern in the behavior and within certain settings or situations? (For example, objective data might reveal that the student exhibits the behaviors more often in the cafeteria and gym than in the classroom. This is important information which may later allow the team to speculate whether that behavior is due to the student’s difficulty in regulating around noise or crowds or unpredictable conditions. During data analysis the team may instead determine that the reason is simply because the student prefers to be reading a book.)

2.5 SESIS Field Heading: What is the presumed purpose of each behavior?⁶

Based on all direct and indirect data, formulate and state the hypothesis – what appears to be the function/purpose of the behavior? Why does the student engage in the behavior that is now in his/her repertoire? (Consider also the next heading related to what a student gains or loses in section 2.6.) Provide a clear description of the hypothesis.

Sample phrasing: When ___(something occurs- antecedent)__(student)___ will ___(Targeted Behavior)___ within___ (amount of time after antecedent occurs – latency) ___ at an approximate rate/duration of ___(data collection baseline of frequency/duration) ___ in order to ___(get or avoid: purpose/function of behavior)___.

⁴ Heading is based on regulation 200.22(a)(3) “... to form the basis for a behavioral intervention plan for the student that addresses antecedent behaviors ...”

⁵ Heading is based on regulation 200.1(r) “...how the student’s behavior relates to the environment...”

⁶ Heading is based on regulation 200.1(r) “...determining why a student engages in behaviors that impede learning... the formulation of a hypothesis regarding the general conditions under which a behavior usually occurs ...”

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2.6 SESIS Field Heading: What does the student gain or lose as an immediate result of the targeted behavior?⁷

Based on all direct and indirect data and the team's ongoing formulation of a hypothesis, determine what the student appears to gain/get (e.g., attention or a desired tangible item) or lose/avoid (e.g., a math assignment or a noisy environment) by displaying the targeted behavior. Summarize consequence information (e.g., from ABC data). What happens immediately after the behavior that may be maintaining it, causing the behavior to occur again? (For example: Each time the student gets out of his/her chair, the teacher stops instruction and tells student to sit down. The student may simply be gaining/getting attention which he/she would not get sitting in the chair and doing work.)

2.7 SESIS Field Heading: What interventions were previously attempted, and what were the results?⁸

Based on indirect data (e.g., from student records and teacher reports) as well as direct observational data, describe how student responded to previous intervention plans or is responding to current interventions. Discuss what has worked or is working currently, as well as what did not work in the past and what currently does not appear to be working. All information should be connected to the targeted behavior.

2.8 SESIS Field Heading: What interventions should be planned?⁹

The team should identify what alternative and adaptive behaviors might be taught to the student to replace the targeted behavior. What behaviors/skills can be taught which will serve the same function/purpose of the behavior, the reason the student does the behavior? The team should consider what actually needs instruction. (For example, does the student already demonstrate the skill but needs support in using it when under stressful conditions? Would instruction related to self-regulation and/or social skills better assist the student?)

2.9 SESIS Field Heading: What does the student view as positive reinforcement?¹⁰

Based on interviews with the student and/or the use of a more formalized reinforcer assessment, the team must consider: What is highly reinforcing to the student? Moderately

⁷ Heading is based on regulation 200.1(r) ... "and probably consequences that serve to maintain it [behavior]" and also based on regulation 200.22(a)(3) ... "reinforcing consequences of the behavior..."

⁸ Heading is based on regulation 200.22(a)(2) ... "information obtained from direct observation ... from the student's teacher ... from the student's record... information provided by the student's parent .. but shall not be based solely on the students history..."

⁹ Heading is based on regulation 200.22(a)(3) ... "recommendation for teaching alternative skills or behaviors..."

¹⁰ Heading is based on regulation 200.22(a)(3) ... "and an assessment of student preferences for reinforcement"

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reinforcing? Not reinforcing? What motivates the student either from within the activity itself or as a reward? Does the student prefer tangible “pay offs” or just time to socialize? (For example, does the student seem satisfied by simply completing a writing assignment and putting it in a folder or does the student need a break to walk around and then come back to the task?)

2.10 SESIS Field Heading: What are the expected behavior changes? (Indicate in measureable and objective terms.)¹¹

Utilizing all data and team discussions related to the targeted behavior and its function/purpose – the hypothesis as to why the behavior occurs – the team must identify the desired/expected student behavior. State what new behavior(s) the student will learn, in what amount of time, and in what ways progress will be measured. Use SMART goal format as an example of how to write in measureable and observable terms. It is important to note that some behavior changes need to occur gradually, in increments in order to fully change a behavior. The team should describe benchmarks/approximations related to the expected/desired behavior which clearly lead to the eventual acquisition of the behavior.

2.11 SESIS Field Heading: Describe the methods/criteria for outcome measurement¹²

This is the section where all the reasons for conducting the FBA are listed and a determination is made by the team as to whether a formal BIP is necessary. If it is necessary, then the team might make suggestions as to possible content in the BIP which would include outcome measurement and progress monitoring.

Hence, based on all of the collected data the team should:

- Summarize the hypothesis - conditions under which the behavior usually occurs and the probable consequences that serve to maintain it. See section 2.5.
- Describe the disruptive or unsafe behavior that impedes student's learning or that of others. See section 2.2.
- Review all direct data (from formal assessment related to observation of the student) and indirect data (parent/student/teacher interviews etc.) that describe cognitive and affective factors (academic and emotional factors). See sections 2.2.1-2.2.4.
- Document when the team will meet to review progress and adjust the hypothesis if necessary? (monthly, bi-monthly, quarterly?)
- State benchmarks of achievement related to the targeted behavior and the expected behaviors. See previous section 2.10 on heading regarding expected behaviors changes. Indicate what data the team would like to review and within what periods of

¹¹ Heading is based on regulation 200.22(a)(3) ... alternative skills or behaviors ...

¹² Heading is based on consideration of all previously stated regulations and in particular 200.22(a)(3) ... sufficient detail to form the basis for a behavioral intervention plan for the student ...

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time (with or without recommendation for BIP) – see additional information in section 3 below.

- Recommend whether a formal BIP must be developed. (Prior to this decision, see additional in section 3 below regarding “Determining the necessity of developing a BIP”.) If a BIP is recommended, indicate timelines for completion, implementation, and progress monitoring.

3 Determining the necessity of developing a BIP

Team awareness of ways to “test” the accuracy of their hypothesis may circumvent the need for a formal BIP. In other words, the team must ponder further whether their hypothesis regarding the behavior is correct. Hence, rather than immediately recommending a BIP, the team might make suggestions as to how to systematically test the hypothesis – to determine the accuracy of the hypothesis – to see if the problem/targeted behavior might actually relate to a specific antecedent or consequence that can be manipulated or altered somehow. (For example, if the student seems to be avoiding a non-preferred task such as math, instruction might be scaffolded differently and paired with a preferred reinforcer; or if the student seems to be seeking attention by being sent from the room, the teacher might change a verbal directive and immediately upon entering the classroom, tell the student to work with a preferred peer in order to complete an assignment with greater focus). The introduction and implementation “manipulations”/changes is done systematically by collecting data each time a change in an antecedent or consequence is made. Usually it is recommended that only one manipulation or change be implemented at a time. The teacher/staff could choose to manipulate:

1. A specific instructional variable (e.g., complexity of learning tasks, oral or written student responses), or
2. An introduction or withdrawal of a variable (e.g., teacher attention, physical proximity), or
3. Another condition assumed to trigger the occurrence of the targeted behavior (e.g., student seating arrangement, desk placement).

In this way, the IEP team may be able to determine precisely the condition(s) under which the student is most (and least) likely to behave appropriately. The avoidance and/or attention seeking behavior indicated within the hypothesis can become clearer through more carefully designed data collection. The timelines for this systematic process will be based upon (among other things) the definition of targeted behavior, the student’s typical learning pace, the consistency of implementation, the skills of instructional staff in data collection and analysis, the need for instructional staff training and support to assure accuracy in manipulating and implementing.

With some minor differentiations in instruction, or additions/removals in the environment, or alterations to other conditions, there may be no need for an intensive BIP. Additionally, the changes may actually benefit all students (Universal Design for Learning) and point toward the need to teach the student as well as other students how to cope with changes, how to self-regulate, how to ask for the help needed, etc.