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Issue 33

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ASD Newsletter Feature Article: What happens before the meltdown?

When one of the students we are supporting becomes physically aggressive or engages in a tantrum, the main thing usually on our mind is making sure he or she does not hurt himself or others. Other priorities might include how to stop the behavior and how to minimize the level of distraction for the rest of the class. While these are important goals of any intervention, equal attention should be given to how the behavior started in the first place. In technical terms, we call these behavior inducing events *antecedents*.

Shifting our focus to deal more often with antecedents, rather than only reacting to behaviors, is a proactive, preventative approach. If we can effectively analyze what happens before the occurrence of a problematic behavior and develop successful antecedent strategies, we will have less need to plan and worry about what happens after the behavior. This is because good antecedent strategies prevent or minimize the chance that a problem behavior will occur. This is especially useful for more severe behaviors, such as hitting, biting, elopement (running away), and self-injury. If we can set up the student's environment to prevent these types of challenging behaviors, we will have more opportunity to teach positive, expected behaviors instead of continually returning to the same cycle of problem behavior and resulting consequences.

So what exactly are antecedents and how can we develop strategies based on an understanding of their importance in behavior patterns? Antecedents are essentially anything that happens in the environment before a behavior. There are antecedents that bring about a desired behavior (i.e. finishing a math problem) and antecedents that precede problem behavior (i.e., running out of class). Immediate antecedents, often called *triggers*, include situations which may be created due to a particular demand in class, such as being asked to write a sentence, or as a result of another student getting too close. There are a myriad of possible antecedents for students whom we intervene with, such as environmental stimuli (i.e., noises, smells, flashing lights, etc.), transitions, having a toy or item taken away, not getting their way or perceived lack of attention. There may also be more subtle antecedents, often called *setting events*, such as the time of day, a particular adult or student in the area, the weather, physical location, or other environmental factors. We can also look at things such as lack of sleep, physical health, life events, and family issues. Our job is to find patterns to these antecedents and address them in ways that meet a student's particular needs. There are almost always some antecedents that we will see over and over again before a particular behavior, and this will help us to determine our intervention. An easy way to track this type of information is on ABC (Antecedent-Behavior-Consequence) data sheets or ABC checklist.

Just as important as looking at antecedents related to problem behavior is looking at when the behavior does NOT occur. This can give us possible clues as to how we can promote those antecedents which prevent the problem behavior. Let's look at an example for one of our students: Travis has difficulty with transitions from his Gym class to his English class. He often has tantrums and may become physically aggressive toward one of his educators. According to the ABC data, his educators note that his behaviors start when he hears the teacher tell the students that gym class is over and that they need to line up at the door. The ABC data also show a pattern wherein Travis is less likely to engage in these problem behaviors when gym class is after lunch. According to these antecedents, several interventions can be put into place. For example, the gym teacher or an aide can use *priming* to indicate once or twice before the class ends that there are just a few more minutes left. This can help prepare Travis for a smooth transition as a result of increased predictability which is typically beneficial for students with autism. Alternatively, since it seems that Travis has fewer behaviors after lunch, his educators could try giving him an additional small snack in the mornings in order to see if hunger could be a possible antecedent. In addition, an *If/Then* strategy (visual if required) could be used to motivate Travis to comply with instructions to line up after gym. This would mean offering Travis a highly reinforcing item or activity if he transitions without engaging in the specified problem behaviors. Travis could also be reminded about his reinforcer when he is being *primed* just before the end of class.

Many other antecedent strategies could be included in this article but hopefully these examples outline the basic concepts of this model so they can be applied within your school environment.

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Teacher Tip: Excerpt from *The ABA Program Companion, 2002, J. Tyler Fovel, M.A., BCBA*

Behavior change techniques are proactive if they occur before the behavior and have an effect on making certain behaviors occur more or less often. Remember it is important to stay calm and have fun. Students take their emotional cues from teachers. Here are several antecedent building blocks to create a proactive educational classroom.

- ♦ **Keep the student busy** - Unstructured time allows for challenging behaviors to begin. Reinforce appropriate behaviors.
- ♦ **Stack the deck** - Choose potent and varied reinforcers and have plenty available.
- ♦ **Eliminate the competition** - Restrict competing reinforcers and distractions as much as possible.
- ♦ **Structure the physical environment** - Set up the classroom so that it propels students into learning and decreases opportunities for off-task behavior.
- ♦ **Ensure readiness** - Make sure the child has the prerequisite skills for accomplishing the tasks expected of them.
- ♦ **Teach errorlessly** - Analyse the skill into its component parts and develop a strategy to teach a little at a time, starting with the simplest parts.
- ♦ **Allow the student to be competent** - Plan the daily schedule so that children are spending a significant amount of time performing things they CAN do.
- ♦ **Know your enemy** - Where problem behavior exists, understand WHEN and WHY it occurs (i.e. antecedents).
- ♦ **Intervene early and listen to the student** – Problem behaviors usually start subtly and can be contained if we are alert, listen to the student and learn to analyze behavior carefully and objectively.

Occupational Therapy Corner: Creating an Environment for Optimal Functioning-Joëlle Hadaya, erg.

The beginning of the school year is the ideal time for teachers to rethink their classroom's physical environment, as well as to identify strategies and systems which can be put in place in order to fit particular needs of their students. The goal is to create an environment of optimal functioning for all students and identify successful strategies which emphasize prevention of challenging behavior for specific students. The following are some guidelines that can be followed to support this goal (C. Murray-Slutsky & B. A. Paris, 2000) .

Designing the Environment:

- ♦ Start by defining **physical boundaries** to provide external structure. This includes reviewing classroom layout and desk organization, assigning areas for *circle time*, *centers*, *calming corner*, etc.
- ♦ Make sure the classroom is, as much as possible, **clutter-free** throughout the day by eliminating distractions. This can be achieved by gathering/preparing supplies in advance, keeping unused materials out of sight and scheduling regular cleanup periods.
- ♦ Consider making **sensory modifications** based on the student's needs. This can include dimming the lights; lowering the volume on microphones; using a *Yacker Tracker* to sensitize students about noise level; seating sensory sensitive students away from distractors with their back to a wall and directly facing the teaching area.
- ♦ Finally, consider the **emotional characteristics** you want your classroom to have (e.g.: nurturing, positive, supportive, etc.), and develop activities/systems to support this (e.g., *reading buddies*; a system for requesting assistance; activities to identify/address emotions).

Maximize Strategies and Systems:

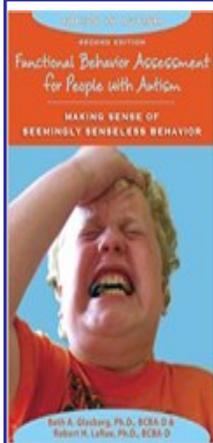
- ♦ Review **schedules and planned activities** to address the need for structure to ensure the rate of activities is appropriate for all students.
- ♦ Plan to alternate between work and sensory-based activities, providing additional opportunity for movement. When teaching new activities, plan periods for preparation, demonstration, facilitation and practice with the student, before expecting them to perform independently.
- ♦ Schedule **down time** as needed; and minimize as much as possible waiting periods.
- ♦ Facilitate **transitions** by beginning difficult periods with the same activity (i.e., easy and enjoyable). Prepare students for change by providing advance notice and using visual reminders. As needed, provide preferred item (e.g., fidget supply, toy) to support transitions.
- ♦ Provide **opportunity for choice and control** throughout the day, by selecting activities that enable choice making and self-monitoring, using choice boards for rewards.
- ♦ Identify **clearly defined rules**. Design and teach rules that support success. Break down the rules so they are easier to achieve step-by-step, and explain the link between rules and consequences. Post and review rules regularly and use visuals and consistency when enforcing them.
- ♦ Provide **concise instructions** by limiting extraneous verbalization. Make sure instructions are specific to the task. Use cue words and clear gestures, paired with demonstration. Make visuals of steps to follow as needed.
- ♦ Choose **interesting activities** that are motivating to your students and include consideration of the **special interests** of students. Design individual/class activities so the **challenge is "just-right"** (i.e., not too easy or too difficult).
- ♦ Use **work systems and quantified tasks**. Define the number of items to be completed and the time limit. Choose the appropriate material/system for the student (e.g., baskets, carrel with numbered drawers containing activities, binder with activity folders, etc.). As needed, divide tasks into manageable components and provide an example of end product.



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Our team is composed of professionals with a variety of specializations. Designated as a Centre of Excellence within the province, our mandate is to assist LBPSB schools in the implementation of best practices for the inclusion of students with ASD and to serve as a resource to the other English school boards in Quebec. Our team provides assistance to students and families and works to support educational personnel in augmenting their capacity to meet a wide range of needs in the classroom. We do this through direct intervention, coaching, consulting, professional development, and the sharing of materials.

We're on the web! <http://coeasd.lbpsb.qc.ca>



Read all about it!
Functional Behavior Assessment for People with Autism: Making Sense of Seemingly Senseless Behavior, Second Edition (Topics in Autism) Paperback– November 14, 2014 by: Beth A. Glasberg (Author), Robert H. LaRue (Author).

When people with Autism engage in challenging maladaptive behaviors, there is always a function of the behavior (a reason why it occurred in the first place). This second edition book teaches you how to conduct a *Functional Behavior Assessment* (FBA) to determine the underlying function of a behavior, which includes examining antecedents and consequences of behaviour, collecting and analyzing data, etc. It is updated with current research and new case studies. This book also includes additional information about how to conduct FBA's in alternate (non-clinical) settings such as school and home. It will be released on November 14th, 2014.

Coming soon:

CONFERENCE

JOYFUL LEARNING :
USING ACTIVE AND COLLABORATIVE
STRUCTURES TO SUPPORT
DIFFERENTIATED INSTRUCTION

WITH PAULA KLUTH, PH D

NOVEMBER 6, 2014

9:00AM-4:00PM — UQAM

SALLE MARIE-GÉRIN-LAJOIE — GM400

405 STE. CATHERINE ST. EAST
MONTREAL, QUEBEC H2L 2C4

PROFESSIONAL: \$60.00
PARENT/STUDENT: \$40.00

LUNCH NOT PROVIDED
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Too often, a "one-size-fits-all" approach is used to design lessons leaving some learners struggling to participate and leaving teachers feeling they have not reached all of their students. In this session, participants will learn to apply principles of differentiation by exploring a number of collaboration, active and brain-compatible learning techniques aimed at engaging students and making learning joyful. This session is appropriate for teachers, educators and professionals working with students with an ASD in K-2 classrooms.

Dr. Paula Kluth is a consultant, author, advocate, and independent scholar who works with teachers and families to provide inclusive opportunities for students with disabilities and to create more responsive and engaging schooling experiences for all learners. Paula is a former special educator who has served as a classroom teacher and inclusion facilitator. Her professional interests include differentiating instruction and inclusive schooling.

She is the author or co-author of more than ten books and director of a documentary film.

Try This!

As mentioned in our feature article, the ABC checklist is an effective tool which can be used when we want to collect data on a student. This type of data collection is used when attempting to find a pattern in the student's behaviour and provides a guide to the interventions used. You can find the ABC checklist on our ASD website at the link below:

<http://coeasd.lbpsb.qc.ca/>

