



What is a Functional Analysis (FA)?

A Functional Analysis (FA) is a research-based assessment that provides a systematic method for determining the function of a problem behavior that is targeted for reduction. A BCBA and/or other highly training professional should conduct the FA. FA's investigate the relevant events that occur before and after a problem behavior that play a role in the persistence of that behavior. Information from the FA is generally used to develop the child's individualized Behavior Plan that outline the procedures for systematically reducing targeted problem behavior and teaching possible replacement behaviors.

Procedures that may be used in collecting information

There are a variety of procedures that may be used to conduct an FBA. The most complete information is obtained by gathering information from a variety of sources and via direct observation of the child (including, potentially, on different days/times and across different settings/activities). Some procedures include but are not limited to, the following:

- Unstructured or structured interviews of parents, other caregivers and family members, teachers and other school personnel, other service providers (SLP, OT, PT), doctors, etc.
- Records review
- Unstructured observations of the child (with narrative and anecdotal notes)
- Structured observation and data collection: recording data on the "antecedents" (A), behavior (B), and consequences (C); known as ABC analysis; and collecting other data (frequency, duration, etc. of behavior)
- Interaction
- Interacting directly with the child

Procedures that are typically used in conducting an FA

There are standard procedures for conducting FAs; however there are several varieties of FAs. In all cases, an FA involves exposing the child to a repeated series of "sessions" (generally ranging from 5 – 10 minutes) specifically designed to manipulate and isolate the antecedent-behavior-consequence relation. The conditions under which the behavior occurs most frequently indicate the antecedents and consequences that play a role in the persistence of the behavior.

FAs typically include conditions to test the following functions: gaining access to attention, gaining access to an item, escaping/avoiding demands, and an "alone" condition that assess whether the behavior is self-stimulatory. In addition, a control condition (no demands, access to preferred items, access to free attention) is sometimes included. In some cases, specific conditions are created to address the particular variables that are relevant to child (for example, attention from a particular person or access to a particular item). What is important to know about an FA is that the intention is to create, control, and identify conditions that reliably produce the problem behavior. Whether conducted in the home or in the clinic, care is taken to ensure the safety of all participants.