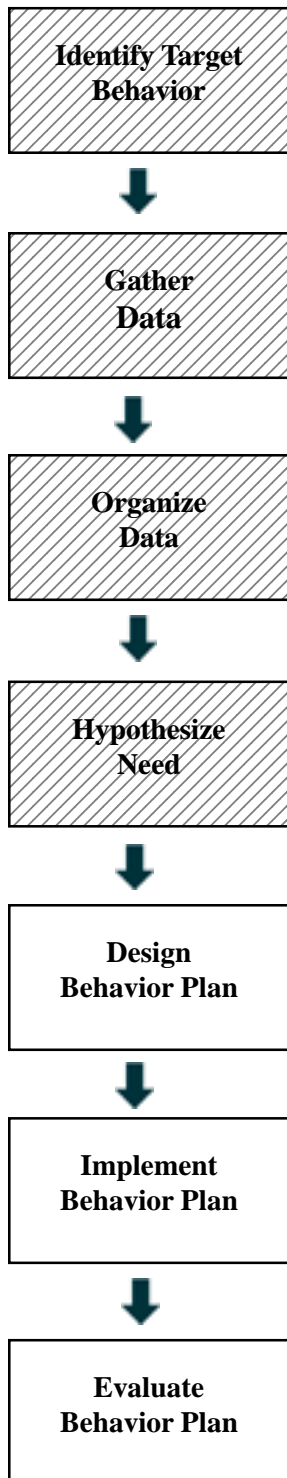


PART I

Assessing Behavior:

Functional Behavior Assessment



When students have challenging behavior that interferes with their relationships at home or in the community, we now have a tool--the Initial Line of Inquiry* (ILOI)--for gathering information about both the student and his or her behavior. This information gathering is the first part of the process of providing positive behavioral support to the student. Once we understand the purpose of a challenging behavior, what that individual “gets” or “avoids”, then we can design a behavior plan that includes teaching supports and strategies that help the individual get what he needs in a more socially acceptable way.

The ILOI is a team effort. It requires bringing together folks who know the individual well (i.e. parents, friends, teachers, support workers, and the individual himself, if appropriate). This team will identify the problem behavior to target for intervention, gather data, and then use the information to develop a hypothesis or “best guess” about why the behavior is occurring.

So what kind of data is important to figuring out what is behind a behavior and what might be done to intervene?

The Target Behavior

Behaviors that are targeted tend to be those that have not responded to standard strategies that teachers or parents have used before. In describing the behavior, it is important to be as specific as possible. For example, you would say, “Peter swears and argues with the math teacher”, rather than “Peter gets angry in class.”



Individual Strengths/Skills

Here’s where you want to note how the individual learns best, what s/he does

well, and with whom s/he has positive relationships. Hopefully, you will be able to use these skills in designing a behavior plan.

Fast Triggers

A fast trigger is what comes just before the challenging behavior. It includes where the behavior occurs, with whom, and during what activity.



Slow Triggers

Slow triggers look at the bigger picture to find factors which may be influencing the person’s behavior. Learning difficulties and communication challenges may add to an individual’s frustration. Things like environmental triggers (heat, noise, crowds, etc.) or physical factors (illness, hunger, fatigue, side effects of medication, over-stimulation, etc.) may “set up” an episode of negative behavior. Family and social forces may play a part, too.



Consequences

Consequences are what happen immediately after the behavior occurs. Did other people around laugh? Was the individual scolded? Did Peter avoid having to complete a math problem?

Perceived Function

Once information is gathered on what, with whom, when and how the behavior occurs, it is often possible to make a guess as to “why”. Most behavior, good or bad, is motivated by a need to *get* something (attention, a desired object, etc) or to *avoid* something (hard work, embarrassment, discomfort, etc.). Challenging behaviors may serve more than one function.



The Initial Line of Inquiry



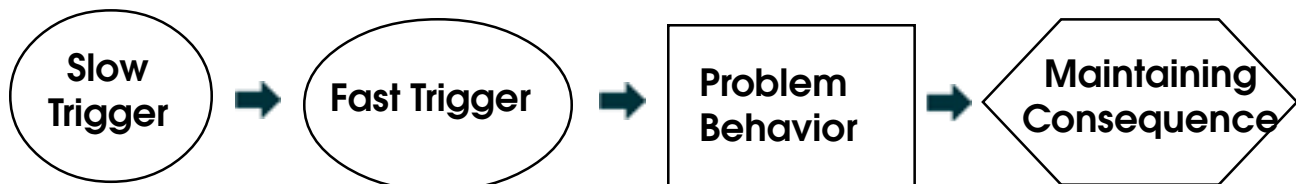
Sample ILOI

Strengths of the Individual: Peter has many friends and is an avid reader. Peter's parents have asked for ideas on how to help him with his math homework.				
Slow Triggers (Setting events)	Fast Triggers (Antecedents)	Target Behavior	Perceived Function	Actual Consequences
Learning disability in math, fear of being the focus of attention, "rough" friends	Being singled out in math class to answer a question or work out a program	Swearing Throwing his math book Arguing	Avoids having to complete the problem and reveal his lack of understanding	Is sent to the principal's office

When the team is satisfied that they have found information for each of the questions asked by the Initial Line of Inquiry, it can proceed to coming up with a "best guess" or hypothesis. Any unanswered boxes in the ILOI form indicate that more information is needed. In some cases, the team may have to consult with others (a physician, a counselor, a peer, a tutor, etc.) to fill in information not known to the team.

Once the gaps in information have been filled and the data is organized, the next step in the process is to build a hypothesis statement, a summary of why the team believes the behavior is occurring and what purpose it serves.

Building a Hypothesis



Given these circumstances . . . When Peter is unable to follow his math assignment	when this occurs . . . and he is asked to complete a problem on the board	the individual does . . . Peter swears at his teacher and throws his book down . . .	in order to . . . avoid having to work on the problem and appear stupid.
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The hypothesis that the team builds becomes the foundation for developing a Behavior Support Plan for the individual. Ideally, the plan will have strategies that line up with the four pieces of the ILOI--slow trigger strategies, fast trigger strategies, alternative behaviors and consequence strategies.

See Part II to learn how to put together a support plan.

*The Initial Line of Inquiry was co-authored by Greg Llewellyn, an educational consultant from Pennsylvania, who provides technical assistance to Hawaii's Department of Education.

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