

PFA Tips

Understanding FBAs and BIPs

You receive an email from your child's school saying they have concerns regarding a behavior issue. Now what? This overview of the basics of a Functional Behavioral Assessment (FBA) and a Behavior Intervention Plan (BIP) will help you know when they are used, how they are completed, and how they can be a helpful support for your child as they navigate the school day.

What is an FBA?

A Functional Behavior Assessment (FBA) is a documented analysis of behaviors to better understand the purpose, or function, of the behavior. Why does Sheila throw pencils every day during English class? Why does Eddie call out constantly during teacher lectures in Social Studies? What is the child getting out of it? The FBA is a tool that looks at what the behavior is, when it happens, and what happens after the behavior occurred.

What is a BIP?

A Behavior Intervention Plan (BIP) is based on the results of the FBA and recommends intervention strategies that include positive behavior supports and services to address the unwanted behavior.

Who writes the FBA and BIP?

It can vary between schools, but the team may include a behavior specialist, or a combination of the counselor, the special education teacher, the general education teacher, the school psychologist, and possibly an administrator.

The FBA

Does your child get pulled out of class to conduct the FBA?

Typically, the answer is no. The team that works on the FBA is interested in data collection, organization, synthesis, and analysis. The child is not pulled out of class, nor do they have any specific behavior "tests" done. The child is not interviewed by a clinician, nor are they asked soul searching questions.

What happens?

First, the parent must provide consent. The behaviors of concern are noted (usually 3 behaviors, but not always) by the team, and data collection begins.

When is it time to request an FBA?

Either the parent or the school can request an FBA if the student is repeating the same behaviors in different settings, and the behavior is interfering with the child's ability to access the curriculum. Examples might include frequent calling out or talking over staff or peers, getting up out of their seat and taking school supplies from peers, or displaying unsafe behavior such as throwing scissors or making threats.

The team then wants to know: what is going on here? Why is the student engaging in those behaviors? The team creates data collection sheets and begins to collect data in order to look for patterns (patterns for time of day, who is present, was there a change in schedule, etc.).

What data is collected?

The antecedent: What is going on right before the behavior happens? Is it when the child is asked to follow a new schedule with no notice, such as picture day, or for a school-wide assembly, or a delayed opening? Is it when a certain peer sits next to them? Is it when there is a substitute teacher present? Is it when recess is moved indoors? Is it when there is a different bus driver that day, who was late and didn't know the child? These are some common examples.



The Behavior:

What is the behavior? The behavior should be observable and repeatable. Any two people walking into the classroom should see the behavior, so adjectives are not that helpful. We can't measure "lazy." Unless the student said, "I am lazy, and I won't do that today." Then it can be noted what the student said, but "lazy" is not observable. Typically, most teams working on an FBA are trying to figure out if the student's behavior is a function of one of the "three A's:" attention, anger, or avoidance. Asking the questions: When does it occur? Where does it occur? Who is present? helps to narrow down the behavior in question to a specific occurrence.

Document the following behavior characteristics:

Intensity: How intense is the behavior? Pushing a paper clip off a desk while sitting quietly in the back row to see where it lands is not the same as picking up a desk and throwing it at someone.

Duration: How long does the behavior last? Is the student calling out hello to their peer who walks by on their way to lunch or are they talking non-stop for 15 minutes while the teacher is lecturing?

Frequency: How often does the behavior occur? Is the behavior monthly, weekly, daily, or hourly?

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The consequence: What happens after the behavior? Is the consequence a negative for the child? A child may feel rewarded if the consequence is an escape from an unwanted activity.

Example:

Antecedent: Student is called to his reading group which is an activity in which he does not perform well.

Behavior: Student calls out every 2 minutes, interrupts his peers with talking and talks over his teacher every 3 minutes.

Consequence: The child sits in the office with the kind secretary.

The antecedent/behavior/consequence chart is typically referred to as an ABC chart.

The BIP

Does every student with an unwanted behavior need a BIP?

Not every student qualifies for a behavior plan. They are intended for students who have difficulty behaving appropriately, and only when the behaviors get in the way of their learning.

What is included in the BIP?

A BIP can vary in length but has some key parts. The BIP should:

- List the problem behaviors
- Describe why they happen
- Put in place strategies or supports to help

Identify a replacement behavior and intervention strategies

A replacement behavior is an appropriate substitute action for the targeted unwanted behavior. The team should look at ways to problem solve so that the antecedent is adjusted, and the behavior is eliminated. Keeping with the example above, let's explore options so the student will not seek being sent to the office to avoid his reading group: reexamine the student's reading levels, reassign his reading group, move his group away from watchful peers that cause him to feel embarrassed, or allow him to read in another room with another teacher during that time. The replacement behavior for this student is to be present for reading instruction, and all of the supports needed for that to happen should be tried. Sometimes the student will verbalize the problem, such as, "I don't like reading next to Jimmy. He kicks me under the table." In this case, a simple fix would be to rearrange the group. Obviously, it is not often that simple. But until the data is collected, analyzed, and a plan put in place, unwanted behaviors will likely remain.

Reevaluate the BIP

The team will meet a few weeks after the BIP is put in place, to assess the effectiveness of the plan. If the behaviors are still occurring, the plan needs to be adjusted.

Additional Resources

PFA Tips: Communicating with Your Child's Teacher

<https://pathfindersforautism.org/articles/education/parent-tips-communicating-with-your-childs-teacher/>

PFA Education Articles

<https://pathfindersforautism.org/articles/education/>

Autism By Age (includes age-specific education resources)

<https://pathfindersforautism.org/autism-by-age/>

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