

Intervention Case Study 2

Introduction

Tom is 29 months old with a diagnosis of autistic disorder. His problem behaviors include tantrums consisting of screaming and pulling away from adults. He attends preschool.

Functional Behavioral Assessment

The team began with a functional behavior assessment that included interviewing Tom's parents and other childcare providers as well as observation of Tom across different contexts such as play, meals, bed, school, and transportation. The team explained their conclusions on the functions of the problem behavior to Tom's parents.

Measurement

In order to measure problem behaviors, the team used a variety of methods including interviews and observation. Approximately one to two times a week, a team member interacted with Tom while he played for around fifteen minutes. The team also videotaped these interaction sessions and two independent observers watched the tapes and recorded the frequency of behavior. These sessions were conducted before the intervention and during the intervention, until the frequency of the problem behaviors became consistent. Before the start of the intervention, team members used strategies the parents regularly used to deal with Tom's problem behaviors.

Intervention

The team and family developed a plan for Tom consisting of four parts. Long-term supports involve teaching the child and family skills that will help bring about the best outcomes for the child, including the best way to structure interactions and the environment around the child. For Tom, the long term supports included increasing predictability in the environment-for example, having his toys in the same location everyday. Also, it included creating more consistency in how Tom was expected to behave at home and at preschool as well as developing friendships with other children.

Prevention strategies involve the prevention of problem behaviors and identifying cues that might trigger such behaviors. For Tom this included adults giving him more time before expecting a behavior, increasing his choices in activities, and letting him do something he wanted after a difficult activity. It also included a visual schedule-this is a chart that lets a child know what activities are coming up during the day using pictures and words. It is another way to provide consistency and predictability. Examples can be found here:
<http://www.setbc.org/projects/vss/docs/pg3.html>

Replacement skills involve replacing the problem behaviors with other behaviors that still serve the same function. For Tom this included having him say no when he did not want to do something as opposed to having a tantrum. It also included him making requests through using the visual schedule.

Consequences involve reacting to problem behavior in such a way that it no longer serves its intended function. For Tom this included redirecting him to replacement skills.

Results

Tom showed decreases in problem behaviors at both home and at preschool. At the end of 24 days, he did not have any tantrums. His autism behaviors decreased from 90 to 47 over the seven month intervention (the mean score for typical children is 4). In addition to direct observation, interviews with the parents also indicated that problem behaviors decreased and social competence increased. Tom began indicating what he wanted through pointing to pictures. He stopped carrying a cloth diaper everywhere like he used to. He also began sitting with his family at meals and going out to new places without having tantrums.

Dunlap, G. and Fox, Lise (1999). A demonstration of behavioral support for young children with autism. *Journal of Positive Behavior Interventions*, 1, 77-87.