

Functional Thinking Framework and Its Application for School Mental Health

1. Module One - Introduction

1.1 and Its Application for School Mental Health



Notes:

Functional Contextual Thinking and Its Application for School Mental Health
An Introduction
Northeast and Caribbean MHTTC at Rutgers University
2021

1.2 About



Notes:

Hello and welcome to the first in a series of three modules describing

Functional Contextual Thinking and Its Application for School-based Mental Health. We are glad you could join us today and hope you will find the information useful.

There are three modules in this series, each taking approximately one hour to complete. The first module will help you become familiar with a new framework, Functional Contextual Thinking. New terminology will be introduced and practice examples will be provided to help you become comfortable with this new way of thinking about external and internal behavioral issues.

The second module will apply functional contextual thinking specifically to internalizing problems.

The third module will walk you through different examples of interventions you can use based on the functional contextual thinking framework. Each module will introduce new content and build skills in a step-by-step fashion, providing opportunities for practice and helpful resources.

Progressing through the modules is straightforward. There are links in the top corner for you to access a transcript and Resources. You can pause the audio any time you need to take a break.

1.3 Dr. Talida State



Notes:

The developers of the Functional Contextual Thinking course are:

Dr. Talida State, an Associate Professor of Special Education in the Department of Teaching and Learning, College of Education and Human Sciences at Montclair State University. Dr. State is passionate about supporting students with social, emotional, and behavioral challenges to

reach and exceed their potential. As you can see, she has been involved in research and practice related to students with behavioral needs for some time. She is the co-founder of Nurturing Environments Institute (NEI).

For fun, she loves to travel and go to the beach to relax and spend time with friends and family.

Dr. State is a Board-Certified Behavior Analyst (BCBA) with over 15 years of research and school-based experience in consulting and providing evidence-based services for students with emotional and behavioral challenges. She is a member of a number of premier professional organizations such as the Council for Exceptional Children and the Association for Positive Behavior Supports. She is a regular presenter at national and international conferences and also serves on the board of editors for the Journal of Positive Behavior Interventions, Journal of Behavioral Education, and Journal of School Mental Health.

1.4 Dr. Imad Zaheer



Notes:

Dr. Zaheer is an assistant professor of School Psychology at St. Johns University and co-founder of Nurturing Environments Institute (NEI). He is a pediatric school psychologist who has worked on numerous projects in clinics, hospitals, and public and alternative school settings that involve direct and indirect services across individual, group, classroom, and systems levels.

His areas of interest are developing assessments and interventions for children with emotional and behavioral challenges and creating comprehensive school-based prevention programs by integrating school mental health, social emotional learning, and school-wide positive behavioral

interventions and supports. For his work in these areas, Dr. Zaheer was awarded the Council for Exceptional Children's Professional Performance Award in 2019. Additionally, he sits on the steering committee for the national group, Family School Community Alliance, an organization dedicated to creating robust collaboration and engagement across schools and families and community settings.

When he gets a chance to relax, he enjoys cooking, baking, hiking and running.

1.5 Objectives



Notes:

Let's get started! There are four main objectives in Module 1. Click on each tile to view the objectives for this self-paced module:

At the completion of this module, you will be able to:

Describe social, emotional and behavioral challenges frequently experienced by students in school settings

Describe the impact of social, emotional and behavioral challenges on student and teacher performance

Define behaviors in observable and measurable terms and identify the context supporting the behavior

Identify the function of behaviors related to mental health challenges, and select appropriate interventions and strategies to respond to that function

01 Objective (Slide Layer)



03 Objective (Slide Layer)



04 Objective (Slide Layer)



02 Objective (Slide Layer)



1.6 Categories



Notes:

Before we introduce the Functional Contextual Thinking Framework we would like you to take a minute and think about frequent social, emotional and behavioral challenges that you might be facing in school. We usually separate them into different categories, such as behavioral problems, social-emotional learning deficits or mental health challenges. However, the reality is that they often overlap.

We define behavioral problems as frustrating events that are happening in our classrooms. Often these behaviors are minor, such as students acting out, being disruptive, or inattentive. However, sometimes behaviors can be extreme such as physical aggression, vandalism, or self-injurious behaviors.

Sometimes we reach the understanding that problem behaviors are the result of social-emotional learning deficits, limited skill sets or individual skills a student might be missing. For example, a student who didn't learn how to cope with frustration, might end up vandalizing their locker as a result of anger caused by a bad grade.

We can think of mental health challenges as separate issues, however, we

know they often overlap with the first two categories. For example, a student could struggle with severe anxiety, beyond a normative threshold. This can lead the student to engage in behavior problems as a way to express that anxiety. The student who vandalized his locker might have done that in part due to anxiety over their parents' reaction to news of their bad grade. These different categories can at time overlap or they can be distinct. Depending on your school culture, you might look at a problem behavior with either one of these three lenses or all three of them at the same time.

1.7 New Lens



Notes:

Through this module, we want to provide you with a new lens for how to look at student behavior called functional contextual thinking or FCT.

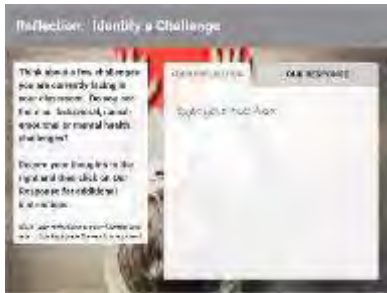
FCT is a promising approach designed to improve school professionals understanding of why students struggle with internalized and externalized problems and select effective strategies to respond to those challenges. FCT is a user friendly, brief and informal method designed to quickly help school professionals hypothesize the reason why a student struggles and engages in misbehavior and then identify strategies to target that reason.

Once the reason or the function is identified, educators can effectively respond to challenges by teaching students various social-emotional competencies or appropriate replacement behaviors to manage their experiences thus promoting better mental health.

Making FCT routine practice for educators to use when problem behaviors are still minor and infrequent has great potential to reduce major behavior

problems and teach skills that will set students up for future success.

1.8 Reflection: Identify a Challenge

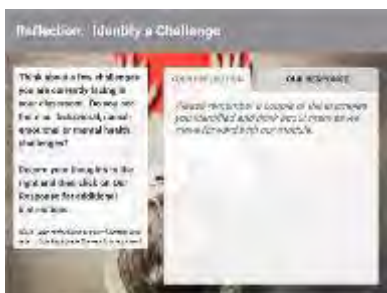


Notes:

Please take a moment and think about a few challenges your students are currently experiencing.

Record your thoughts in the “Your reflection” box. Please remember what you noted and think about these challenges as we move forward. Your reflections are confidential and will not be saved once the module is closed.

What others say (Slide Layer)



1.9 Hitting and Kicking



Notes:

Let's talk a bit about how we traditionally approach problem behaviors.

Think of a student who is hitting and kicking. We typically respond by addressing this as a negative behavior that needs to be stopped. Negative consequences tend to be one of our first responses, so we may give the student a reprimand by saying: "Stop kicking!" or "Stop hitting!". If the student continues, we might send the student to time-out, remove a point for misbehavior, call the students' parents or, if the behavior escalates, send the student to the principal's office.

Alternatively, you may use reinforcers for stopping the misbehavior. Different token systems can be used to reward students for good behavior or punish them for misbehavior. For example, if you're hitting and kicking, we're going to take a token away, but if you're not hitting and kicking, we will give you a token.

These are general strategies that can be used to address various behavioral concerns. We know that strategies like time-out, tokens, and praise are very powerful strategies that have a lot of evidence behind them and when done well, can be very effective. If a student is being reprimanded they will temporarily stop hitting and kicking, but the effectiveness is often short lived. A little bit later the hitting and kicking will come back because we did not address the reason why the student is hitting and kicking. We did not teach the student any alternative behaviors to do instead.

These strategies, based simply on the topography of behavior, have poor generalization. One teacher reprimands the hitting and kicking in their classroom and the behavior stops, but as soon as the student leaves the classroom, the hitting and kicking starts again in the hallway.

Because of these limitations to our common practices, we need to turn our attention to a more functional approach.

1.10 Another approach



Notes:

Let's think of the same behaviors of hitting and kicking using a functional contextual thinking approach. When we use a functional approach to address problems, we ask a very important question: Why is the student hitting and kicking?

The answer is not that the student is aggressive or he is a bad student. All behaviors happen for a reason, and identifying that reason is critical if we want to help the student be successful.

There are two main reasons or functions for why students behave a certain way. They want to obtain something (attention, an object, access) or try to avoid or escape something (attention, an object, access, sensation, a person). In this case, maybe the student is hitting and kicking because they are trying to get the teacher's attention or trying to socialize with another peer.

Or maybe the student is trying to escape or avoid a difficult task so they know that if they keep on kicking the teacher will eventually send them out of the classroom. "What does the student want to escape?" This can be anything from the task that they're working on, to an individual, or even a sensation that they're feeling in the moment.

Once we identify the reason or function for the hitting and kicking, we can

think of an appropriate replacement skill to teach the student. If the student wants attention, we can teach appropriate ways of getting attention such as raising their hand to ask the teacher for help. If the student wants to escape a difficult task we can modify the task so the student can complete it or we can teach the student to ask for a break appropriately.

One of the big advantages of the functional approach is that it leads to long term outcomes because we are teaching students a replacement skill, and importantly a skill that directly honors the function of the behavior. As a result, next time the student feels frustrated with a difficult assignment they will ask for help or a break. These replacement skills tend to generalize to other areas of the student's life.

Let's think of a different reason why the student might be hitting and kicking. Maybe, in this case, the behavior is performed as a result of some kind of unwanted social interaction and the student is trying to escape another peer. Instead of just punishing the student to reduce the hitting, we will teach the student a prosocial skill to avoid the other student or communicate their discomfort by saying something like, "I'm not comfortable, can you please give me my space?". This will have a long-term impact in that specific setting, and it is likely to generalize. When they experience conflict with another individual, they can use the same skill to say "I'm not comfortable, can you please give me my space?"

1.11 FT Interventions



Notes:

Selecting strategies based on the function of the behavior will reduce the frequency of punishment which can itself have negative emotional and

behavioral side effects we want to avoid. The functional approach focuses instead on teaching appropriate replacement skills that will lead to positive effects in the long term for students.

1.12 Process Interaction



Notes:

Functional thinking is a brief process that involves several steps. FCT is not a formalized process. We can easily apply it in our daily interactions with students and when practiced enough, we can embrace it as a new way of thinking about social, emotional and behavioral concerns.

Click on the steps to the left to explore further.

Step 1 - Define Behavior

The first step is defining the behaviors of interest. We want to clearly define the concern using measurable and observable terms.

Step 2 - Understand Context

The second step is understanding the context of the behavior in order to be able to determine its function. Behaviors are not happening in a vacuum they are context related. In order to understand the context, we need to understand what happened before and after the behavior took place.

Step 3 - Determine Skill or Motivation Needed

Next, we need to decide if the skill or behavior we want to address is already in the student's repertoire but is not being used and requires motivation for the student to actually perform it. Or, maybe the student is not performing the behavior because the skill is missing all together. In that case, we will have to teach the student a new skill.

Step 4 - Identify Function

Once we have these pieces of the puzzle identified, we can understand the function of the behavior. We will use this information to select strategies that will prevent future problem behaviors, teach the student a replacement skill when necessary, and help us respond effectively if the problem behaviors occur again.

Step 01 (Slide Layer)



Step 02 (Slide Layer)



Step 03 (Slide Layer)



Step 04 (Slide Layer)



1.13 The Basics of Human Behavior



Notes:

Let's have a brief conversation about some basic concepts of human behavior. This will set the stage for better understanding the FCT framework and its applications.

1.14 ABC B



Notes:

You have to know your ABCs in order to understand your FCT.

We'll begin by talking about Behavior. All behavior serves a function and communicates a need. But how do we define behavior?

Oftentimes when we refer to problem behaviors or even mental health challenges, we can make the mistake of placing the problem within the child, so it becomes a "problem child" and not a problem behavior. When we focus on defining the behavior, we commit to understanding the behavior, because the behavior needs to be changed. Our students experience some problem behaviors, but they are not problem students.

1.15 Problem Behavior



Notes:

What is behavior?

In plain English, we can say behavior is action and movement, whether internal or external. Externalized behaviors such as hitting and kicking are

very easy to observe. If you look at this picture, the behavior is clear, the child is crying.

Sometimes behaviors are not as easily observed because they are internalized. Internalized behaviors such as negative thoughts, feelings of sadness or anxiety can also be observed through self-reporting on a rating scale, verbal communication, or externalized behaviors. When a student reports he is feeling anxious and you see him pacing the hallways, the internalized thought is expressed on the outside with the movement of pacing around.

It is important that we communicate in clear and observable terms about a student's behavior. Vague terms such as the student is aggressive will not help the understanding of the behavior. Instead we need to describe the behavior precisely, answering questions such as "what are we observing?" and "what are we measuring in this situation?"

1.16 Externalized Behavior



Notes:

Let's take a look at a few examples of vaguely defined behaviors and practice defining these behaviors in observable and measurable terms. In the boxes are vague descriptions of behaviors. "Ana is aggressive" could mean a dozen different behaviors that we can label as aggression. How exactly is Ana aggressive? Aggressive could mean that Ana hits other students, or that she rips paper, or maybe she kicks the desk. Click on the box to find out what aggression looks like for Ana.

As you go through each example, you will notice how we define the vague labels by using measurable and observable terms. Before you click a box,

please think of how you would translate the statement into measurable and observable terms.

01

Aggression for Ana is that she hits others.

02

"Brett is disruptive", we can make it clearer by saying "Brett yells out in class".

03

There is nothing wrong with talking about behavior in vague labels, and in fact sometimes we encourage it because it's easier for us to express a concern. Saying someone is being very disrespectful might get at the heart of what the main concern is. But once we labeled the concern we want to really look into what it is that he's doing that is disrespectful in the situation. If Randall is being disrespectful by cursing, we can observe and measure the frequency of cursing to gain an understanding of the severity of the problem.

04

"Kris is unfriendly" because "Kris blocks the seat".

05

"Isaiah is uncooperative" because "Isaiah walks away from his group."

06

"Maureen is antisocial" because "Maureen plays alone during recess and refuses to share toys."

Examples of Externalized Behavior

In this case, students are asked to describe a behavior that is observable and measurable. The behaviors listed below are examples of behaviors that are not observable and measurable.

01 John is hyperactive	02 John is hyperactive	03 John is hyperactive
04 John is hyperactive	05 John is hyperactive	06 John is hyperactive

1.17 Johnnie is Hyper

Your Turn: Examples of Externalized Behavior

<p>Write a clear description of the behavior that is observable and measurable. For example, "Johnnie is running around in class."</p> <p>Write a clear description of the behavior that is not observable and measurable. For example, "Johnnie is hyperactive."</p> <p>Write a clear description of the behavior that is not observable and measurable. For example, "Johnnie is hyperactive."</p>	<p>Write a clear description of the behavior that is observable and measurable. For example, "Johnnie is running around in class."</p> <p>Write a clear description of the behavior that is not observable and measurable. For example, "Johnnie is hyperactive."</p> <p>Write a clear description of the behavior that is not observable and measurable. For example, "Johnnie is hyperactive."</p>
--	--

Notes:

Your turn!

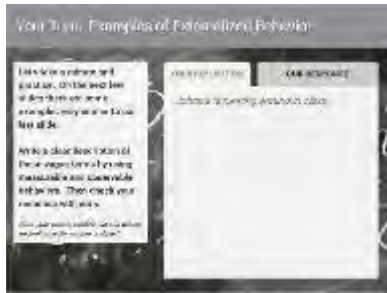
Let's take a minute and practice. We have some examples on the next couple of slides that are very similar to our last slide. Work through these examples and write a clear description of the vague terms by using measurable and observable behaviors. After you complete your reflection feel free to check on our response for additional ideas.

Johnnie is hyper.

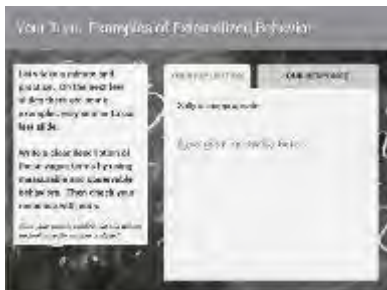
Our Description

Johnnie is running around in class.

Our Description (Slide Layer)



1.18 Sally is Inappropriate



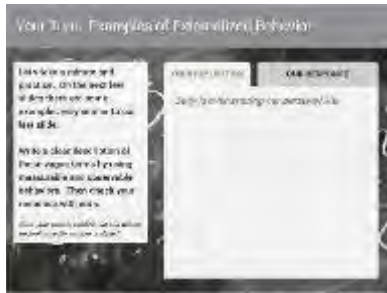
Notes:

Sally is inappropriate.

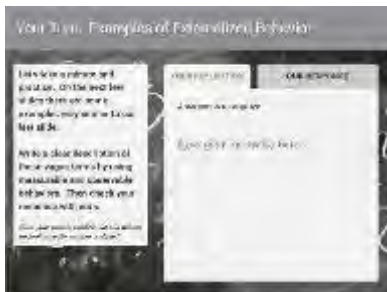
Our Description

Sally is over-sharing her personal life.

Our Description (Slide Layer)



1.19 Jasmine is Disruptive



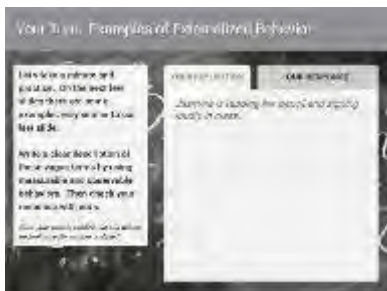
Notes:

Jasmine is disruptive.

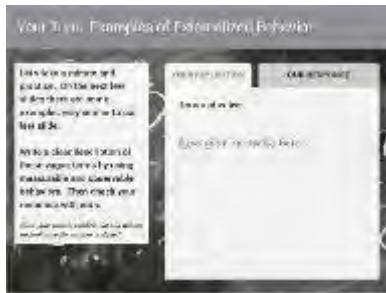
Our Description

Jasmine is tapping her pencil and sighing loudly in class

Our Description (Slide Layer)



1.20 *Tai is Inattentive*



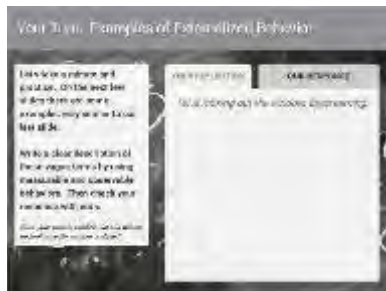
Notes:

Tai is inattentive.

Our Description

Tai is looking out the window, daydreaming.

Our Description (Slide Layer)



1.21 Steve is Anxious



Notes:

Now that you understand externalized behaviors and how to describe them, let's shift our attention to internalized behaviors. They are a little bit harder to notice because we are the main observers of our own internalized behaviors. However, we can still define internalized behaviors in others with clarity.

Let's look at the statement, "Steve is anxious". Like our earlier example of aggression, the statement "Steve is anxious", could mean many different things. I can think of dozens of examples of what anxiety might look like in each situation. Instead, we might want to ask ourselves, "What tells us Steve is anxious?". What are some behaviors that let us know Steve is anxious? Or what are some indicators of Steve's anxiety that we can observe?

We may be very good at spotting behaviors that tell us "Steve is anxious". For example, we may notice Steve is sweating a lot. We may see him pacing the hallways. Perhaps Steve covers his eyes, has flushed cheeks, and shakes his leg. Even more clearly, we may actually hear Steve saying, "I'm Scared".

We should always confirm internalized problems such as anxiety by asking multiple respondents, including teachers and parents, to provide input and possibly complete rating scales. If Steve is old enough, he may be able to complete a self-report rating scale.

1.22 Martin is Depressed

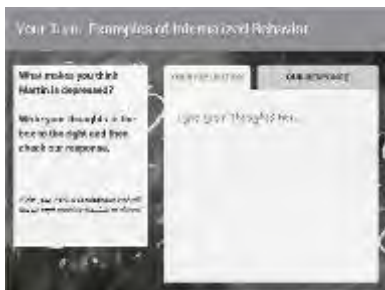


Notes:

Let's look at another example and practice defining "Martin is depressed", a general label for an internalized behavior that can be described by different externalized thoughts, feelings and behaviors. Listen to a description of Martin and then identify some signs that would indicate Martin is depressed. Record your thoughts on the next slide.

Martin is a middle school student whose behavior has noticeably changed over the past few weeks. His parents have expressed their concerns reporting that Martin seems depressed. In school Martin has not been spending time with his friends and has taken to eating lunch by himself. He doesn't participate in activities during recess and rarely talks unless he's asked a direct question by his teacher. Martin's teacher has seen him with tears in his eyes and when he asked Martin how he was doing, Martin said that he felt sad.

1.23 Your Turn Martin



Notes:

Write your thoughts in the box to the right and then check our response.
Remember to use specific and measurable descriptions.

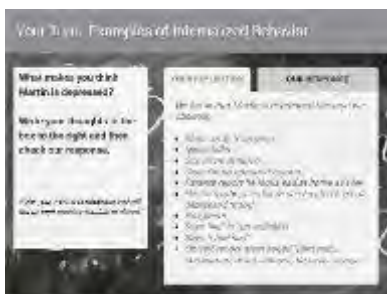
Our response:

We know that Martin is depressed because we observe...

- Stays away from peers
- Never talks
- Sits alone at lunch
- Cries for no apparent reason
- Parents report he looks sad at home as well
- Parents' ratings on a scale indicated an elevated level of depressed mood
- Hits peers
- Says, "No" to fun activities that most children enjoy
- Says "I feel sad"

On self-report when asked "I am sad...Sometimes, never, always", student picks always

Our Response (Slide Layer)



1.24 Refining the Description

Refining the Description	
COMPONENTS	EXAMPLE
Who (person/thing)	Billy displays off-task
What (observable and measurable behavior)	behavior by talking to peers and drawing on his worksheets during individual seat-work in math class.
When (when/when-not)	
Where (location of behavior)	

Notes:

Thank you for working through the examples. Hopefully we can all start thinking and talking about student concerns in measurable terms. This clarity will help us as we move forward with our functional thinking process.

We can go one step further and make the description of the behavior even more precise by creating an operational or behavioral definition. We can further define the context of the behavior, specifically the who, what, when, and where. The who usually refers to the student, the what is the behavior described in measurable and observable terms, the when describes when the behavior is occurring, and the where describes the location of the behavior.

For example, Billy (the “WHO”) displays off task behavior by talking to peers and drawing on his worksheet (this is the “WHAT” in observable and measurable terms), during individual seat work (that’s the “WHEN”), and, it’s happening in math class (that’s the “WHERE”).

So the full statement reads “Billy displays off-task behavior by talking to peers and drawing on his worksheets during individual seat-work in math class”. As we look at this definition, we have a better understanding, not just of the behavior, but also the context where the behavior occurs.

Our next step is defining the context. As we define the context, we get a better understanding of whether the behavior of concern is due to a lack of motivation or a lack of skill.

1.25 Which is it?



Notes:

Remember, we want to differentiate between a skill deficit and a performance deficit.

We need to ask ourselves, “Does Billy actually have the skill that is required of him to be successful in this situation?”

If students struggle with a “I can’t do it” problem, they simply don’t have the necessary skill, so we will have to teach them. If students have the skill but are not motivated to perform it because the problem behavior gives them faster and/or better results, then this is a “I won’t do it” problem or sometimes a “I am scared to do it” problem.

Sometimes, it can be a combination of the two or one can lead to the other. Think of a student with anxiety who’s scared to perform a behavior and as a result avoids the behavior and eventually, due to lack of use, loses the skill. For example, a student who is anxious to speak in public may refuse to present in class and eventually loses proficiency at giving oral presentations.

Please keep this information in mind as we move forward with the ABCs of behavior that explain the contextual framework and help us understand why students behave a certain way.

1.26 ABC A

Now that we’ve covered the “B” in our ABCs of Functional Contextual Thinking, we’re going to move over to the “A”. A stands for antecedent. The antecedent

is the event or events that trigger a behavior. Antecedents can come in two flavors, slow and fast. Let's take a closer look at both of these.



Notes:

1.27 Process Interaction



Notes:

Slow triggers, also called setting events, are conditions that set up the possibility that the concerning behavior may happen. Slow triggers may have happened in the past but they influence behavior in the present. Fast triggers, also called antecedents, are what sets off the behavior at that moment and happen right before the concerning behavior. We need to identify both slow and fast triggers to fully understand why a student is experiencing challenges. Click on the boxes to the left to learn more about slow and fast triggers and the interaction of both.

Slow Triggers:

Setting events are not going to be the immediate triggers for the concerning

behavior but will influence the relationship between the fast triggers and the behavior. For example, lack of sleep might make a student more irritable, so the student might have an angry outburst when the teacher asks them to take a quiz. Additional examples include feeling hungry, experiencing trauma, feeling anxious, and even some of our preferences.

Fast Triggers:

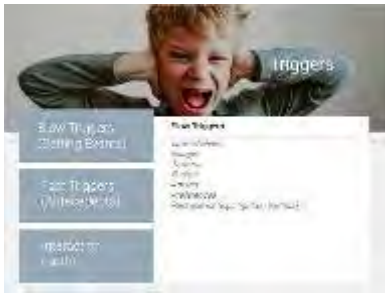
Antecedents are things that happen right before the behavior and set it off. Examples include giving a direction in the classroom, putting a demand on the student, not being able to sit with a preferred friend. Triggers could also be internal, for example, a student could have a memory of a past traumatic event come to their mind.

Interaction:

It is important to remember that the slow and fast triggers can interact. A common school related example includes the bus ride to the school during which the student may have experienced some kind of aversive or unpleasant event such as a peer making fun of them. As the student walks into the school building, this setting event can interact with a fast trigger, such as a teacher making a comment about their new hair color. The result is the student making an inappropriate response, such as saying a curse word to the teacher.

Another example includes a situation in which a student is involved in a fight during lunch and receives an after-school suspension that makes them very upset. Later in Math class, this student, who normally follows directions well, engages in challenging or problem behavior when the Math teacher asks them to open their textbooks. This is the result of both slow and fast triggers.

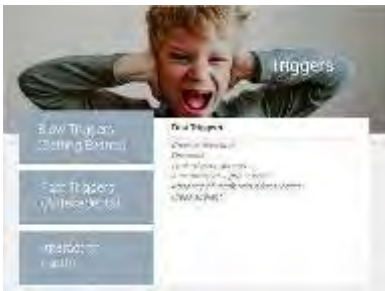
Slow Triggers (Slide Layer)



Slow Triggers

- Lack of sleep
- Hunger
- Trauma
- Fatigue
- Anxiety
- Preferences
- Past events (e.g. fight on bus)

Fast Triggers (Slide Layer)



Fast Triggers

- Given a direction
- Demand
- Lack of peer access

- A memory of a past event
- Absence of preferred adult/peers
- Class subject

Interaction (Slide Layer)



Bus ride to school where an unpleasant event happened (slow trigger) and teacher making a comment about sensitive subject (fast trigger).

Result: student lashes out

Fight during lunch, student gets after school suspension (slow trigger) and teacher gives direction to open textbook (fast trigger).

Result: student misbehaves

1.28 ABC C



Notes:

Now we've covered the behavior and the antecedents and we have just the C left in our ABCs. The C stands for consequence or what immediately follows

the behavior.

We understand that there is an antecedent or a trigger that sets off the behavior and now we want to pay attention to what happens after the behavior takes place. The consequence is going to give us a clue as to what the function of the behavior may be or why the behavior may be happening.

We need to be careful about what we observe in terms of consequences ... let's explore further.

1.29 External and Internal



Notes:

Consequences can be external or internal. External consequences can be observed. You can see the consequence of the behavior if you are looking closely. Internal consequences are harder to observe because they are experienced internally by the student, but you can hypothesize them by looking at the behavior of the student, asking the student to self-report, or by asking the student to observe their own internal reactions. Click on each box to explore in more detail.

External:

An example of an external consequence is a student might misbehave because they know the teacher will tell them to leave the classroom and go to the principal's office. As the student leaves the classroom and walks to the principal's office, they will escape the assignment and meet their preferred adult by gaining access to the principal. In a different scenario, a student may call out in the classroom and as a result, the teacher addresses the student

and allows them to give the answer to a question. The student continues to call out because as a result they get the teacher's attention.

Internal

An example of an internal consequence is that a student might storm out of their classroom because the assignment was too difficult. Leaving the room reduced their anxiety, they feel better now, and their heartbeat slows down. Remember, the consequence tells us why the behavior is happening and as a result we can hypothesize the function of the behavior. Our hypothesized function in this example is that the student left the classroom to escape the uncomfortable sensations, feelings, or thoughts they experienced as a result of the difficult assignment.

External (Slide Layer)



Internal (Slide Layer)



1.30 Reinforcement



Notes:

Consequences determine if the behavior will continue in the moment, happen again in the future, or stop and be discontinued. Consequences reinforce or punish the behavior. The terms reinforcement and punishment are often used colloquially to mean good and bad, but when used in a behavioral context reinforcement and punishment have different meanings. Reinforcement is anything that increases the likelihood of the behavior occurring and punishment is anything that decreases the likelihood of the behavior.

To determine if a consequence reinforced or punished a behavior, we can see if the behavior increased or decreased as a result. If the behavior increased or strengthened, then the consequence following that behavior was reinforcing. For example, if a student raised their hand to answer a question and gave an incorrect response but the teacher provided praise for the effort, it is more likely the student will volunteer to answer another question in the future as their effort was reinforced. If the behavior decreased or weakened, then the consequence following that behavior was punishing. For example, if the student gave an incorrect response and the teacher reprimanded the student who then felt humiliated, chances are the student will hesitate to volunteer to answer in the future.

A quick note on punishment. We generally discourage the use of punishment as a general practice. Research has demonstrated that punishment causes secondary emotional harm, doesn't solve the problem that needs to be addressed, and is generally very stressful for both the adult and student.

Instead, we want focus on building skills to help a student be successful in school and life in general. Simply stopping behaviors using punitive

procedures does not accomplish that goal. FCT focuses on reinforcing the skills and behaviors the student needs, rather than simply reducing unwanted behaviors.

1.31 Function of Behavior



Notes:

Now that we are clear about the difference between reinforcement and punishment, let's take a closer look at the function of behavior. There are several considerations to keep in mind when thinking about the function of a behavior. To start, we want to remember that behavior always serves a function; it happens for a reason. Often when we are looking at a problem behavior, we must remind ourselves that the student is behaving a certain way in order to get something they need. The problem behavior is helping the student meet this need in the most efficient and effective way they know. The behavior becomes problematic when it contrasts with the *appropriate or desired* behavior that we want a student to perform to meet that function.

For example, if a student wants to get a teacher's attention so they can participate in a lesson, the student can raise their hand and wait to be called on or they can call out. The function of both behaviors is to get the teachers attention, but one is clearly less disruptive and more desirable for the teacher. For the student to learn that raising their hand is more efficient and more effective than calling out in class at meeting the function of getting the teacher's attention, the teacher needs to ignore the student when calling out and only accept participation when the student raises their hand and waits to be called on. Calling out no longer meets the student's desired function.

For us to intervene successfully, we need to identify the student's needs and

how can we help them be successful at meeting those needs using desirable behaviors.

1.32 Two Categories



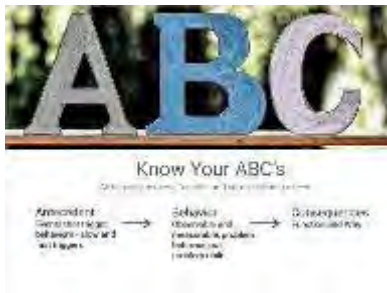
Notes:

You can think more about function in terms of a desire to gain or obtain something (for example, attention, an object, or access) or to try to avoid or escape something (for example, attention, an object, access, sensation, or a person).

Broadly speaking, on one side there are things that we want to move towards, and, on the other side, there are things we want to move away from. For example, we can either want someone's attention or want to get away from someone's attention. We might want to engage in a certain activity because we think it is fun or we might want to get away from an activity because we find it challenging. We might want access to a certain object, or we might want to avoid an object.

Of course, sometimes the same behavior can serve multiple functions. For example, a student may want to get away from a classroom activity that is difficult and get closer to someone outside of the classroom they want to interact with. By misbehaving the student anticipates the teacher will ask them to leave the classroom, thus escaping the activity and being able to meet with their friends in the hallway.

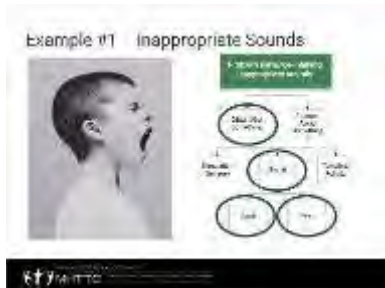
1.33 ABC Idea -End



Notes:

Now let's put it all together. Always remember your behavioral ABCs. The antecedent sets off an observable and measurable behavior that is followed by an immediate consequence that informs us about the function of the behavior. Let's look at a couple examples to build your fluency with this content.

1.34 Calling Out



Notes:

In this example we have a student who is “making inappropriate sounds in the classroom” and disrupting the teacher and other students’ learning process. Specifically, when the teacher is introducing new material (the antecedent), the student starts making animal sounds (the behavior) and in response, peers laugh and the teacher tells the student to stop and pay attention (the consequence). If we think functionally, we might quickly understand that the student is trying to “get something”, in this case, the student gets social attention from an adult and peers.

Once we hypothesize the function, we can start thinking how to support the student in meeting this need for attention in a more desirable way. What skills or behaviors do we need to teach the student and reinforce, and what behaviors do we need to stop or weaken?

1.35 Raising Hand



Notes:

In this second example we have a student who is raising their hand in class. The teacher has assigned independent seat work and the student doesn't understand the activity (the antecedent), the student raises their hand (the behavior), and the teacher approaches their desk to help (the consequence). What was the function of raising their hand? The student wanted to obtain the teacher's attention. Just like in the previous example, the student needed social attention. The difference is, in this example, the student performed a desirable behavior instead of a disruptive behavior to meet the same function.

1.36 Case One – The Angry Little Boy



Notes:

Let's practice putting the ABCs into action.

Explore the circumstance below by clicking on each ABC component. See if you can determine the main function of the student's behavior before clicking on the question mark to check your answer. We recommend starting with the behavior first since in practice this is what you would see first, then you can click on the antecedent and the consequence before hypothesizing the function.

Antecedent:

The student has a history of academic failure, so we can guess that challenging academic work may be frustrating or at least not something this student enjoys. This could be classified as a slow trigger. Then the teacher gives him a worksheet that is too difficult for him to complete independently. This would be the fast trigger.

Behavior:

The student responds by throwing the papers.

Consequence:

As an immediate consequence, the teacher attempts to reason with the student but eventually sends him to the office.

Function:

Looking at all this information together it appears that one of the main functions of the student's behavior is to escape from the work demand. As we start thinking about interventions and supports for the student, we will have to examine the work closer and determine if, given his history of academic failure, there is a skill deficit that prevents this student from completing the work or if he needs to develop skills to cope with frustration? Either way simply labeling the student as being angry is not helpful. We want to understand the context, so we can hypothesize the function of his angry

outburst and support his needs.

Antecedent (Slide Layer)



Behavior (Slide Layer)



Consequence (Slide Layer)



Function (Slide Layer)



1.37 Case Two – Alone



Notes:

Let's try another example. This time we want to look at an internalizing behavior. As we mentioned earlier, internalizing behaviors are often harder to address because they're harder to observe. Explore the circumstance below by clicking on each ABC component. See if you can determine the main function of the student's behavior before clicking on the question mark to check your answer. Again, we recommend starting with the behavior, then the antecedent and the consequence before hypothesizing the function.

Antecedent:

The student is approached by her peers during unstructured recess time and

they ask her to hang out. This is the immediate, fast trigger for her behavior. We also know that this student has a history of experiencing trauma so we may hypothesize that this is a contributing slow trigger.

Behavior:

In response to her peers' request this student refuses to join the game and chooses to sit on a bench by herself.

Consequence:

As a consequence, the student is left alone by her peers, resulting in some relief, but also increased feelings of loneliness.

Function:

In this case, it appears the student wanted to escape or avoid attention from and interaction with her peers. While her behavior serves this function it also results in some unwanted outcomes. This student may benefit from coping skills to address her strong emotions and trauma history, as well as social skills that allow her to successfully connect with her peers.

Antecedent (Slide Layer)



Behavior (Slide Layer)



Consequence (Slide Layer)



Function (Slide Layer)



1.38 Case Three - Lining UP



Notes:

The ABC model can help us think functionally about individual student behaviors, and the behaviors of groups of students. This final example uses functional thinking to address group behaviors.

Notice in this example, students all rushed to line up, knocking over items and fighting for the spot in the front. If this is something that's causing awkward and sometimes even dangerous transitions, we might want to address this group behavior in our classroom.

Antecedent:

Students are given the instruction to line up but there are no clear directions regarding how students are to line up in an orderly fashion.

Behavior:

The students all rush to line up, fighting for a spot at the front of the line. In the process students knock over items and jostle and push each other.

Consequence:

Once the students begin to form the line they continue to argue with each other and complain to the teacher about their spot in the line.

Function:

Looking at the ABCs for the whole group, we understand the function of the behavior is to obtain a preferred position, most likely the first spot in line. To address this behavior, alternative strategies to equitably meet this function need to be determined.

Antecedent (Slide Layer)



Behavior (Slide Layer)



Consequence (Slide Layer)



Function (Slide Layer)



1.39 Case Four - The Sign-er

The screenshot shows a web form titled "Case Four - The Sign-er". Below the title is a small paragraph of text. The form is divided into four colored boxes: a green box labeled "Antecedent", a blue box labeled "Behavior", a blue box labeled "Consequence", and a green box labeled "Function" with a question mark icon. Below these boxes is a large white text area for notes. A "Go to Scenario" button is located between the boxes and the text area.

Notes:

Now let's see if you can identify the ABCs and hypothesize the function on your own. You can check your answers on the next slide.

Click on the scenario button to read about the student. Next, type the behavior, the antecedent and consequence in the box below. Follow the same exact steps we discussed and remember to write about the behavior of concern in measurable and observable terms.

After you identify the ABCs, type the possible function that explains why the behavior was performed this example, please complete the ABCs and hypothesize the function on your own. You can check your answer on the next slide. Click on the scenario button to read about the student. Next, type the behavior, the antecedent and consequence in the box below. Follow the same exact steps we discussed and remember to write about the behavior of concern in measurable and observable terms.

After you noted your ABCs, type the possible function or functions that explain the reason why the behavior was performed.

1.40 Answer to Case Five



Notes:

Check your answers by clicking on the ABCs.

Antecedent:

The students have been asked to work independently and the teacher is assisting other students.

Behavior:

Billy begins by sighing loudly, and then goes on to tapping his pencil, and finally exclaims, "I can't do this".

Consequence:

The teacher responds to Billy by saying he should use his inside voice and that the teacher will be with him in a minute.

Function:

The function of Billy's behavior is to get the teacher's attention.

Antecedent (Slide Layer)



Behavior (Slide Layer)



Consequence (Slide Layer)



Function (Slide Layer)



1.41 Case Five - Student Example



Notes:

We hope that by now you have a good understanding of what behavior is and how the context can help us understand why behaviors are performed. It is time for you to create your own example. Think of a social, emotional, or behavioral challenge that you experience in your school. Follow the same steps we've used in the previous examples. Start by describing a behavior of concern in measurable and observable terms. Next consider the antecedents for that behavior. Are there any slow triggers that could influence the behavior? What is the immediate fast trigger that provokes the behavior? Then write the consequence, what happened as a result of the behavior, immediately after the behavior occurred. After you consider the ABCs, hypothesize what possible function or functions explain the behavior.

1.42 Conclusion



Notes:

Great job working through that material! We want to finish with a reminder. The only behavior we can truly control is our own.

We all need to understand that we are part of our student's context. Our reactions to a student's behavior can make it more or less likely that the behavior will happen again. Our own behaviors can also serve as antecedents for future behaviors. Thus, we should be mindful of the role our behavior plays in determining our students' behaviors.

1.43 Exit



Notes:

Thank you for taking part in the first module of the Functional Contextual Thinking and Its Application for School Mental Health online course. Our next module will go into more detail about specific internalized problems and how functional contextual thinking can help us hypothesize their function.

2.

2.1 The Scenario



Notes:

The Scenario:

It is math class and students are supposed to work on their work independently. The teacher is assisting a different student when Billy starts "sighing" out loud repeatedly. The teacher ignores Billy's behavior and continues to assist the other students.

Billy starts tapping his pencil on the desk and when the teacher continues to ignore his behavior, he cries out loud "I can't do this!". The teacher says "Billy, inside voices, I will be with you in a minute!"

Return to slide by clicking on the X in the upper right.

2.2 Answer Steve



Notes:

Answer:

We know Steve is anxious because his cheeks are flushed, he is shaking his leg, sweating, and repeatedly saying "I am scared!"

Return to slide by clicking on the X in the upper right.