

Reducing Problem Behaviors

Some people with autism display behaviors that may be problematic in some way. All behavior serves a function. In order to know how to reduce a problem behavior, and to replace it with a more appropriate behavior, it is important to identify what function the problem behavior serves.

The functions of behavior typically fall into one or more of the following functions:

- **To escape from or avoid an undesirable situation**
- **To gain attention** from someone in the environment.
- **To gain a tangible consequence:** a treat, a token, money, a favorite toy or video.
- **To gain a sensory /self-stimulatory consequence:** to get warmer if one is cold, or cooler if hot, to gain some tactile, taste, auditory, visual, proprioceptive, or vestibular consequence.

In order to determine which function(s) the behavior serves, it may be helpful to conduct a functional behavior assessment or a functional behavior analysis. A **functional behavior assessment** involves careful observation and data collection in order to determine a precise description of the behavior, its context, what happens before the behavior occurs, and what happens after it occurs. A **functional behavior analysis** begins as an assessment, but includes the added step of systematically altering the antecedents to and consequences of the behavior to determine precisely which are the driving forces behind that behavior.

The first step in a functional behavior analysis is to carefully observe and precisely describe the behavior that the child is exhibiting and the events and stimuli in the environment both before and after that behavior. Often, this careful description is referred to as identifying the ABCs of a particular behavior:

- **A**ntecedent what happens before the behavior occurs
- **B**ehavior the behavior that we see exhibited by the child
- **C**onsequence what happens after the behavior occurs

A behavior plan is then designed to teach and reinforce more socially appropriate behaviors and reduce the problem behaviors by changing the antecedents and consequences.

Modified from **Functional Behavior Analysis** at <http://www.polyxo.com/fba/> (August 2010)

