

Functional Communication Training

Fact Sheet

Definition

Functional Communication Training (FCT) is an intervention to reduce the use of Behaviours of Concern (BOC). It involves assessment to determine the function(s) of behaviour and teaching the use of a more appropriate form that serves the same function.

Stages

1. Identify the communicative function of the BOC.
2. Select an appropriate communicative alternative.
3. Implement systematic instruction to teach the communicative alternative under relevant conditions.

Identify the Communicative Function of the BOC

Use of one or both of the following strategies is recommended.

1. Functional Behaviour Analysis
 - 1.1. use observations and interview data to identify BOC
 - 1.2. develop hypotheses about what controls the behaviour.
 - 1.3. test the hypotheses systematically by setting up situations that are thought likely to increase the likely occurrence of the BOC.
 - 1.4. continue the process systematically until support for each hypothesis about what triggers and maintains each BOC is found.

Caution: Not all behaviours are triggered or controlled by environmental factors and so functions may not be found (e.g., sensory functions, mental or physical health problems).

Functional Behaviour Analysis requires skills and time that make the approach difficult to implement in most service systems.

2. Functional Behaviour Assessment
 - 2.1. use a published tool that relies on carer completion. Examples are the Motivation Assessment Scale (MAS, Durand & Crimmins, 1988)) and Questions about Behavior Functions (QABF, Paclawskyj et al., 2000).

Select an Appropriate Communicative Alternative

Principles to keep in mind:

- The communicative alternative must provide a good replacement for the BOC
 - It must serve the same function, be triggered by the same environmental variables and result in the desired outcome for the individual.
 - It must be as easy as or easier to perform than the BOC serving the same function.
 - It must be promptly and consistently reinforced.
- To ensure adherence to these principles, a communication assessment must identify:
 - the symbolic and physical ability of the individual (e.g., will s/he have the ability to learn signs and to perform them so they are understood by people in the environment);
 - how easily and readily the person can access the alternate form of communication (e.g., will s/he be able to recall the sign, or will a graphic symbol be within reach when needed);
 - the communication partner's ability to recognise the alternate form of communication and know its function;
 - the communication partner's ability to respond immediately and to provide reinforcement when the person uses the alternate communication form.

Implement Systematic Instruction

- Use appropriate behavioural teaching procedures, such as prompting and fading, and differential reinforcement.
- Determine the most appropriate instructional techniques during the assessment (e.g., use a trial and error teaching approach as part of the assessment; identify the person's receptive language skills so as to ensure comprehension of verbal instruction or input or to develop strategies that are verbal prompt-free).
- Implement the instruction within the environments in which the BOC occurs and involve all relevant people in the environment.
- Introduce fading techniques to reduce dependence on prompts (and therefore increase spontaneous use of the alternate form of communication).

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