Functional Behavioral Assessments

Components of an FBA

The FBA process is not linear. Collecting and analyzing data is a dynamic, fluid, and ongoing process. It is important for teams to recognize that the data they collect informs what additional data and other information they may need. Teams should also be responsive to and respectful of the individual student and be aware of the many contexts in which the student interacts.

To conduct an FBA, teams will use the following components. Each of these components is described in more detail on the following pages.

1) Form the Team and Establish Roles
2) Establish the Purpose for Conducting an FBA and Determine Notification and Consent Requirements
3) Identify and Define Behavior that Interferes with Learning or Learning of Others
4) Identify Developmentally and Educationally Relevant Questions
5) Gather Standard Data
6) Gather Additional Data
7) Synthesize the Data
8) Analyze Data to Identify the Function of Behavior and Root Cause
9) Use the Results of the FBA

Note: FBAs are encouraged as a tool for students who do not have an IEP and who are not suspected of having a disability under IDEA. The following components are geared toward students with disabilities but may be applicable for all students.

1. Form the Team and Establish Roles

> *"An effective FBA is developed by a team that includes professionals with technical expertise, school staff who are knowledgeable about the curriculum and the environment, and parents who know their student's unique learning history to ensure strategies are contextually and culturally relevant. ... Additionally, including the student (as appropriate) in an FBA process can improve the likelihood of success in implementing the BSP or BIP and provide additional insight and information." Home | U.S. Department of Education*

Conducting an FBA is a collective and collaborative team responsibility. Parents are key members of the team and essential partners in decision-making. Equally important is the active and ongoing voice and choice of the student to the greatest extent possible in light of the student's individual circumstances. If the student already has an IEP, the team may wish to consider including any additional team members with special knowledge or expertise about the student and their social, emotional, and behavioral functioning. All members of the Individualized Education Plan (IEP) team are responsible for ensuring the FBA is completed. People who are typically involved in the information-gathering process include:

- the student,
- parent(s), guardian(s) or other family members,
- the student's general education teacher(s),
- the student's special education teacher(s),
- related service providers, and
- administrators or supervisors.

Another way to think about team membership is to think of the specific roles that are needed to conduct a meaningful and educationally relevant FBA. There may be individuals who were not on the most recent IEP team who can provide additional perspectives throughout the process. This includes, but is not limited to, school counselors, school social workers, school psychologists, school nurses, occupational therapists, physical therapists, and speech-language pathologists. The level of staff skill needed when conducting FBAs should intensify as the level of student need intensifies. At least one individual on the team should be able to fill one or more of the following roles that include but are not limited to

- person(s) who have a positive or the most positive relationship with the child inside and outside of the school,
- person(s) who have knowledge of the student's academic progress in school and knowledge of the student's age- or grade-level general education curriculum,

- person(s) with knowledge of age- or grade-level social and emotional learning competencies,
- person(s) who have knowledge of the student's social relationships inside and outside of school,
- person(s) who can interpret the results of each assessment used, and who can synthesize the data from all information sources in order to help the IEP team identify the function and root cause of behavior,
- person(s) responsible for determining the team's tasks, such as what specific information is to be gathered, what tools will be used to collect the information, and who is assigned to obtain that information,
- person(s) knowledgeable about the availability of resources of the public agency,
- person(s) with the skills needed to identify and address bias throughout the FBA process, and
- person(s) with the skills needed to train and coach others on FBA protocols and data collection procedures.

If the IEP team participants do not have all of the necessary expertise to conduct a meaningful and educationally relevant FBA, the Local Educational Agency (e.g., school district) should consider contracting with an individual or organization that provides expertise in conducting FBAs in school settings.

2. Establish the Purpose for Conducting an FBA and Determine Notification and Consent Requirements

There are times when IEP teams are required to conduct an FBA and other times when conducting an FBA, while not required, is highly recommended because it will provide valuable data and other information to an IEP team that will help the team develop interventions and supports that will be effective with the student. It is important for the entire team to understand the reason for conducting the FBA, as it will determine if parent notification and consent are required.

If an FBA is used solely to address the use of positive behavioral interventions and supports when the student's behavior impedes their learning or the learning of others, parental notification and consent are recommended but not required.

Parental notification and consent are required before conducting an FBA when:

- an FBA is needed as part of a comprehensive special education initial evaluation or reevaluation.
- an FBA is part of required manifestation determination procedures, or
- a student with an IEP is secluded or restrained twice in a school year. Under this circumstance, the IEP team must review the IEP to ensure it contains appropriate positive behavioral interventions and supports based on an FBA of the behavior of concern, if a recent FBA has not been completed on the behavior of concern.

3. Identify and Define Behavior that Interferes with Learning or Learning of Others

> *"An FBA should include a clear, specific, measurable, observable, and objective description of the behavior that interferes with learning. The description of the interfering behavior should be sensitive to cultural and linguistic differences and be written using objective observations free from bias and judgment."* [*Home | U.S. Department of Education*]

All IEPs must include a statement regarding whether a student's behavior interferes with their learning or the learning of others. In the context of an FBA, behaviors that interfere with a student's learning or the learning of others are often referred to as "target behaviors." The behavior(s) to be assessed must have a clear operational definition so that the team can determine what data to collect and how to collect it. Identifying target behavior(s) includes discussing information about when and where a behavior does and does not occur. Such information is key to identifying the function and root cause of the target behavior(s).

The operational definition of the behavior or behaviors must be:

- clear,
- specific,
- objective,
- observable and measurable (generally in terms of frequency, intensity, or duration).

Tip: Try asking, "What is the problem we are trying to solve?"

To assist teams with identifying and operationalizing target behavior(s), it may help to begin with an agreed-upon problem or concern that the team is trying to solve with the student. Having a collective mindset around a problem to be solved can then lead to a conversation to identify observable and measurable target behaviors that are clear and concise and allow the team to focus on the goal of finding solutions.

In addition, the identification of the targeted behavior(s) should be:

- based on existing data and input from multiple perspectives, including teachers, the family, and the student,
- clearly identified by all team members as a behavior that interferes with the student's learning or the learning of others,
- clearly linked to the student's ability to access, engage or make progress within the school environment, instruction and curriculum,
- understandable to everyone on the team, including the parent and student, and based on the student's unique circumstances (e.g., everyone would be able to agree if they observed the target behavior),
- clearly linked to the problem(s) or concern(s) the team has agreed to try to solve.

Children whose behavior interferes with their learning or the learning of others rarely engage in only one clearly definable behavior. Typically, a child will engage in multiple behaviors in response to multiple internal and external factors. When a team identifies multiple behaviors that interfere with learning, they should prioritize one or two to be the target behavior(s) of the FBA and the focus for determining the function and root cause. Additionally, the team should also explore if other behaviors influence the target behavior(s). For example, an IEP team may decide to focus on the behavior of getting into arguments at school if team members feel that behavior is highly correlated with the target behavior of self-isolation.

Tip: Identifying Target Behaviors
When identifying target behaviors, the team should select observable behaviors that have the greatest impact on the student's access, engagement, and progress in school. As a behavior of concern is shared, the team should agree that the observable behavior will be a "target behavior" to investigate as part of the FBA. Once all potential target behaviors are identified, the team can begin prioritizing and discussing the relationship between the target behavior and other behaviors to assist with the focus of the FBA.

The team may wish to collect data on additional behaviors that were not identified as "target behaviors" as part of the FBA process, as data related to these are likely to be a part of a pattern of behaviors that can help the team identify the function and root cause. Additionally, the team may identify patterns of less intense but higher frequency behaviors that may precede the higher intensity but less frequent target behavior. This may assist the team later on when developing a behavior intervention plan or other supports to intervene more proactively.

For example, a team prioritizes the target behavior of walking out of the classroom. After discussion about the target behavior, the team also plans to take data on the student's observable physical signs of anxiety (e.g., body rocking, fidgeting with objects, blank stare) that at times may be correlated with walking out of the classroom. Although the team feels body rocking and fidgeting with objects are not behaviors of concern, they feel these may be early warning signs that lead to more significant behaviors that are of concern. By collecting data on other related behaviors as part of the FBA process, the team may better identify the root cause of "why" the student is having difficulty in school. This will lead to developing the appropriate positive behavioral interventions and supports.

It is vital when identifying the behaviors that interfere with the student's learning or the learning of others (i.e., target behaviors) to keep in mind that human behavior is greatly influenced by environmental factors and context.

> ***Tip: Addressing bias when identifying target behaviors.***
> *Behavioral responses are often a way of communicating an unmet need, an emotion the student cannot yet identify or manage, missing or undeveloped skills, or that an expectation exceeds the student's capacity. For strategies the team can use to define FBA target behaviors in a way that is unbiased and objectively takes context into consideration, refer to the Vulnerable Decision Point 2: Identifying Potential Areas of Need During Referral and Review of Existing Data section of the Addressing Bias in the Special Education Evaluation Process.*

4. Identify Developmentally and Educationally Relevant Questions

When one or more target behaviors have been identified, the next step is to develop developmentally and educationally relevant questions regarding how the target behavior(s) may impact access, engagement, and progress in the general education curriculum or progress toward the student's IEP goals. Asking student-specific, developmentally and educationally relevant questions helps the team decide what data needs to be collected.

The rationale and use of developmentally and educationally relevant questions has been clearly described by Dr. Howard Margolis in the article, Using instructionally-relevant questions to develop evaluations and IEPs (MultiBriefs, 2018). Asking student-specific developmentally and educationally relevant questions can help identify both student strengths and unmet needs and assist in the identification of the function and root cause of behavior. The developmentally and educationally relevant questions agreed upon by the team should help identify potential skills and needs within at least one of the [six areas of academic and functional skills](#).

Examples of developmentally and educationally relevant questions might include:

- Why is the target behavior occurring in some environments and contexts and not others?
- Does the frequency or intensity of the behavior change between home and school environments?
- What strategies and supports have been effective in addressing the behavior, at school and at home?
- How do the student's academic skills, interests, or growth affect the target behavior and vice versa?
- Which of the six areas of academic or functional skills do we believe are most correlated with the target behavior?
- What specific academic or functional skills represent possible unmet student needs?
- Is the student in need of instruction in specific skills, additional supports such as accommodations or modifications, or both?

Answering these or other developmentally and educationally relevant questions can also help to identify potential interventions and supports to be provided in the IEP and, when appropriate, a behavioral intervention plan.

> ***Tip: Strategies for identifying developmentally and educationally relevant questions***
>
> - *Use the team's answer to the question from Step 3 ("What is the problem we are trying to solve?") as a starting place for identifying what other information is needed to identify why the target behavior occurs.*
> - *Use the six areas of academic and functional skills as a starting point for asking deeper questions about specific skills in which the student has strengths and how those strengths may inform a student's unmet needs (e.g., how might the student's strengths in social and emotional learning, such as forming peer relationships, support unmet needs in the area of academics, such as reading fluency).*
> - *Use the Review, Interview, Observe, Test (RIOT) by Instruction, Curriculum, Environment, Learning (ICEL) Matrix to ensure the educationally relevant questions consider ecological factors and are not solely focused on the behaviors that interfere with the learning of the student or others, and that the scope of the FBA considers the many ecological factors that influence behavior.*

- *When identifying developmentally and educationally relevant questions, the team should remember that both internal and external stimuli influence behavior. Teams need to look beyond "behaviors" and consider the stress response and the student's activated fight, flight, freeze, or fawn response. Teams also should continue to consider adult behavior, relationships, and responses.*

5. Gather Standard Data

> *"To consider other perspectives, culturally responsive teams seek out comprehensive information about the learning environment instead of only considering information about the student's skills and behavior."* [Culturally Responsive Problem-Solving Guide: An Evidence-Based Guide for Team Practice]

No single data collection method or information source is sufficient for determining the function or root cause of behavior. All FBAs must include data and information from a variety of sources using a variety of data collection methods. In addition to helping the team identify developmentally and educationally relevant questions, the RIOT-ICEL Matrix can be a useful organizational framework for the team to identify what tools to use to collect data. RIOT assists with identifying data collection methods, and ICEL assists with determining the settings, contexts, and focus of the data collection. Finally, The IEP team needs to collect data in a manner that avoids confirmation and untrue, unfounded, or unalterable attribution biases that may be held by team members. This will ensure that when conducting an FBA, teams address important developmentally and educationally relevant questions to identify meaningful and educationally relevant function and root cause of the identified target behavior(s).

At a minimum, an FBA should include data and information from the following sources:

- Formal structured interviews of the student, parent(s) or caregiver(s), and educator(s) that include gathering culturally relevant information.
- Observations, including direct observations of the student in settings where the target behavior is likely to occur, as well as in settings where the behavior is less likely or unlikely to occur.
- Objective progress monitoring data that reliably measures the student's response to positive behavior interventions and supports.
- Record review, including academic progress reports, previous comprehensive special education evaluation reports, IEPs and IEP progress reports, and student disciplinary records and data. A

thorough review of records and educational history can identify important information about current and previous behavioral patterns, student strengths and interests, and ecological factors that influence behavior.

6. Gather Additional Data

Based on the student's age, grade, previous assessments, and other factors, the team may need to gather additional data in order to answer the developmentally and educationally relevant questions so they can identify the function and root cause of behavior(s) and develop effective interventions and support.

Tip: Refer to RIOT-ICEL Matrix to minimize bias in the FBA process
As explained in the Guide for Problem-Solving Teams (Newell, 2017), the RIOT-ICEL Matrix is an approach designed to ensure teams are collecting data from multiple domains, sources, and settings as well as using multiple methods. It is a versatile guiding framework often used by problem-solving teams to focus on both ecological factors as well as the skills, services, and supports students need to access, engage, and make progress in their education. Teams can use one or more of the RIOT methods to assess multiple ICEL factors that are relevant to the student's context.

Briefly, the ICEL domains are used to investigate the multiple factors affecting the student's learning.

- ***I**nstruction - refers to the teaching practices. Things to consider are pacing, student grouping, use of technology, and other classroom strategies.*
- ***C**urriculum - refers to the educational programs used in the classroom and the academic skills a student is expected to master in the content areas.*
- ***E**nvironment - includes any factors of the physical surroundings that affect the student's learning.*
- ***L**earner - refers to the student as a unique individual.*

The RIOT domains represent the multiple sources of information used to investigate ICEL.

- ***R**eview*
- ***I**nterview*
- ***O**bserve*
- ***T**est*

For more information, see RIOT-ICEL Matrix: A Tool to Support IEP Team Processes, Problem Solving Using the RIOT and ICEL Framework, ICEL by RIOT Matrix Worksheet, and The RIOT/ICEL Matrix: Organizing Data to Answer Questions About Student Academic Performance and Behavior.

The following additional data collection procedures are commonly used when conducting FBAs. These strategies are organized in no particular order. The types of data collection needed should be matched to the target behaviors and developmentally and educationally relevant questions. This will help ensure IEP teams conduct a meaningful and educationally relevant FBA. Each team member assigned to collect the data should be trained and qualified in the selected data collection method(s).

Standardized Rating Scales: Standardized rating scales assess an individual's social, emotional, and behavioral functioning and skills in comparison to a norm group (typically a nationally representative sample of peers of the same age or grade range). They gather information about a student's behavior from observers, such as teachers or parents, or the student themselves through a self-report.

Data produced by standardized rating scales are indirect measures that reflect the rater's individual perceptions based on their recollection of a student's functioning and skills. Because of this, rating scale and checklist results are influenced by the implicit and explicit biases of the rater. Collecting rating scale data from multiple sources and interpreting convergent findings helps minimize bias. This limitation and others need to be understood by those analyzing and reporting the data.

Dynamic Assessment: As explained in the Wisconsin DPI Dynamic Assessment Guidance, dynamic assessment is a method of assessment whereby a student's ability to learn a skill (i.e., a student's modifiability) is measured after a teaching phase led by an evaluator. During the teaching phase, the evaluator provides scaffolded supports and explicit instruction around an identified area of need to determine the student's learning potential and present level of functioning

The rationale for using dynamic assessment during an initial evaluation for special education is to:

1. address the bias of standardized testing

2. aid in determining whether student needs reflect a lack of skills or lack of exposure to skills

3. determine if there is a need for specially designed instruction and to inform intervention.

Dynamic assessment can also be used to try out any type of instruction or support that the IEP team believes may address the student's behavior(s) that interfere with the student's learning or the learning of others (i.e., target behavior) and to improve the student's access, engagement, and progress in school. For example, the team may try out any of the following to see if they help to reduce or eliminate the target behavior that is interfering with the student's learning or the learning of others: providing a student with choices of regulation materials or activities throughout the school day, using visual timers or visual schedules, implementing self-monitoring systems, or consistent use of positive reinforcement. For information on these and other evidence-based practices to support the behavioral needs of students with IEPs, go to National Organizations to Support Implementation of Evidence Based Practices for Students with IEPs.

> ***Tip: Use of Dynamic Assessment to Identify Competing Behaviors***
> *Identification of a Competing Behavior Pathway is a common FBA instructional process that can be implemented through dynamic assessment. The goal of identifying a competing pathway is to identify a replacement behavior that, if taught and learned, will compete with the behavior interfering with learning. For example, if a student is observed demonstrating unsafe behavior when met with specific types of activities or instruction from adults, the team may teach the student to use a break card to request a break from the activity or instruction for a set period of time. Requesting a break is seen as more safe than the unsafe behavior that is interfering with the student's learning or the learning of others. Requesting a break competes with the unsafe behavior and may provide the student with what the student needs, such as time to regulate or process how to complete specific types of activities or instructions.*
>
> *Teams should use caution to ensure they are addressing bias and social norms when considering whether any behavior needs to be replaced. For example, observable behaviors of unusual student movements (e.g., toe walking, rocking, tapping a pencil) may help the student regulate their behavior and often do not require replacement. In addition, attempting to replace some behaviors may lead to more significant or more unsafe behaviors.*

ABC Data Collection: ABC stands for Antecedent-Behavior-Consequence and is a data collection method for recording and analyzing behaviors in order to understand why they occur. The "antecedent" conditions are the events that happen before the behavioral response occurs. The "behavior" is the demonstration of the target behavior, and the "consequence" conditions or outcomes are the natural events that happen immediately after the behavioral response occurs. An example of the ABC Data Collection worksheet can be found on the DPI Sample Data Collections webpage.

Collaborative & Proactive Solutions (CPS): CPS is an evidence-based model that helps school teams and families address challenging behaviors by focusing on identifying and solving problems that contribute to those behaviors. CPS aims to empower children and caregivers to work together to create solutions and build stronger relationships. Tools found within the CPS model include:

- Assessment of Skills and Unsolved Problems Guide (ASUP, formerly referred to as ALSUP)
- Assessment of Skills and Unsolved Problems (ASUP 2024)
- CPS Materials/Paperwork

Think:Kids: The Think:Kids Collaborative Problem Solving (CPS) approach is an evidence-based and trauma-informed approach that aims to build relationships, teach problem-solving skills, and reduce challenging behaviors. Additional information and tools include:

- The Collaborative Problem Solving (CPS) ® model focuses on building skills like flexibility, frustration tolerance and problem solving.
- The Books and Resources webpage, includes the Thinking Skills Reference Sheet and Plan B Organizer.

7. Synthesize the Data

Once the data and other information have been gathered, it needs to be organized in a meaningful way so they can be reviewed and discussed in an unbiased manner (see Addressing Bias in a Comprehensive Special Education Evaluation Vulnerable Decision Point 4). Because team members inherently have different levels and areas of expertise and come with their own implicit biases, it is vital that the data and information be presented to all members so that each member's subjective viewpoints are acknowledged and can be applied in as objective a manner as possible. Well-organized and presented data allow the team to reduce or eliminate potential biases by:

- ensuring all data is considered equitably, rather than selectively, emphasizing data that confirms prior assumptions about the student's behavior,
- taking a strengths-based approach when interpreting the data (i.e., be sure to point out what is working for the student, positive relationships, and strengths),
- validating that the data gathered from different sources is consistent in identifying that the target behavior is the problem that needs to be solved, and
- providing information about where and when the target behavior occurs and does not occur in order to identify behavior patterns. And if the data does not converge to reveal a pattern, why not?

8. Analyze Data to Identify the Function of Behavior and Root Cause

"...teams should look across all data to identify points of convergence, which occur when multiple pieces of data are pointing to the same problem and hypothesis. If the data does not converge, then the team should ask additional educationally relevant questions to re-evaluate the problem, re-evaluate the hypothesis, or, when applicable, request consent from the parent to collect additional data." [Vulnerable Decision Point 4: Interpreting Data and Information]

Identifying a Pattern in the Data

Teams analyze the data to provide an objective description of the behavior as well as a complete picture of the context in which the behavior(s) does and does not occur. Data analysis is an important step prior to the identification of function and root cause. Data analysis should focus on objectively describing internal and external factors that increase or decrease the likelihood of the behavior(s) occurring (antecedents and consequences), as well as the frequency, intensity, duration, latency, and other objective dimensions of the behavior(s). At a minimum, data analysis should lead the team to identify patterns of when, where, and with whom the target behaviors occur, as well as patterns of when, where, and with whom the target behaviors do not occur. One way to identify patterns is by looking at all the data to identify points of convergence. Convergence happens when multiple pieces of data point to the same problem and hypothesis. If the data does not converge, then the team will need to reevaluate the problem and the hypothesis. The team may need to examine different data or collect additional data before returning to data analysis.

> ***TIP: Address Bias when Analyzing the Data from the FBA***
> *To address bias at this point in the FBA process, see Culturally Responsive Problem-Solving Guide Vulnerable Decision Point 3: Identifying a Hypothesis for Area of Need and Vulnerable Decision Point 5: Interpreting Data. Also see section titled Building Readiness.*

It may be helpful to revisit and use the RIOT/ICEL Matrix as an organizing tool for data analysis. Information and data collection methods (RIOT) may reveal behavioral patterns across contexts (ICEL). The team reviews the standard data (records review, observation, interview, and progress monitoring) and any additional data collected (rating scales, dynamic assessment). The analysis should include reviewing the data for:

- common themes across respondents, environments and data sources,
- the student's perceptions, thoughts, feelings and actions,
- patterns in the student's response to different academic, behavioral and social expectations, instruction, relationships, and environments,

- the ways the adults and other students in the environment respond and interact, and
- patterns in the events that happen before the behavioral response occurs (antecedents or triggers) and the events that happen immediately after the behavioral response occurs (consequences or outcomes), across observations.

The identification of a pattern or patterns can lead the team to develop a hypothesis of the function and root cause of the behavior. In some circumstances, the team may identify more than one function or root cause. The functions may be attention-seeking, escape or avoidance, access to tangibles (gain something), or sensory stimulation. Root causes may be related to unmet needs, emotions the student cannot yet identify or manage, missing or underdeveloped skills, or expectations that exceed the student's current capacity.

Competing Behavior Pathways can be used to summarize the behavior pattern that has emerged through the data collection and analysis. By identifying the "pathway" a student typically follows in response to their environment, we can better understand how to proactively support, teach, and modify the expectations to help the student get their needs met. An example of a Competing Behavior Pathway can be found on the DPI Sample Data Collections webpage.

Function of Behavior

The term "function of behavior" traditionally refers to why an individual engages in a specific behavior. One way to think of function is "what the student is getting out of the behavior." These functions are commonly described as attention-seeking, escape or avoidance, access to tangibles (gain something), and sensory stimulation.

> ***Tip: Don't Oversimplify the Function of Behavior***
> *Some sources have simplified why individuals engage in behaviors to two core functions: obtain or get something or escape/avoid something. Oversimplifying the function of behavior to such simplistic descriptors can be problematic, especially when the goal of identifying the function of behaviors is supposed to be to assist in supporting the student to access, engage, and make progress in their learning. Learning and development are complex processes that take place within the even more complex systems of curriculum and instruction.*

The identification of a behavior's function can provide relevant data and insights to the true root cause of a behavior or pattern of behaviors. Starting with identification of the function of behavior can lead to a deeper level of analysis. Such deep analysis is needed to identify the root cause of the student's behavior.

Root Cause of Behavior

A root cause explains why a student is demonstrating a target behavior that is interfering with the student's learning or the learning of others. For each individual student, any observable behavior that interferes with a student's learning or the learning of others may have multiple root causes based on the individual student's unique circumstances. For example, there is not a single root cause that explains why all students demonstrate a similar self-injurious behavior. For some students the root cause may be internal (e.g., managing physical pain or assisting with regulation), and for other students there may be a wide variety of external factors (skills related to maintaining relationships, unmet academic needs, or unmet communication needs). Not only will each individual student likely have different root causes for similar observable behaviors, but any individual student may also have more than one root cause for why a behavior occurs.

> ***Tip: Resources and Connections for Root Cause Analysis***
> *The DPI College and Career (CCR) IEP Process highlights root cause analysis as a necessary component of identifying a student's disability-related needs. Identification of root cause for "why" a behavior occurs in the FBA process is the same process used to identify a student's disability-related needs in a student's IEP. For more information on root cause analysis, see CCR IEP Step 2: Identify Effects of Disability and Disability-Related Needs.*

Function and Root Cause Analysis Working Together

The process of identifying the function of behavior and root cause analysis can be used together to help ensure a meaningful and educationally relevant FBA process. For example, if a student frequently leaves the classroom, the function of this behavior may be avoidance or escape from a specific academic task. But the root cause of that behavior is likely to be much more complex. The root cause may be missing or undeveloped academic skills, or that the student has already mastered the skills and is not being adequately challenged. Other potential root causes may include difficulty developing and maintaining relationships with peers, or the student may have a physical need, such as being hungry at that time of day. Consider the differences between the special education instruction or support an IEP team would include in this scenario based on the function of the behavior (escape) compared to an IEP that is developed to address and support the root cause of the behavior.

Function and Root Cause Comparison Chart

Function	Root Cause
What a student gets out of a behavior that interferes with learning or the learning of others.	Why a student demonstrates a behavior that interferes with learning or the learning of others.
Typically, one identified function per target behavior	Acknowledges that there may be multiple root causes of a behavior.
Simple, surface level description based on principles of behaviorism: i.e., what does the student "get" or "get out of" engaging in a certain behavior?	Recognition of complex social and ecological dynamics that influence behaviors. What are the instructional, curricular, environmental, and learner factors that contribute to the student maintaining or repeating a behavior over time?
Closer in time to behavior	Further away in time from behavior
Less influence on maintaining or repeating behavior	More influence on maintaining or repeating the behavior over time
Relies on objective data	Relies on objective and subjective data
Often can be identified through discussion of surface level factors by IEP team members.	Often takes a deeper and more sensitive discussion and requires self-reflection and vulnerability from IEP team members.
Interventions and supports addressing the function of behavior often are based on principles of behaviorism (i.e., rewards and consequences, managing environmental "triggers" of behavior, teaching a replacement behavior) and are rooted in positive relationships with the student	Interventions and supports addressing root cause of behavior focus on teaching of new skills to the student, identifying adult supports required to meet the student's needs, and are rooted in positive relationships with the student

Regardless of whether you use function of behavior, root cause analysis or both, the goal of an FBA should always be to identify the need(s) of the student that can be addressed through changes in adult behavior and the learning environment, and skill development and generalization through specially designed instruction, supplementary aids and services, or related services.

9. Using the Results of the FBA
The goal of an FBA is to understand and identify the function and the underlying root cause of the behavior in order to develop a plan so adults can better support and meet the student's needs, not solely to replace or change a student's behavior. Once the FBA has been completed, the IEP team must use the data collected and the identified function and root cause to plan and implement special education services and support. See the full section on Using the Results for more information.

Reflection and Discussion Activities

1) What step(s) of the FBA process do you feel are most important? Describe or reflect on why you feel this step is most important.
2) What step(s) of the FBA process do you feel you or your team are most comfortable with completing to ensure the FBA process is meaningful and educationally relevant?
3) What step(s) of the FBA process do you feel you or your team need the most support with completing to ensure the FBA process is meaningful and educationally relevant?
    a) What can you or your team do to get the support needed to improve your systems of implementation for this step(s)? (e.g., request professional learning and training from internal or external experts, develop a professional learning community, request outside consultation or contract to assist with completion of FBAs)
4) Identify and describe, if applicable, any steps you feel are missing that are needed to ensure the FBA process is meaningful and educationally relevant.

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