

Participation in work-based learning experiences (WBLEs) during high school is a strong predictor of post-school employment for students with disabilities (Mazzotti et al., 2021). WBLEs offer opportunities for students to identify career interests and develop essential job-related skills necessary for gaining and maintaining employment. For some students, however, the presence of challenging behaviors may interfere with participation in WBLEs. A functional behavior assessment (FBA) may help to identify appropriate interventions to support students with challenging behaviors to achieve success in the workplace (Kittleman et al., 2016).

What are FBAs?

An FBA is a structured process for collecting information about a challenging behavior and the factors that may trigger or sustain the behavior (Anderson et al., 2015). The FBA process involves gathering both direct (i.e., observations) and indirect information (e.g., structured interviews; Kittleman et al., 2016). Findings from the FBA should result in six outcomes (see Table 1). Once the FBA is complete, a behavior support plan can be created that articulates strategies for both modifying the work environment and teaching appropriate replacement behaviors that serve the same function as the challenging behavior.

What the Research Says

There is evidence to suggest that the most effective interventions for improving challenging behavior are interventions that are functionally based (Anderson et al., 2015; Carr, 1994). There are four primary classifications of behavior functions: (a) attention seeking, (b) escape/avoidance, (c) sensory reinforcement, and (d) access to tangibles (Carr, 1994). Understanding the function or reason for the challenging behavior allows educators to focus not only on decreasing challenging behavior but teaching more appropriate behavior serving the same

Table 1

Primary Outcomes of an FBA

Outcome	Description
Description of challenging behavior	Clearly describes what the behavior looks like including the frequency, duration, and intensity
Antecedents	Events that occur right before the behavior that impact or evoke the behavior
Setting events	Situations that predict when the behavior is likely to occur
Consequences	Functions the behavior serves that maintain the behavior
Hypothesis/summary statement	A description of the behavior and the most likely setting events, antecedent events, and consequences maintaining the behavior
Confirmation of hypothesis	Use of observational data to confirm the hypothesis

Note. Table adapted from O’Neil et al. (2015)

function as the challenging behavior (Kittleman et al., 2018).

According to O’Neill and colleagues (2015) FBAs provide valuable information about the social, physiological, academic, and environmental factors that may be impacting the student’s challenging behavior. Transition personnel can use information obtained through the FBA process to (a) modify physical and social settings (e.g., work environments, interactions with colleagues) that will deter challenging behavior from maintaining, and (b) teach appropriate replacement behaviors. Modification of the physical and social setting may also lead to more positive relationships between

the employer and co-workers by adjusting certain components of the environment (e.g., altering the amount of work, assisting with social interactions) for students exhibiting challenging behavior (Kittleman et al., 2016).

Guidelines for Practice

When conducting FBAs, it is important to collect both direct and indirect information. Direct information can be gathered by observing the student in the workplace for an extended period on at least three separate occasions. One method for collecting direct information is by conducting an ecological assessment in the form of a discrepancy analysis. Ecological assessments can be used to identify behavior that may be interfering with job performance, clarify a student's strengths and needs, and describe environmental factors that may evoke challenging behavior. Indirect information can be gathered through informants (i.e., those who have direct knowledge of the student). One method for collecting indirect information is by conducting structured interviews using the *Student-Guided Functional Assessment Interview for Work-based Learning* (FAI-W; see additional resources section). The FAI-W can be used to identify the function of a student's behavior and develop functionally based behavior support plans that will teach the student appropriate replacement behaviors. Both forms of information (direct and indirect) can provide valuable information about the student and work environment.

References

- Anderson, C. M., Rodriguez, B. J., & Campbell, A. (2015). Functional behavior assessment in schools: Current status and future directions. *Journal of Behavioral Education, 24*(3), 338-371. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10864-015-9226-z>
- Carr, E. G. (1994). Emerging themes in the functional analysis of problem behavior. *Journal of Applied Behavior Analysis, 27*(2), 393-399.
- Kittleman, A., Mazzotti, V. L., & McIntosh, K. (2018). Toward a model for collaborative function-based planning in work-based learning environments. *Journal of Vocational Rehabilitation, 49*(2), 227-239. <https://doi.org/10.3233/JVR-180968>

Additional Resources

Student-Guided Functional Assessment Interview for Work-based Learning (FAI-W) bit.ly/ICTW-FAI-W

This interview guide is designed to gather information about a student's challenging behaviors at the workplace and to assist in identifying more appropriate replacement behaviors through a competing pathways analysis. Questions focus on defining the student's strengths, challenging behavior, antecedents to the behavior, setting events that predict the behavior, and consequences that maintain the behavior.

Functional Behavior Assessment in the Workplace

youtu.be/gfxuKDvdii4

This ICTW webinar describes how to use ecological assessments and functional assessment interviews to develop behavior support plans in the workplace. An example of how to gather and analyze information gained from a completed FAI-W is included.

- Kittleman, A., Bromley, K. W., & Mazzotti, V. L. (2016). Functional behavioral assessments and behavior support plans for work-based learning. *Career Development and Transition for Exceptional Individuals, 39*(2), 121-127. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2165143416633682>
- Mazzotti, V. L., Rowe, D. A., Kwiatek, S., Voggt, A., Chang, W. H., Fowler, C. H., Poppen, M., Sinclair, J., & Test, D. W. (2021). Secondary transition predictors of postschool success: An update to the research base. *Career Development and Transition for Exceptional Individuals, 44*(1), 47-64. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2165143420959793>
- O'Neill, R. E., Albin, R. W., Storey, K., Horner, R. H., & Sprague, J. R. (2015). *Functional assessment and program development for problem behavior: A practical handbook* (3rd ed.). Cengage Learning.

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