

FBA Frequently Asked Questions Parent Perspective April 6, 2009

What exactly is a Functional Behavioral Assessment and why should one be completed for my son/daughter?

A Functional Behavioral Assessment (FBA) is a process used to determine the function or the reason(s) for a behavior or behaviors. During the process the team consisting of family, school staff, BHRS staff including a BSC trained in FBA process, as well as the child or adolescent with the behavioral issue if possible look at the behavior in a systematic way. An FBA includes the gathering of information through interviews of those involved and direct observation and data analysis of when the behaviors occur and do not occur. A Functional Behavior Assessment would be completed for your son or daughter so that adaptations could possibly be made so the behavior would be less likely to occur as well as to teach ways to replace destructive, disruptive, or distracting behaviors with more socially appropriate, acceptable and satisfying behaviors as a means of communicating and getting their needs met.

As a parent, what is my role in the FBA process?

You have the important role of helping the team understand your child's behavior. You will have lots of information about your child and the history of your child's behaviors which can inform the process. Sometimes you will be asked to participate in observing and collecting information about your child's challenging behavior as you observe it in the home and in community settings to provide a complete picture. You will also be trained to use specific strategies to provide consistent support to your child.

Why should I worry about a FBA for a preschooler? They are supposed to be challenging.

Even if the child is very young it is important to address challenging behaviors as these can quickly become learned responses and it is much easier to teach a two or three year old to ask for a drink or snack instead of allowing them to engage in tantrums or self-injurious behaviors than to deal with those behaviors with a ten, fifteen or thirty-five year old. Children who have ways of getting their wants and needs met in a socially acceptable manner have better prospects for inclusion in school, community jobs and a more fulfilling life. The challenging behaviors do not have a chance to be part of a long learning history.

Will the FBA help my adolescent son/daughter enjoy more activities within the community and perhaps help them maintain a volunteer or paid job?

Yes, it is much more likely for someone to participate in school and community activities of their choice and later, maintain a paid job or be a successful volunteer if they have acceptable behaviors in those settings. If a person engages in challenging behaviors as a means of getting what they need or want, they are not as likely to get along well in community or work settings. The FBA will help uncover the function of the challenging behaviors and support the development of new skills and strategies your child can employ to get their wants and needs met.

Who should conduct direct observations?

Observations from multiple sources would be best. The professional conducting the Functional Assessment, the Behavior Specialist Consultant in BHRS, would work with the team on defining the behaviors, training the team on data collection, and providing an analysis of the data. Depending on where the challenging behavior is occurring, the person conducting the FBA and all those who support the person would observe and collect data. If appropriate, parents may be asked to collect data as well. It is important to observe the person across several settings and across varying times of the day to see when the behaviors of concern happen and when they do not. Typically, the process takes a few weeks and data collection may last throughout this time.

Why is it necessary for the behavior specialist to interview people?

It is necessary to interview people to gather as much information as possible that helps describe the problem behaviors that are impeding learning or functioning within the community or home environment. Besides gaining relevant, factual information, an interview also brings out anecdotal information not captured elsewhere and leads to a more complete picture of the child or adolescent across settings and persons.

Who should be interviewed?

Those people who work with the person during his or her day, parents, the individual (as appropriate), and any BHRS staff who work with your child would be valuable to interview. Information gathered from multiple sources is necessary to complete a more holistic picture of the individual.

Why should we seek to define the function of the problem behavior?

Often through the demonstration of problem behaviors, people with ASD are trying to express something or communicate. Through the FBA process, we will understand why the person is engaging in a particular behavior. We can then teach the individual skills necessary to more appropriately communicate and have their needs met. For example, a preschooler who is tantruming during free time at day care when he or she does not know what to do might benefit from learning how to ask for help and a picture menu of the possible activities with pictures breaking down the steps of those activities. A teen who can report that he or she is getting upset might use a hall pass to take a short walk in the hall to escape a problematic period rather than scream or swear in class.

Which forms should I use for the Functional Assessment Interview and data collection?

If you are participating in observing and gathering data on your child's challenging behaviors, the forms you need will be provided to you by the Behavioral Specialist conducting the FBA. As you are an important part of this process, please feel free to make suggestions or offer ideas. Those ideas you have are bound to be important.

How might I approach my son or daughter's support staff about conducting a Functional Behavior Assessment?

Approach the issue from a proactive team approach. Explain the reasons you feel the need for an FBA and discuss with the team your concerns moving forward.

How many behaviors should be addressed in a FBA?

It is best to focus in on a minimal number of behaviors. If there are multiple challenging behaviors that a person is exhibiting, it is necessary to prioritize the behaviors accordingly:

1. Destructive behaviors that are affecting the safety of self and others or serious property destruction.
2. Disruptive behaviors interfering with inclusion, acceptance, and overall quality of life.
3. Disturbing behaviors that may be annoying but could cause a person to be teased or limit interactions with others.

What do we do after the FBA is completed?

The behavior specialist will hold a collaborative team meeting with all necessary members to review the data (including graphs of the data) and develop a Behavior Support Plan that will be followed by everyone involved in the person's care and support.

What should I look for from the FBA meeting in order to be fully informed and clear on the findings from all of this hard work?

Data should be presented in a graph form to the team in order to analyze and discuss the patterns and perceived functions of the behaviors discovered. The interviews will provide anecdotal information that will help to elaborate on the problem behaviors, antecedents etc. Direct observation data will confirm, dispute or expand upon information from the interviews. Information gained will drive the interventions being developed within the treatment and behavior support plan the team will implement as they move forward.

What should I look for in selecting a provider to work with my child and family?

If you are working with a licensed mental health agency, the behavioral specialist consultant (BSC) should have successfully completed the FBA training offered by the Department of Public Welfare (DPW), Bureau of Autism Services or be a Board Certified Behavioral Analyst (BCBA). DPW has issued a bulletin, OMHSAS-09-01, [Guidance for Conducting Functional Behavioral Assessments in the Development of Treatment Plans for Services Delivered to Children with Behavioral Health Needs Compounded by Developmental Disorders](#), which instructs licensed providers on expectations for conducting the FBA. You should expect the behavioral plan to be based on the results of the FBA and for the FBA to be updated if the plan is not working or new behaviors are occurring. If a FBA has also been conducted by the school system, it will work best if the two plans are merged together.

How should I work with the support staff when there is a crisis?

The crisis plan, as outlined in Pages 7 & 8 of the OMHSAS bulletin, should be utilized when the behaviors are so significant that the child or adolescent is a threat to safety of him or herself or others, or there is a threat of serious property damage (torn worksheets do not count). The roles of all persons involved should be outlined in the crisis plan. Each plan is different as is each child and family, but, for example, if the crisis occurs while in the community the plan might state that the TSS would provide support to the child including moving objects out of the way to keep everyone safe, using the predetermined de-escalation techniques, signaling others that help is needed, asking interested observers to give some space and help keep the scene as private as possible. The parent might be holding the child's hand so they do not run off into the street or otherwise hurt themselves while placing a communication book in range to prompt communication. The fact that the crisis plan needed to be employed means that something did not work in the behavior plan so the team should meet to consider if changes need to be made to avoid a future crisis situation.