ABC (Antecedent-Behavior-Consequence) Model

BQIS Fact Sheets provide a general overview on topics important to supporting an individual's health and safety and to improving their quality of life. This document provides general information on the topic and is not intended to replace team assessment, decision making or medical advice.

Intended Outcomes

Reader will know what the ABC model is and be able to put the three components together to understand why behavior happens.

Definitions

The ABC Model: The three-term possible events of antecedent, behavior, and consequence. An antecedent is something that comes before a behavior and may trigger that behavior. A behavior is anything an individual does. A consequence is something that follows the behavior.

Facts

- Looking at behavior from an ABC perspective is part of a comprehensive functional assessment (an extensive set of procedures to identify the causes of a maladaptive or socially incorrect behavior, and reduce it through teaching replacement behaviors instead of suppressing it through punishment) of a behavior.

- Using the ABC model is an effective way to understand why a behavior happens. Being able to look at several ABC data sheets provides a brief "snapshot" of what is going on when an individual participates in a particular behavior. It lets us see what is going on in the environment before the behavior that might trigger it and what happens after the behavior that might allow it to continue.

- The ABC model can also be effective for increasing behavior. For example, we can use specific antecedents to trigger behavior we want to increase and follow the behavior with a consequence that will increase or continue that behavior. See the examples below to see how this is done.

- Collecting data in ABC format does not require extensive skill or time. This data are helpful to the person writing the plan. Many times, the data forms for ABC data collection are simple checklists or other grids that are easy to use.

Recommended Actions and Prevention Strategies

1. ABC data should be collected as part of a functional assessment of a behavior. ABC data are a necessary part of determining why a behavior happens.

2. To collect ABC data, the person that sees the behavior writes down what happened just before and just after the behavior, and states what the behavior looked like. For example:

   – **Antecedent:** Staff asked individual to take a shower
   – **Behavior:** Cursed at staff for 30 minutes
   – **Consequence:** Staff walked away

3. We should look at the antecedents to the behavior that is the focus of change. If we can eliminate those antecedents, we may be able to stop the behavior. For example, if we know that an individual regularly participates in screaming and self-injurious behavior when at the grocery store, we might stop trips to the grocery store. However, that may not be the most practical solution. We might look instead at going to small convenience stores, spending less time in the store, or other supports and methods to increase the individual's tolerance for the grocery store.

4. ABC data should be collected on an ongoing basis, in addition to frequency (rate of recurring) data, to help determine if the behavior plan is working.

5. We should use the ABC model to teach positive behavior. We can use antecedents before and reinforcers after positive behavior, to help the learner engage in more useful and socially appropriate behaviors. For example:

   – **Antecedent:** Staff offered individual choice of bath or shower
   – **Behavior:** Went to bathroom with towel
   – **Consequence:** Verbal praise

Learning Assessment

The following questions can be used to verify a person's competency regarding the material contained in this Fact Sheet:

1. Which of these is not a reason to collect ABC data?

    A. It helps to determine why the behavior is happening.

    B. It helps to see which kind of punishment is best to use.

    C. It helps to teach a new behavior.

    D. It helps us learn why a behavior is happening.

2. Which of these includes all parts of the ABC model?

    A. All Behavior has Consequences

    B. Antecedent, Behavior, Categories

    C. Antecedent, Behavior, Consequence

    D. All Behavior is Crucial

3. True or False: Collecting ABC data is so complex that only someone with advanced training should try to do it.

References

Antecedent-Behavior-Consequence (ABC) Chart. The University of Kansas. Retrieved 07/17/2015 from http://www.specialconnections.ku.edu/?q=behavior_plans/functional_behavior_assessment/teacher_tools/antecedent_behavior_consequence_chart.

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Learning Assessment Answers

1. B

2. C

3. False