

Selecting and Defining Target Behaviors

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The first step in selecting and defining target behaviors....

- Assessment

- Methods to identify and define targets for behavior change
- Identify relevant factors that may inform or influence intervention

Assessment methods

- Indirect measures
 - Interviews
 - Checklists
- Direct measures
 - Tests
 - Direct Observation

Direct observation

- Direct and repeated
- Natural environment
- Identifies potential target behaviors
- Preferred method

After assessment...

- You use the assessment data that you collected via indirect and direct observation methods to determine the target behaviors

When selecting behaviors remember that you want to answer YES to these questions:

1. Will the target behavior result in access to new reinforcement, contingencies, or environments?
2. Does the target behavior have generativeness (will it result in later learning)?
3. Does the target behavior compete with inappropriate behaviors?
4. Does the target behavior benefit others?
5. Does the target behavior have social validity (help the client in the social community he/she will belong to)?

After you have the set of behaviors to target-

- Prioritize them considering:

1. Threat to health or safety

2. Frequency

- Opportunities to use new behavior
- Occurrence of problem behavior

3. Longevity

4. Potential for higher rates of reinforcement

After you have the set of behaviors to target-

- Prioritize them considering:

5. Importance

- Skill development
- Independence

6. Reduction of negative attention

7. Reinforcement for significant others

- Social validity
- Exercise caution when considering this

After you have the set of behaviors to target-

- Prioritize them considering:

8. Likelihood of success

- Does research show success treating this behavior in this way?
- Do you have experience treating this behavior ?
- Will the environment allow for treatment?
- Are available resources there for treatment?

9. Cost-benefit

- Costs include client's time and effort

Consider rating behaviors with this matrix-

- Higher score = higher priority for treatment

Behaviors	# 1	# 2	# 3
Does this behavior pose a danger?	0 1 2 3 4	0 1 2 3 4	0 1 2 3 4
How long-standing is this problem or deficit?	0 1 2 3 4	0 1 2 3 4	0 1 2 3 4
Will changing this behavior produce higher rate of reinforcement?	0 1 2 3 4	0 1 2 3 4	0 1 2 3 4
How likely is success in changing this behavior?	0 1 2 3 4	0 1 2 3 4	0 1 2 3 4

After you've selected, now define!

- Operational definitions of behavior need to be written
- Operational definitions are:
 - Accurate
 - Complete
 - Concise
 - State inclusions
 - State exclusions
 - Written in observable and measurable terms

Operational definitions

Should also be:

- **Objective**
 - Refer only to the observable
- **Clear**
 - Readable and unambiguous
- **Complete**
 - Delineate boundaries of the definition

Why use an operational definition?

- To thoroughly and specifically describe an individual behavior
- To define both target (e.g., tantrums, elopement) or replacement behavior (e.g., gestures, engagement)
- To promote clear communication across parents and professionals
- To answer the following questions: Who? What? When? Where? How long? How often? How intense? (TIP: Functional assessments are used to answer the "why" question)

The operational definition process for the behavior of: *Aggression*

- What do you call the behavior?
 - Aggression
- What does the behavior look like?
 - The child either attempts or makes actual physical contact with another person. He hits, pinches, slaps, spits, bites, or throws objects at another person.
- When does the behavior occur?
 - In the morning (before scheduled time for reading)
- Where does the behavior occur?
 - At school, in the classroom
- How often does the behavior occur?
 - 1-2 times per day
- How long does the behavior last?
 - Each aggression lasts 1-2 seconds, but episodes of aggression can last up to 5 minutes
- How intense is the behavior?
 - Moderately intense

From that process...

- We have the sample operational definition of:
 - Aggression: Any attempt or actual physical contact with another person in the form of hitting, slapping, pinching, spitting, biting or throwing objects at another person. The child demonstrates aggression 1-2 times per day in his classroom (typically in the morning before the daily reading lesson) with a moderate level of intensity. Each aggression lasts 1-2 seconds, but episodes of aggression can last up to 5 minutes.

Remember to test your definition

- Can you count number of occurrences?
 - Should answer “Yes”
- Will a stranger know what to look for based on definition alone?
 - Should answer “Yes”
- Can you break the target behavior down to smaller, more specific components?
 - Should answer “No”