



# What's the Big IDEA? # 18

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) is a law ensuring services to children with disabilities throughout the nation. IDEA governs how states and public agencies provide early intervention, special education, and related services to more than 6.5 million eligible infants, toddlers, children, and youth with disabilities. This series is designed to offer information about IDEA as amended in 2004. Each fact sheet will focus on a different aspect of IDEA.

## Functional Behavior Assessment

### What is a Functional Behavior Assessment (FBA)?

A Functional Behavior Assessment (FBA) gives information about a child's behavior. It is a process that helps parents and educators figure out *why* a child is behaving in a certain way. It also helps parents and school staff identify ways to change inappropriate behaviors and support appropriate behaviors. An FBA provides a description of the conditions that occur before, during, and after a particular behavior.

### When should an FBA be done?

An FBA can be requested by a parent or a teacher **anytime** a student's behavior is a concern. It can be requested by the Student Assistance Team (SAT) as part of the intervention process for students in general education. It can also be requested by the Individualized Education Program (IEP) team for students who receive special education services. It should be considered whenever behavioral concerns have not responded to standard interventions. It is *required* when a child is removed from his or her educational program beyond 10 days or when a student's behavior shows a pattern of impeding his or her learning or that of others.



### What happens during an FBA?

Information is collected through interviews with the child, parents, classmates, and teachers, and anyone else who is involved with the child in the educational setting. Direct observations of the child in different environments (cafeteria, playground, classroom, home, etc.) are also part of the assessment. In addition, there should be a careful review of records, evaluations, and past IEPs. The team is trying to figure out the student's underlying motivation (function) for the behavior. Is the student trying to avoid something, like a writing assignment? Or is he or she trying to get something, like attention?

### There are five steps to complete for a thorough Functional Behavior Assessment.

#### **Step 1: What is the problem behavior?**

Define the problem behavior. Use terms that are easily understood, simple to measure, and easy to record. Vague or general descriptions of behavior do not lead to effective plans for student success. For example, instead of saying, "*Jan is hyperactive,*" describe what Jan does. *Jan leaves her assigned area without permission. She only completes half of her independent work. She calls out answers without raising her hand.*

#### **Step 2: Where does the behavior occur and not occur?**

Formal observations of a student help identify where problem behaviors occur and where they don't. They are carried out over a set period of time, in a variety of settings or activities. A trained, neutral observer can collect useful information during a timed observation. The observer will want to note the following factors: the environment (eg. seating arrangement); the activities (independent work, group work, recess, etc.); time of day; and the number of people in the setting.

Interviews with the child, teachers, and family can also provide valuable information. Some questions to consider would be:

- What happens just before the behavior?
- Where do you usually observe the behavior?
- Who is present when the behavior occurs?
- What usually happens immediately after the behavior (the consequence)?



### ***Step 3: What happens before the behavior occurs? (Antecedents)***

It is important for the team to determine what happens right before an inappropriate behavior occurs because this information will be used when developing a Behavior Intervention Plan. (Check out IDEA fact sheet #19 for information about Behavior Intervention Plans). For example, Richard may get upset and throw his books and papers when the teacher comes over to help him with his work. Another child may appreciate and respond positively to the teacher's help. In both cases, the teacher going over to the student is the antecedent to the behavior. How the child responds to the antecedent is unique to the child. As the parent, you will also want to share with the team any events that are occurring in the child's life. For example, has your child been ill, or has there been a divorce or a recent birth or death in the family?

### ***Step 4: Is there a consistent pattern? Can the behavior be predicted?***

Once the team is satisfied that enough data has been collected, they meet to compare and analyze the information. The team is looking for patterns to the behavior. For example, does the behavior always occur before reading time? The team also needs to determine if the problem behavior is linked to a skill deficit. Students who lack the skills (either academic or behavioral) to perform tasks may exhibit behaviors that help them avoid or escape those tasks. Or does the student have the skill, but not the desire to modify his or her behavior?

### ***Step 5: What are some possible reasons for the behavior?***

*Children use behaviors to get what they need.* After the team has gathered and analyzed the information, they are ready to make a hypothesis statement. This hypothesis is an educated guess about why the problem behavior occurs. The team may come up with more than one hypothesis, but they will choose one to start with. For example, although they may have considered several different possibilities, the team may decide that *Lucia calls out in class to get the attention of her peers.* Now, based on this hypothesis, the team will develop a Behavior Intervention Plan with appropriate replacement behaviors to address Lucia's needs.

**What happens when the FBA is done?** Once the team has developed the hypothesis, the paperwork does not just go into the student's folder, never to be looked at again. The FBA should help the team decide what skills the student needs to learn, and also what skills and supports the teacher may need. The information from the FBA may reveal that the instructor is not using effective instructional techniques for motivating the student. If this is the case, the team needs to help the educator learn the appropriate skills. The FBA should provide the foundation for a *positive* Behavior Intervention Plan that is focused on *teaching new skills.* The next fact sheet in this series (#19) will outline the steps involved in designing an effective Behavior Intervention Plan.

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If you have more questions, our handbook, *Positive Directions*, goes into more detail about positive behavior management. You can call Parents Reaching Out at 1-800-524-5176 to request your copy or you can download it from our website, <http://www.parentsreachingout.org/resources/publications/behavior/behaviorpd.pdf>

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