GentleCare Therapy
pediatric development

PARENT HANDOUT

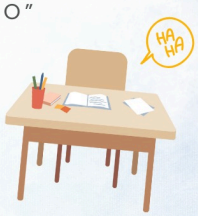
Functions of Behavior in ABA: Attention and Tangible

Attention

SOMEONE INTERACTING WITH YOU.

EXAMPLES COULD INCLUDE:

- CALLING OUT IN CLASS
- MAKING AN INAPPROPRIATE JOKE
- WHINING
- LAUGHING WHEN TOLD "NO"



Attention

CONSIDERATIONS:
ATTENTION MAY BE INADVERTENTLY REINFORCING A BEHAVIOR:

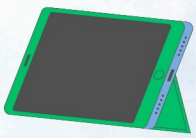
- ANY KIND OF ATTENTION CAN BE REINFORCING, EVEN IF YOU PERCEIVE THE ATTENTION AS "BAD" OR "NEGATIVE", IT CAN BE REINFORCING TO OTHERS.
  - **FOR EXAMPLE**: A CHILD LAUGHING WHEN YOU TELL THEM "NO"
- SPEAK IN TERMS OF BEHAVIORS YOU WANT TO SEE TO MINIMIZE THE ATTENTION YOU GIVE TO THE BEHAVIOR
  - **TRY SAYING:** "PLEASE GET OFF OF THE COUCH," INSTEAD OF "NO JUMPING!"

Tangible

GETTING OBJECTS AND ITEMS THAT YOU WANT (YOU DON'T NEED TO LIKE THEM).

EXAMPLES COULD INCLUDE:

- ASKING FOR AN IPAD
- TAKING A TOY FROM SOMEONE'S HAND
- CRYING AFTER DENIED ACCESS
- SEARCHING FOR A FAVORITE TOY



Tangible

CONSIDERATIONS:

- ALLOW YOUR CHILD TO EARN ACCESS TO PREFERRED TANGIBLES INSTEAD OF TAKING THEM AWAY
  - REINFORCEMENT HAS A GREATER INFLUENCE ON BEHAVIOR THAN PUNISHMENT
- USE TIMERS PRIOR TO BEHAVIORS OCCURRING: THEY TAKE THE CONTROL OFF OF YOU!

What Is a Function of Behavior?

Every behavior serves a purpose, or a **function**. In ABA, we commonly look at four functions: attention, tangible (access to items), escape, and sensory. When we understand why a behavior is happening, we can teach a better way for a child to get the same need met. This handout covers the first two: attention and tangible.

Attention

Someone interacting with you.

Examples of Attention-Maintained Behavior

- Calling out in class
- Making an inappropriate joke
- Whining
- Laughing when told “no”

Tips for Attention-Maintained Behavior

Attention may be inadvertently reinforcing a behavior:

- Any kind of attention can be reinforcing, even if you perceive the attention as “bad” or “negative”, it can be reinforcing to others.
  - For example: a child laughing when you tell them “no”
- Speak in terms of behaviors you want to see to minimize the attention you give to the behavior
  - Try saying: “Please get off of the couch,” instead of “No jumping!”

Tangible

Getting objects and items that you want (you don’t need to like them).

Examples of Tangible-Maintained Behavior

- Asking for an iPad
- Taking a toy from someone’s hand
- Crying after denied access
- Searching for a favorite toy

Tips for Tangible-Maintained Behavior

- Allow your child to earn access to preferred tangibles instead of taking them away
  - Reinforcement has a greater influence on behavior than punishment
- Use timers prior to behaviors occurring: they take the control off of you!

How GentleCare Applies It

Our BCBAs use careful observation and data to find out what a behavior is doing for a child. We look at what happens right before the behavior, the behavior itself, and what happens right after. Once we know the function, we teach a replacement skill that meets the same need, such as asking for a turn instead of grabbing, or tapping a shoulder instead of calling out. We share these strategies with parents and caregivers so everyone responds the same way at home, at school, and in sessions.

Frequently Asked Questions

What are the four functions of behavior?

Attention, tangible (access to items), escape, and sensory (automatic).

Is attention-seeking behavior bad?

No. Wanting attention is natural. The goal is to teach appropriate ways to get it and to avoid accidentally reinforcing problem behavior.

How do timers help with tangible behaviors?

Timers make transitions predictable, so the timer, not the parent, signals when time is up.

Helpful links: Our ABA therapy services · Insurance and enrollment · Handout: 7 Ideas for De-Escalating · Handout: Modeling Behavior We Want to See

> Not sure why a behavior keeps happening? GentleCare Therapy's BCBAs help families in Gibbsboro, Camden County, and South Jersey find the function and build better skills. Contact us to schedule an intake.
>
> **Call (856) 484-5535** or visit gentlecaretherapy.com/contact-us

This handout is general education and does not replace advice from your child's care team.