



# Functional Behavior Assessments (FBAs)

## Parent/ caregiver guide

### What to Expect: Functional Behavior Assessment (FBA)

Functional Behavior Assessment (FBA) is used in special education to create an individualized Positive Behavior Support Plan. FBAs are valuable tools for identifying why ‘challenging behavior’ occurs. They assess what can be changed in the environment to support a child’s behavioral needs, rather than placing blame on the child. FBAs, when done well, have multiple steps that may be confusing to families and educators who are less familiar with the process. Use this brief guide and component checklist to understand what’s important to know about high-quality FBAs and how FBAs relate to the development of Positive Behavior Support Plans, which are sometimes referred to as Behavior Intervention Plans (BIPs) in school settings.

### What are FBAs?

FBAs are important professional evaluations of challenging behavior—or several types of behaviors—that pose safety risks to the child or others or decrease the child’s quality of life. They are often referred to as “target behaviors” and can include aggression, elopement, and self-injurious behavior. It is important to note that challenging or target behaviors are simply behaviors children or youth are doing to communicate their needs and are not being done because children or youth are “bad” or “trying to be naughty.” The FBA process takes the “blame” off of the child and instead looks to the environment and how it can be adapted to better support the child.

FBAs are completed as part of an individualized Positive Behavior Support Plan (PBSP), also known as a Behavior Intervention Plan (BIP), to improve challenging behavior by promoting positive behavior and adjusting the environment to better support the child. FBAs and resulting PBSPs or BIPs should be individualized, or created solely for your child, and based on strengths, the behavior being targeted for improvement, and positive replacement behaviors.

### What happens during the FBA process?

In educational settings, the support team collects information to identify potential environmental patterns influencing the target behavior. The information should identify situations that may trigger the target behavior(s), what occurs following the behavior(s), and times of day and/or activities that go well or are challenging and may require more support. FBAs are also used in various other settings, including at home.

### Step 1—Information gathering

- Professionals review your child’s records. Be sure they have seen a doctor and dentist recently. Share any potential medical or dental issues, as challenging behavior can be a sign that a medical or dental issue is causing pain or discomfort. You may be asked to sign releases or provide previous evaluations to help this process. It is important to note that these steps should not be seen as steps to delay the process. If your child is waiting on a previous evaluation to be sent, for example, you, as the caregiver, can request that the team start with other FBA steps while they wait for these documents.

- Interviews with parents/caregivers will identify patterns in the target behavior, times of day/activities that go well or do not go well, and areas of strength. It is important not to feel judged when discussing your child's target behavior. All children exhibit some challenging behavior, and this process is designed to help you create the best plan for your child.
- Recommend input from others. If your child does well in art class, for example, suggest the evaluator speak with that educator to see what is working well. Or suggest contacting a trusted intervention provider or pediatrician. Be sure an evaluator observes your child several times on different days and across activities that are going well and that are more challenging.
- Be sure the observer has a clear definition of the target behavior. What exactly does it look like? How is it being accounted for?
- They should provide context around when, where, what time, and what activities occur around the behavior, noting the A-B-Cs:

### **Antecedents-Behavior-Consequences (A-B-C)**

- Antecedent: Child is told to line up for gym class
- Behavior: Child hits another child in line
- Consequence: He or she is brought to a calming space

## **Step 2—Analysis and Summary**

- Professionals look for patterns in the ABCs by tracking data over time and making multiple observations. Context matters: Does off-task behavior often happen during teacher instruction? How do peers typically react?
- What function is the behavior serving? Getting attention? Gaining access to a tangible object/activity? Escape? Or does it seem not to involve other people and occur regardless of what the child is doing?

## **Step 3—Intervention Plan**

- A temporary alternative behavior is taught, such as asking for help from an educator or presenting a card.
- Over time, build socially appropriate behavior that the child maintains.

## **Step 4—Monitor progress, adapt as needed.**

- The plan can be faded out when no longer needed.



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