

**Autism Classroom Resources Podcast
Episode 14 Transcript
November 17, 2019**

Welcome to the Autism Classroom Resources Podcast, the podcast for special educators who are looking for personal and professional development. I'm your host, Dr. Christine Reeve. For more than 20 years, I've worn lots of hats in special education, but my real love is helping special educators like you. This podcast will give you tips and ways to implement research based practices in a practical way in your classroom to make your job easier and more effective. Welcome to the Autism Classroom Resources Podcast. I am Chris Reeve and we are continuing our discussion about behavioral problem solving. Right now we are moving into step four of our five steps to meaningful positive behavioral support. And what that means is that we're going to begin to talk about writing our behavior support plans. I use the term behavior support plans because I see it as a plan that outlines support for the student, that improve their quality of life through preventing the behavior through specific instruction of specific skills and through the reduction of challenging behavior.

Many of you and your districts may call them behavior plans, behavior management plans, or behavior intervention plans, sometimes referred to as BIP's. And that's fine. I tend to put the word support in there because I want the emphasis on the fact that we're actually building skills more than getting rid of behavior because when we build skills we can reduce challenging behavior if we have a really good plan that is directly linked to our functional behavior assessment. Now interestingly, we have a strong literature that tells us that an education and large number of plans are actually not well connected to the FBA. So there is a tendency to take that FBA data, develop a hypothesis, put it away, and develop a plan that may not have any relationship to that FBA. At which point, why did we do it anyway? Those of you who have listened or have read my blog for a long time know that I don't do things because I have to do them and check them off a list.

I do them so that they have a purpose and if they don't have a purpose, I will find a way to make a purpose. So I, really am not fond of the idea of we do a whole FBA and then we don't have a plan that's based on that and not surprisingly, we find that those behavior support plans also are not strong and do not change behavior.

So I'm going to start today's episode talking a little bit about what behavior support plans are and are not. And then I'll talk a little bit about what goes into creating a strong behavioral support plan. And you take those hypothesis statements that we talked about in episode 13 and turn them into a behavior support plan because if you listened to episode 13 I gave you a template that you can download from that site on how we can take that information and translate it into our plan. And our goal is to end up with a behavior support plan that supports the student in the context in which the behavior is occurring and is long-lasting at creating behavioral change.

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If we define a behavioral support plan as a program that outlines what supports we're giving to the individual so that we can prevent the behavior, we can replace the behavior with more appropriate skills and ultimately to reduce that challenging behavior, then that's a much broader plan than just a behavior modification plan where we're just trying to get rid of the behavior or a behavior plan that just tells us what to do when the behavior happens. And because of that, a behavior support plan really isn't a discipline policy or discipline plan. It's not a consequence only plan. So it isn't a plan for just how do we respond to the behavior. Although that is a part of it and it isn't just a crisis plan, although again, a crisis plan may be part of it, but a behavior support plan is going to talk about what do we do to put things in place so the behaviors are less likely to occur as well as how do I teach the student what they need to know so the behaviors are no longer necessary and how do I respond to the behaviors so that I'm not reinforcing it?

So we're trying to write a long term document that not only solves the issues by preventing and addressing the behaviors now, but also are going to provide the student with long lasting skills that can carry over and make them more independent. One of our primary focuses in developing a behavior support plan really does need to be how do we enrich this person's life? How do we improve the quality of their life by teaching, by preventing. So if you remember some of our early premises that we are focused on teaching appropriate behavior, not just expecting it now. Because of that, we can actually take the hypothesis statement that we developed and we can develop the three key elements of a behavior support plan

and those are, what strategies are we using to prevent the behavior from occurring, what behaviors are we teaching to either replace the skill, the problem behavior with a more appropriate skill that serves the same function, so that's a replacement skill. And then what other skills are we developing that are incompatible with the problem behavior? And I'll talk a little bit more about what each of those means and then how are we going to respond to the behavior so that we prevent reinforcing the behavior itself and making it happen more frequently. But also if we need a crisis plan or need to make sure that everyone is safe, how is that being done?

So let me talk a little bit about what a strong behavior support plan includes. First of all, it focuses on and recognizes the individual's strengths. So we, again, I talked in when we talked about the functional behavior assessment, that part of our goal there needs to really have a good understanding of who this student is and what they want and what they don't want and what their strengths and weaknesses are.

And so we need to use those strengths to build the student's skills in other areas. We need to make sure that our behavior support plan clearly defines the target behaviors that we are trying to address. Because if we've been trying to address these target behaviors through our whole assessment and then we changed focus and focus on different behaviors, then we're going to have a problem. Now there may be times that we may choose specific behaviors that we're going to focus on in the behavior support plan and we might table others. So for instance, we may find that we have a student who's climbing on furniture and jumping from shelf to shelf across the classroom and we have found that this behavior is to get people to attend to them. Everything in class stops as the adults try to make sure that he's safe and that the other students are safe.

At the same time the student also always takes off his shoes. So when I developed a behavior plan in this situation, I may say the furniture hopping and the furniture climbing, that is our clear target behavior that we need to address. The shoes I'm not as concerned about right now. So even though they really both serve the same function because taking off his shoes also got him a lot of attention. I'm just going to focus right now on responding to the furniture hopping because it's dangerous because it's the biggest issue that we have for him and in this classroom. Whether

or not he have his shoes on is really not as big a deal. It's not as strong a priority, so it's something that might be distracting or might even be disruptive, but it's not dangerous and so our rule might become you have to put shoes on to go outside, which he likes to do, so he's likely to do it and I'm not going to fight about it the rest of the time, but I need to make sure that I've clearly defined those behaviors that we are addressing in my behavior support plan so that everybody who implements it is on the same page.

Another thing that is critical is making sure that our behavior support plan is based on our hypothesis from our FBA. I've mentioned earlier that if we do a whole FBA and put it in a file cabinet, obviously it does us no good, but we need to make sure that we are focused on developing, especially our replacement behavior. Specifically of what those functions are. Because the reason that we figured out the purpose and the function of the behavior is so we can figure out what that student can do to get that need met. Because the need is like the roots of a plant. It doesn't go away. So we can cut off the plant. I could make the behavior go away, but it's gonna pop up in another way if I don't address that function. So when we think about replacement behaviors, and even when we think about preventing and how we're going to respond, all of that has to revolve around what we know is driving the behavior, which are our hypotheses from our functional behavior assessment.

It's also very important that we fit the behavioral plan into the context of the person's life. The behavior plan that I might write for school might look very different than a behavior plan that I would write for a home because the two situations are extremely different. The expectations are different, the amount of structure is different. The staff in the adults available to intervene are different. So I have to write my plan to match the context in which that person is in, in that time. So I might expect and tolerate more behavior say at school than I would in a home situation. And so here's what all of that kind of leads to. We have to make sure that we are developing our behavior support plan as a team and on that team, we need to make sure that we have people who are what we would call the stakeholders or your classroom staff who have to implement the plan or if you're working with a family, we have to make sure that the family is part of that plan.

And we also have to have people involved in that team who know the principles of

behavior analysis. Benazzi, Horner & Good (2006) wrote an article and did a study where they actually looked at what happens if we just have a behavior analyst, for instance, write the plan. And so they do the FBA, they write the plan and they give it to the staff to implement. What they found was they got a very good technically, technically adequate plan so that the technology and the plan, the strategies matched the FBA. They were sound and they were likely to reduce the behavior problems. What they also found however, was that those plans were less likely to be implemented with fidelity by the staff because they weren't matched to the context in which they needed to be implemented. So by not including people who are the people who are going to implement the plan on a daily basis, we lose that ability to make sure it gets applied.

On the flip side, one of the things that they also found was they did it differently. They had the classroom team or the family team develop the plan and did not have somebody on that team who understood behavioral analysis. And when they did that, they got a plan that got implemented with fidelity because the team developed a plan they could implement, but they ended up with a plan that was not connected to the hypotheses most of the time and therefore it wasn't effective. So you want to make sure that you're developing your plan as a team and that the team includes all those key players, somebody with knowledge about applied behavior analysis. That could definitely be a certified behavior analyst. It could also be a teacher or a therapist who has significant training in behavioral analysis. There is nothing in the school rules that say the F that behavior plans should only be created by certified behavior analysts, which makes sense because most schools don't have certified behavior analyst.

Is it nice to have that person on the team that develops a plan? Absolutely, because they've got that knowledge, but you do need to make sure if you don't have a BCBA or BCABA, you have somebody who does have a strong knowledge of behavioral analysis and here's kind of how I think about it. When I develop a plan, I often as a behavior analyst, I often will walk in with a draft, but I will sit with the team and get their feedback and make changes because it is really just a draft. And so when I say I want to do this and they say, I don't think we can do that, then I have to come up with a way to make it be able to be done in that setting. Either by advocating for more staff or something like that or I need to change the

strategy.

I need to change the strategy based on the training of the staff that's there. I need to, as a behavior analyst, I am responsible for for training the staff and making sure that their level of training matches the needs of the plan. But if I were writing a behavior plan for school, I might have a slightly more sophisticated plan that involves having more individualized attention than maybe I would if I was writing a home plan. I need to know if this teacher can actually, for instance, ignore that behavior because if I know for a fact that no matter how much training I give this person, they're never going to be able to ignore it. Then ignoring or extinction cannot be my sole method of reducing the behavior. Now, I rarely have a sole method of doing anything and a behavior support plan, but that's an example of something.

Sometimes they're just kids and teachers who are pushing each other's buttons and I would have to completely rewire both of them in order to really make a difference, so we want to create it with a team, but we want to have a team that has someone who really understands the technology and the principles on which we're basing our interventions and that's a really key component and you and that person who has that ABA knowledge really does need to be flexible because there does need to be an understanding of there is always more than one solution to every problem. If there were not more than one solution, our behavioral literature would be extremely thin because we would just have five articles on one thing and that would be our answer. And we don't because we make changes based on the individual needs of the student, but we also need to think about the individual needs of our environment.

I might ask on the flip side, I might ask a teacher to ignore a behavior and I might not expect mom to ignore that same behavior because it just pushes all of her buttons in a way that maybe it doesn't for the teacher. So I have to know my team as a behavior analyst and I have to make sure that I'm matching the interventions to my FBA, but I also need to make sure that I'm matching it to my team and the context of the person's life. So that's kind of my soapbox for the moment. I feel very strongly about that and I would love to hear more of what you think about it in our Facebook group and I'll talk about that at the end. But we

also want to make sure that our behavior support plan includes strategies for preventing the behavior from occurring so that we can reduce it quickly, but we don't necessarily want to have to change the environment forever without making sure that we're doing something for the longterm. And because of that, we also have to have a replacing and instructing component where we are teaching behaviors that serve the same function as the negative behavior. So we're teaching him to ask for a break instead of engaging in behavior to get out of the task. And we also have to instruct in incompatible behaviors. So maybe we're reinforcing him for staying in his seat instead of getting up. So some of these things are going to be functional, some of them aren't going to be functional, but they might be incompatible. And then we have to have a response component because what are people going to do when the behavior occurs? No matter how good your behavior plan is, the behavior is going to happen at some point.

How are we going to make sure that we're not reinforcing it, how we're going to make sure that we're trying to hold our reinforcement back and how are we going to make it so that our behavior is much less efficient at getting reinforcement. Meaning it doesn't get it consistently, it doesn't get it as easily and it doesn't get it as often as our replacement behaviors. And I'll do a whole podcast episode specifically on replacement behaviors because they are so much more than just saying use your words. And so we'll, we'll dive into that as a deep dive in a later episode. We also want to make sure that our plan is clear and easy to understand that our staff is trained to use it and implement it correctly because we need to make sure that our plan is implemented with fidelity. Because remember in the naturalistic assessment, our verify phase is implementing the intervention.

So we are trying to make sure that our interventions are based on our functions and if the student's behavior does not change, then we have to ask ourselves, are we implementing our plan accurately and with fidelity? So are we doing it the way it's supposed to be done? And if so that tells us that our functions were wrong and we need to go back to that stage. If we're having a problem implementing with fidelity, obviously we have to address that first. And that means that we have to monitor our plan and change it over time. So when we see something that's working, we keep it going. When we see something that's not working, we make changes. We're not waiting nine weeks to find out that the plan that we have in places and

doing anything for us, and that monitoring piece is a very important piece because a lot of times I'll put a behavior plan in place with a team and I'll, I'll talk to them a week or two after they started implementing it and I'll say, how's it going?

Oh he's so much better. The behavior plan is working great. And I'll go in and do an observation and I'll take the monitor some of the monitoring data and guess what? He is doing exactly the same as he was doing before we put the plan in place. His behavior hasn't changed at all. Instead what's changed is the staff's perceptions of the problem because they're not worried anymore about what they're going to do when the behavior happens because they have a plan. So let me talk just very briefly about matching our hypothesis statements to our strategies. I gave you a hypothesis graphic organizer in episode 13 and it said, you know, when the student does this that when this happens was our antecedent part, this behavior is likely to happen and as a result, this is the environments for spots that maps directly onto when this situation happens, what do we do with that situation for prevention? That's our prevention part of our hypothesis. What is the behavior? What is its function? That maps directly onto our teaching, part of our behavior plan that tells us what goes in our instructional component and as a result, this is how the environment responds. That tells us how we need to respond differently for our behavior plan so that we're not reinforcing the behavior because typically what goes in that third box of that as a result, this happens is reinforcing the behavior. So I will have a graphic on this on the website. So if you go to autismclassroomresources.com/episode14 you will be able to see kind of how this maps itself out. It'll be a little bit more clearly, I think visually. And you will also see a sample of a behavior plan and it's a summary plan so you can see it easily that starts with our prevention strategies, our replacement strategies and our skills we're going to teach and our responding strategies and so I'll make sure that that is there as well and the link to that post will be in the show notes as well. So that gives you an overview of kind of how the hypothesis statement builds into our behavior support plan and what we need to think about in creating our behavior support plan. If you would like to do a deeper dive and really understand how to put all of this together, come join us in the special educator academy at specialeducatoracademy.com and we have a whole course on designing behavioral support plans and behavioral problem solving. So it walks you through in much more

detail for this and we have a seven day trial if you'd like to try us out and find out if it works for us, just over to [special educator academy.com](http://specialeducatoracademy.com) and you will find everything you need to know.

I'd love to hear more about some of the struggles you have in working with teams or developing behavior support plans. And to do that, just come and share in the our private Facebook at specialeducatorsconnection.com and I'll put both of those links into our show notes and you can go and find previous episodes at autismclassroomresources.com/thepodcast. Thank you so much for joining us. I appreciate the time that you spent. I hope this gives you some good things to think about as you move forward dealing with some of the challenging behaviors I know all of you deal with, and I hope that you'll come back next week when we will talk, be talking about prevention strategies.

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