

The Spirit  
of Intervenor:  
The Quest Continues

# **BEHAVIOR AS COMMUNICATION**

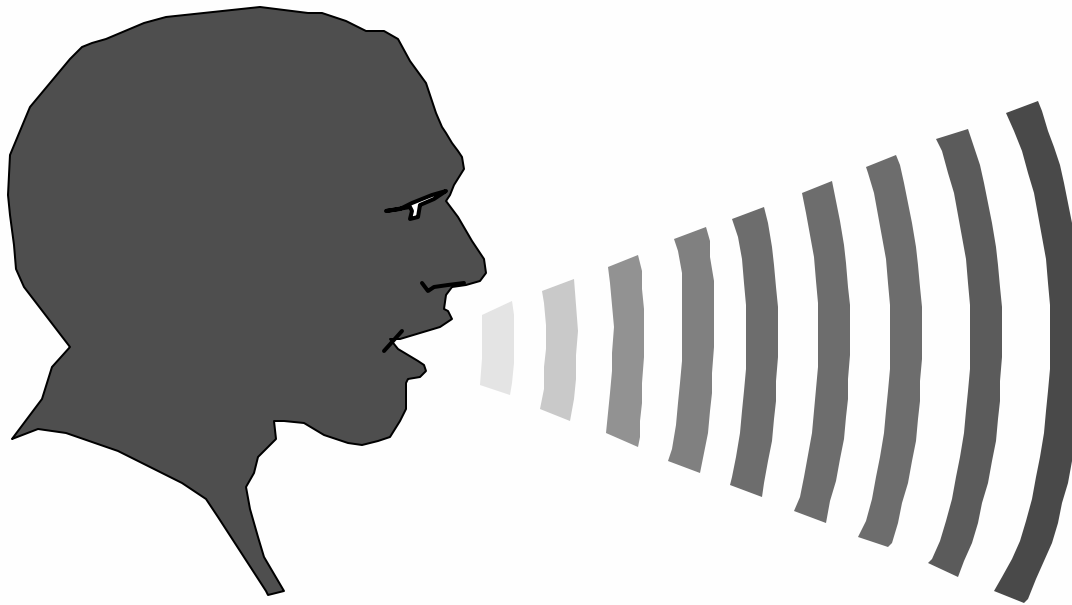
**The function of challenging behavior**

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# ALL BEHAVIOR HAS A PURPOSE



# ALL BEHAVIOR IS COMMUNICATION



# What is communication?

- An information-sharing connection between two people

# Communication Hypothesis

Problem behavior often functions as a primitive form of communication for those who do not yet possess or use more sophisticated forms.

1. Does not apply only to those who do not talk
2. Does not imply that individuals systematically and intentionally use problem behavior to influence others.
3. Problem behavior often functions as if it were a form of communication

# Reading Behavior as Communication

## PRINCIPLES

- Behavior serves a purpose
- Functional assessment to identify purpose
- Goal of intervention is education
- Behavior may serve many purposes
- Change social systems, not individuals
- Lifestyle change is ultimate goal

# Step One

- Understand the purpose
- When the goal of the behavior is understood, the behavior often makes sense
- What does the behavior communicate?

# How to understand the purpose

- Example – siblings fighting
- Look at your reaction to it – very often that was the purpose (i.e., engagement with you?)
- Consider the context – what happened before and what happened afterwards
- Listen and reflect – problem with decoding

MESSAGE	ENCODED	STATEMENT	DECODED	PERCEPTION
This work is too hard, I don't understand it.		This is a stupid assignment.		You are a stupid teacher.
If you weren't so stupid, you'd get it.		The other students seem to get it.		I worked hard on this assignment.
I'm really scared that I am just stupid.		Well, I'm in a class by myself.		I'm not going to give you a chance.
I hate students like you.		Sometimes I wish...		I wish I could reach you, Waldo.

MESSAGE

ENCODED

STATEMENT

DECODED

PERCEPTION

I am not feeling  
Well.

Tears at face

I am angry.

I don't really  
Care.

Restrains

I cannot let  
you hurt yourself

You hate me, and  
are hurting me.

Fights harder

You cannot  
stop me.

I will defeat you.

Tighter restraint

I must make  
you stop.

# Justin: 9 year old with CHARGE

When Justin is touched he often hits.

- I hate surprises, therefore,...
- I don't like being touched,...
- I wanted to acknowledge your presence,...
- I like you very much,...
- I need more warning before you approach me,...
- I have been touched too much and I cannot tolerate it any more,...
- I was telling you that I'm ready for work,...
- I was asking you to come back later,...

# COMMUNICATIVE FUNCTIONS

- **REQUESTS FOR:** attention, interaction, play, affection, permission, reaction, assistance, information, objects
- **NEGATIONS:** protest, refusal, cessation
- **DECLARATIONS/COMMENTS:** about events, actions, objects, persons, errors, affirmation, greeting, humor
- **FEELINGS:** anticipation, boredom, confusion, fear, frustration, hurt, pain, pleasure

Donnellan, Mirenda, Mesaros, Fassbender (1984)

# Models of Functional Assessment

- Informant Assessment – interview information
- Direct Observation – antecedents, behavior, consequences (descriptive analysis)
- Functional Analysis – experimental control in analog simulation
- Goals of Misbehavior (attention, power, revenge, inadequacy)
- Multimodal Approach

# MULTIMODAL FUNCTIONS

- REGULATION OF EMOTIONS
- THOUGHT DISTORTIONS
- REINFORCEMENT
- MODELING
- FAMILY ISSUES
- PHYSIOLOGICAL CONDITIONS
- COMMUNICATION NEEDS
- CURRICULUM/INSTRUCTION

# SOCIAL BASED FUNCTIONS

- TO GET SOMETHING
  - things – tangibles
  - attention
  - power
  - revenge
- TO AVOID SOMETHING
  - pain
  - pressure
  - expectations
  - adequacy

# **NONSOCIAL BASED FUNCTIONS**

- **SENSORY** - produces sensory stimulation
- **HOMEOSTATIC** - regulates stimulation
- **ORGANIC** - biological factors

# PHYSIOLOGICAL BASES FOR SELF-INJURY

- RELEASE OF BETA-ENDORPHINS IN BRAIN PROVIDE PLEASURE
- SUB-CLINICAL SEIZURES
- MIDDLE EAR INFECTIONS
- OVERAROUSAL
- SELF-STIMULATORY, STEREOTYPIC BEHAVIOR

# PSYCHOLOGICAL BASES FOR SELF-INJURY

- REINFORCEMENT
- ANGER OR FRUSTRATION
- STRESS
- BOREDOM
- DEPRESSION

BEHAVIOR CAN COMMUNICATE THESE

The primary objective of behavior management is to understand the purpose and communication underlying misbehavior, and to use that to help the person find more appropriate communication methods to achieve their goals, or to help them find more appropriate goals.

# Managing Behaviors through Communication

- Identify the purpose of the behavior – what does it communicate?
- Let the person know that you understand the communication – they have to know that you know what they want
- Teach the person a different way to let you know what they want – word, sign, picture, object, expression
- Respect communication
  - It has to work before you can shape conditions

# GENERAL INTERVENTION PRINCIPLES

- DO THE UNEXPECTED
- FIND MORE APPROPRIATE COMMUNICATION
- BE PATIENT
- AVOID CRISIS MANAGEMENT

# CRISIS MANAGEMENT

- when feasible, ignore behavior
- protect individual or others
- momentarily restrain
- remove anyone who is in danger
- introduce cues that evoke non-problem behavior

# INTERVENTION STRATEGIES

- DIRECT BY TEACHING MORE APPROPRIATE BEHAVIOR AND/OR COMMUNICATION
- INDIRECT BY CHANGING THE BEHAVIOR AND/OR COMMUNICATION OF OTHERS
- ENVIRONMENTAL BY MAKING IT ENRICHING AND SUPPORTING

# POSITIVE ENVIRONMENT CHECKLIST

- PHYSICAL SETTING
- SOCIAL SETTING
- ACTIVITIES AND INSTRUCTION
- SCHEDULING AND PREDICTABILITY
- COMMUNICATION

# Dealing and Coping

- Misbehavior is an attempt to communicate – so be glad
- Choose your battles wisely
- Interventions need a team effort

# Ultimate Goal: Improved Life Style

- Teaching appropriate communication
- Changing social systems
- Creating responsive environments

# Building Communication

- Bonding and attachment
  - Sometimes through touch
- Consistency of response and interaction
  - Including touch and object cues
  - Use of routine
  - Responding to all communication efforts
- Nonverbal conversations
  - Reciprocity
  - Imitating
  - Turn-taking
- Respecting behavioural state
- Acknowledging behaviour as communication

# Many Communication Systems

- Direct behaviors
- Gestures
- Vocalizations and sounds
- Signs
- Speech
- Argumentative

# Communication can be a key...

- Acknowledging behaviour as communication can be an effective way of preventing challenging behaviours from emerging

# What do I look for?

- Turning away
- Moving away
- Eyes looking away
- Loud repetitive vocalising
- Picking at skin or fingers
- Flicking of thumb
- Biting fingers
- Etc...

# What does it mean?

- Need for a break
- Fatigue
- Transition time
- Time to process
- Time to put it all together
- Need to regulate or reorganise self
- Sensory integration dysfunction

# Wait.....

- Give time to process
- Give time to self-regulate
- Give time for transition
- Give time for breaks
- Give time to put it all together
- Give time to refresh
  - Always consider fatigue

# ENERGY!

- Imagine having a hearing and vision impairment, on top of ongoing medical issues... and the amount of energy it must take to put it all together to make sense of the world...

# Communication Challenges

- If respecting behavioural states, consistency, and acknowledging behaviour as communication, are so important to communication development, how can consistency be achieved with so many adults involved?

# The world can be a very confusing place!

- With so much going on medically, physically and neurologically, is it any wonder that some of our children with CHARGE develop so-called ‘challenging behaviours’!

# Power of Communication

- How much control does a child with little formal communication have over his/her life?
  - What to do and when to do it
  - Where to go and when to go there
  - Time for therapy; time for medication
- Acknowledging behaviour as communication gives back some control

# Giving back the control

- Read behaviour as communication
- Acknowledge behaviour as communication
- Respect personalised communication
- Offer objects and hands rather than manipulating and controlling

# Ultimately... it's communication!

- Whatever the cause, the behaviour is communicating that something is going on
- As parents and communication partners we must learn to read the behaviour and respond accordingly

## **It's not easy!**

- Learning to read behaviour can be challenging and takes **TIME** to get it right
- Recognising and interpreting subtle behaviour requires keen powers of observation

# PREVENTION

- Coping with Stress
- Preparation
- Responsiveness
- Providing structure/consistency
- Providing alternatives/choices
- Thinking through consequences
- Relationship

# How to Insure the Behavior Continues

- Reinforce it by letting it work
- Engage in a power struggle to make it stop
- Fail to let the child know that you know they are communicating with you
- Do not respect the child's attempts to communicate

# Michael 14 years old

- CHARGE syndrome
- Profound hearing loss; vision 20/100
- Tracheostomy, gastrostomy, chronic nasal congestion
- Zoloft for OCD and Clonidine for ADHD and insomnia

# Behavior

- Borderline IQ
- Sense of humor
- Weak socialization skills
- OCD, ADHD
- Difficulty with transitions and change
- Non-compliance; refusal to accept “no”
- Physical aggression at school

“Unless the environment reacts to the child, the child will become frustrated and develop behavior disorders in reaction to the environment.”

McInnes & Treffry, 1982

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