

Replacement Behaviors- Why they are essential!

by Danielle Kessinger, M.Ed, BCBA, LBA



Reimagining Human Service Systems

In Applied Behavior Analysis, we help individuals decrease challenging behaviors by implementing a variety of interventions. The challenging behavior an individual might display, is their form of communication to get what they want/need. A method to prevent the reoccurrence of challenging behaviors is to implement replacement behaviors. Replacement behaviors will only endure when they result in the same type of reinforcement as the challenging behavior. In order to do this, we must focus on teaching new skills and reinforce those skills when they occur.

3 Steps for Teaching Replacement Behaviors

1

Know your focus

When choosing a replacement behavior, you want to first ask yourself, why is the challenging behavior happening? To determine this you will want to take what's called "ABC data." When taking this data, you want to focus on, what happens immediately before the behavior (A-antecedent), what the behavior looks like (B-behavior), and what happens immediately after the behavior (C-consequence).

In Applied Behavior Analysis, there are four main reason why behavior happens.

1. Behavior can occur because the individual is trying to gain attention from someone.
2. Behavior can occur because the individual is trying to escape or avoid something.
3. Behavior can occur because the individual is trying to gain access to a tangible (an item or activity).
4. Behavior can occur because the individual is due to sensory stimulating reasons.

With thorough ABC data collection you can find out why the challenging behavior is happening. Once you do this, you can move on to step 2.

2

Teaching the Replacement Behavior

There are 4 key factors when teaching replacement behavior.

1. Must be functionally equivalent to the challenging behavior.
2. Must be just as easy to perform as the challenging behavior.
3. Must be just as efficient (quick) as the challenging behavior.
4. Must be just as effective as the challenging behavior.

For example, if an individual is displaying loud vocalizations/flopping on the ground when they want access to an I-pad and it has been determined that the function of the behavior is trying to gain access to a tangible. In this case an appropriate replacement behavior would be requesting access to the I-pad by using a visual (such as handing in a picture of the I-pad).

Requesting access to an item using a visual is an appropriate behavior that is functionally equivalent to the challenging behavior (getting access to the tangible). In addition, it is easy to perform, efficient, and effective. Making sure the replacement behavior hits all four key factors is an important step in the process!

3

Providing Reinforcement

Reinforcing the replacement behavior is an important last step. When you are working with an individual and the replacement behavior you are teaching occurs, immediately provide a high degree of reinforcement. This will motivate the individual to display the replacement behavior again and you will see a decrease in the challenging behavior. The reinforcement should give the individual the same reinforcement as the challenging behavior once did.

In our example above, an appropriate reinforcement would be immediate access to the I-pad and a high magnitude of praise.

For more resources, check out our Best Practice Blog at
www.cahumanservices.org/bestpractice