

Alternative to the Standard Functional Analysis



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Functional behavior assessments that include descriptive assessments (e.g. FAST, MAS, or QABF), indirect assessments (e.g. interviews, observations, ABC data) and a formal functional analysis have long been the gold standard for determining the function of problem behavior. The “standard” functional analysis procedure as described by Iwata, Dorsey, Silfer, Bauman, and Richman (1982/1994) involves three test conditions, alone, attention, and escape, and a control condition, play. However, in every day practice, functional analysis is often considered a cumbersome and risky procedure and is therefore not conducted (Hanley, 2012; Jessel, Metras, Hanley, Jessel, Ingvarsson, 2019). Unfortunately, research has shown that descriptive assessments are unreliable as indicators of behavior function. Thankfully in recent years, new research is showing that there are alternatives to the standard functional analysis procedure.

Dr. Gregory Hanley, Ph.D., BCBA-D, a psychology professor at Western New England University, and his colleagues have published several research articles between 2010 and 2019 that describe and evaluate a practical functional assessment procedure that includes an open-ended interview, observation, and a functional analysis, which they call an interview-informed synthesized contingent analysis or IISCA. Despite the long and complicated sounding name, the IISCA requires less time and is more individualized than the standard functional analysis. These articles are not limited to the functional assessment procedures. They also describe and evaluate the process for developing and implementing skill-based treatment procedures. Even better is the fact that the website <https://practicalfunctionalassessment.com/about-2/> provides all of the resources a behavior analyst needs to learn how to begin using the practical functional assessment, the IISCA, and the skill-based treatment procedures. The website is written, edited, and managed by Dr. Hanley. Although, the website is geared toward behavior analysts, the content is accessible for parents, teachers and other professionals.

The practical functional assessment is so exciting because the interview, observation, and IISCA can be completed in 30-minute sessions (even less in some situations). Yes, an FA that provides clearly differentiated results can be done in less than 30-minutes. The information gleaned from the open-ended interview guides the behavior analyst in developing test and control conditions that are individualized rather than general categories. The IISCA also aims to reduce the potential risks of evaluating severe behaviors such as self-injury and aggression by focusing on precursor behaviors.

Among the many resources that can be found on the website, are a structured open-ended interview, data sheets (for the IISCA and treatment), step-by-step instructions, access to the various related articles, webinars/presentations, and even a hotline for implementation assistance. The interview and data sheets are available to download in document or PDF formats, so they are easy to use and individualize as needed.

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