

# Problem Behavior

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## WHAT'S COVERED

This lesson will explore problem behavior by defining and discussing the following:

1. Behavior as Communication
  - a. Getting Good Stuff
  - b. Escaping Bad Stuff
  - c. Getting Good Stuff AND Escaping Bad Stuff
2. Managing Behavior

## 1. Behavior as Communication

Why do our patients do stuff they aren't supposed to? Why can't they just listen and follow directions?

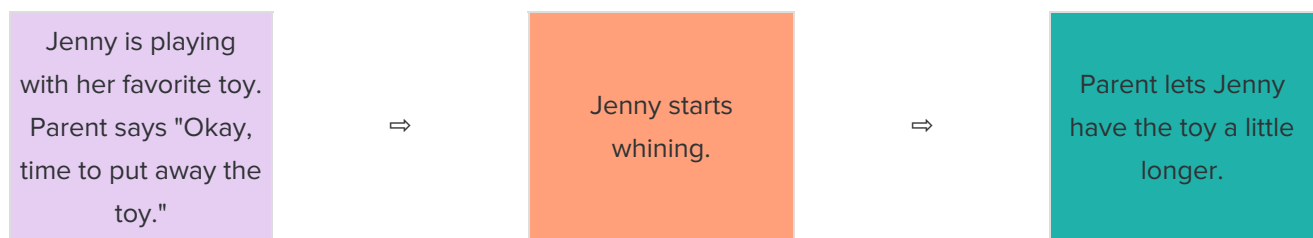
Virtually all the reasons can be explained as either getting good stuff or escaping bad stuff.

### 1a. Getting Good Stuff

Getting good stuff involves acquiring or doing things such as

- candy
- the iPad
- caregiver's attention
- going to a friend's house
- watching a favorite TV show

#### EXAMPLE



## THINK ABOUT IT

How is this like language? What is Jenny saying by whining? How about "I don't want to put my toy away. Can I

play a little longer?"

## Video Transcription

Let's look at an example of the 3-term contingency applied to an everyday situation. Henry is a little boy who has gone to the grocery store with his grandmother. As they pass the candy aisle, Henry sees the candy and realizes that he has no candy and that he would like some. Henry starts to cry, and as a result of Henry's crying, his grandmother gives him the candy.

If we break this down into the ABC analysis, A, the antecedent, is Henry seeing the candy in the candy aisle and having no candy. B, the behavior, is Henry's crying, and C, the consequence is his grandmother giving him candy. Here, we can see that what triggered Henry's crying is the fact that he had no candy and that he wanted some, and the consequence was that he received candy as a result of his crying.

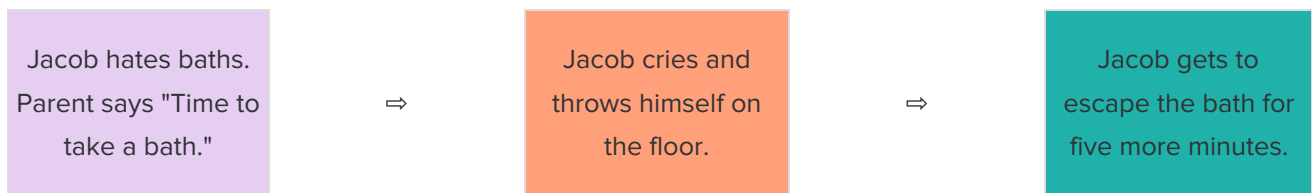
We can say that the function of Henry's crying was to gain access to a desired item, that being candy.

### 1b. Escaping Bad Stuff

On the other hand, escaping bad stuff involves activities like these:

- getting out of chores
- not having to eat broccoli at dinner
- not having to listen to sibling talk on phone
- avoiding homework
- escaping math class

#### 🔗 EXAMPLE



#### THINK ABOUT IT

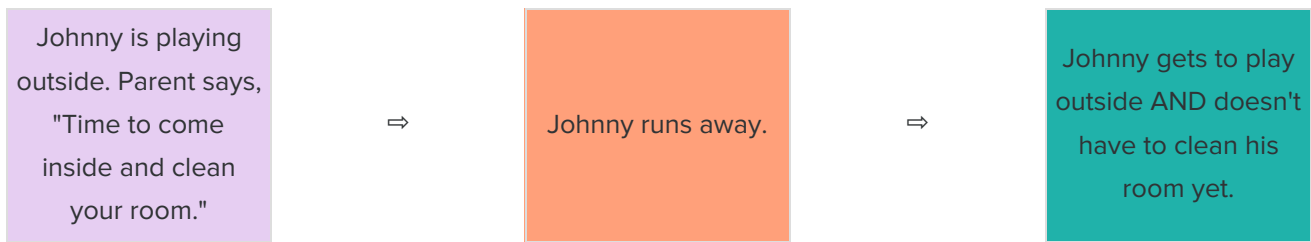
How is this like language? What is Jacob saying by crying and throwing himself on the floor? How about "Can I have five more minutes, Mom?"

## Video Transcription

Let's look at another example of using the ABCs to identify the function of a targeted behavior. Here, we see a student being presented with a non-preferred food. The student cries and pushes the food away in protest. Therefore, resulting in the food being temporarily taken away. By plugging this information into the A-B-C of the situation, we can identify the function of the child's crying and pushing away of the food is escape, or in this particular situation, escaping having to eat a non-preferred food.

### 1c. Getting Good Stuff AND Escaping Bad Stuff

## ➡ EXAMPLE



### THINK ABOUT IT

How is this like language? What is Johnny saying by running away? How about "I want to keep playing AND I don't want to clean my room."

Problem behavior is basically a way of telling you what they want. They may not know or may not care that their way of telling you is not the "appropriate" way. Patients with developmental disorders like ASD may not have the language or communication skills to ask for what they want.



### THINK ABOUT IT

What are some ways that you have communicated (maybe not always with language) that you want something or want to get out of something?

## 2. Managing Behavior

We need to understand the functions of behavior in order to determine an appropriate intervention to change the behavior.

Before you learn about the interventions used to manage challenging behaviors, we would like you to understand how BCBAs determine which of these interventions would be appropriate and effective.

We view challenging behavior as a means of communicating or interacting with others. Challenging behaviors, particularly aggression, property destruction, and self-injury, are very likely to evoke reactions from others.

These behaviors may occur when a patient is trying to communicate with someone and either does not have the skills to communicate in an appropriate way or is not motivated to communicate differently. If the appropriate communication is too difficult, requires too much effort, or is less likely to get what they want, the challenging behavior will occur.

When a patient lacks the ability to communicate in a different way, challenging behavior becomes the only option. When the intervention is developed based on what the patient is trying to communicate through the challenging behavior, the intervention is more likely to be effective because it directly addresses the reason that the patient is misbehaving.

In order to design an intervention to treat a challenging behavior, one must know the function of the behavior (why it is happening and continuing) to determine the appropriate intervention. As a behavior technician, you will not determine the function of the behavior or why it is occurring and continues to occur. The BCBA will do this.

However, we want you to be aware that your patient's BCBA will decide which intervention to use based on what is causing the inappropriate behavior. We cannot choose an appropriate and effective intervention without knowing the reason, or function, underlying the challenging behavior.



#### THINK ABOUT IT

If you were unable to verbally tell someone why you wanted or did not want something, how might you let them know? Pretend you are in a foreign country where you do not speak the language. How do you find your hotel, locate something to eat, or get away from someone trying to bother you?



#### THINK ABOUT IT

Why would you do these things, or more specifically, what would be the function of your behavior? To get good stuff or escape bad stuff?



#### BIG IDEA

People do what they do because they get good stuff or escape bad stuff by doing it. This is a simplified way of talking about why people engage in any behavior (good or bad).

The science of behavior analysis has identified principles of behavior that give us a more technical way of talking about why behavior occurs. According to behavior analysis, there are four reasons why people engage in any behavior (that is, there are four functions of behavior).

In the next section, we will explore how these four functions relate to getting good stuff and escaping bad stuff.



#### SUMMARY

In this lesson, you learned about **behavior as communication**, noting that problem behavior is essentially a way for your patients to tell you what they want, although they may not have the language or communication skills to do so. Remember that virtually all the reasons behind behavior can be explained as either getting good stuff or escaping bad stuff. You also learned about **managing behavior**, understanding that in order to design an intervention to treat a challenging behavior, one must know the function of the behavior (why it is happening and continuing) to determine the appropriate intervention. Remember, your BCBA will determine the function of the behavior and will decide which intervention to use based on what is causing the inappropriate behavior.