

Intervention Case Study 12

This intervention looks at replacing problem behavior that serves as communication with more appropriate means of communication.

Introduction

Dale is an eight year old boy diagnosed with autism. Dale has moderate mental retardation and cannot speak. He will sometimes point to objects he wants when prompted and can follow simple commands such as "sit down." Dale exhibits problem behaviors such as aggression toward others, self-injury, destruction of property and stereotypic behaviors such as rocking.

Measurement

A teacher measured the percentage of trials within 20 trials that Dale exhibited aggression, self-injury, destructive behaviors, and stereotypic behaviors.

Functional Behavior Assessment

In order to determine the functions of the problem behaviors, researchers conducted sixteen trials every day for five days and observed what problem behaviors Dale engaged in. The trials related to four types of functions-escape, attention, tangible, and sensory. For the escape trial, the teacher presented the student with a school task such as a puzzle. For the attention trial, the teacher sat down by Dale and then ignored him by reading something. For the tangible trial, the teacher presented the child with some desired object and then removed it, promising to give it back in a minute. In the sensory trial, the teacher observed the child when they were alone. If the child engaged in problem behavior during this time, it was thought to serve a sensory function.

Based on the frequencies of the different types of problem behaviors during these trials, the researchers determined that stereotypic behaviors served mostly a sensory function. Aggression self-injury, and disruptive behaviors served to gain attention and gain some desired object. Aggression, self-injury, and disruptive behaviors were sometime used to escape a task, but not consistently.

Intervention

With functional communication training (FCT), the idea is that some problem behavior, such as aggression or self-injury, is an attempt at communication. The training replaces the problem behavior with more socially appropriate means of communication by reinforcing the more socially appropriate responses. The new socially appropriate response must serve the same function as the problem behavior.

Dale's intervention was designed to help teach him communication for attention and desired objects. To gain attention, Dale was taught to tap the teacher's hand and to gain desired objects Dale was taught to point to drawings. Dale would be prompted during trials to communicate. During the attention trials, the teacher took Dale's hand and tapped her hand with it. After doing so she praised Dale and gave him her attention. During the tangible trials, the teacher took a desired object away and then helped Dale point to drawing representing that object. After a

number of sessions, the length between the start of the trial and the prompt increased, in an attempt to fade the prompts out.

Results

Researchers first measured Dale's problem behaviors during trials without the prompts and then measured his behavior with the immediate prompts and then with the delayed prompts. Dale exhibited problem behaviors in almost 100% of the trials before the intervention. He displayed low amounts of both problem behavior and appropriate communication during the immediate prompt sessions. When the prompt was delayed, appropriate communication increased while problem behavior remained low.

During a follow-up Dale still showed appropriate communication and no problem behavior during desired object trials. During the attention trials, Dale showed problem behavior during only one trial, but his appropriate communication did decrease as compared to the original intervention measure.

Sigafoos, J. & Meikle, B. (1996). Functional communication training for the treatment of multiply determined challenging behavior in two boys with autism. *Behavior Modification*, 20, 60-84.