# Intervention Case Study 13

This intervention looks at replacing problem behavior meant to gain something with a more socially appropriate form of request.

## Introduction

Sam is a 32 year old with developmental disabilities who lives in a group home with six other disabled people. He has the language comprehension of a 4 year old child and does not speak Sam will lead people to things he wants or use line drawings of common objects to communicate his desires. Sam will often display problem behavior such as screaming or hitting when asked to do something difficult, does not get something he wants, or is unable to do a desired task without assistance.

#### Measurement

Researchers first observed Sam in his home and saw that he displayed problem behavior when required to do difficult tasks and when he wanted some desired object. Researchers than verified what activities Sam preferred by presenting him with two options and seeing what he chose. Pictures of Sam engaging in the activity were used to represent it. Next, researchers set up sessions wherein they asked Sam to complete a task and measured whether he complied, how long it took him to comply, and whether he displayed problem behaviors.

### Functional Behavior Assessment

Sam displayed problem behavior when asked to do difficult things, whether they were something he preferred or not. Researchers concluded his problem behaviors served to escape from nonpreferred difficult tasks as well as to obtain preferred items and activities. If given assistance, his problem behavior decreased.

# Intervention

The goal of the intervention was to replace Sam's problem behavior with a request for assistance. Sam was given a card with the word "help" on it as a symbol of requesting assistance. Researchers presented Sam with a nonpreffered difficult task. They gave him three seconds to respond and if he did not, put Sam's hand on his help symbol. They then gave him help. As time went on, researchers began fading the prompt, by decreasing how far they moved Sam's hand toward the help symbol. When Sam displayed problem behavior before the prompt, they did not give him help with the task. As they were doing the intervention with one group of tasks, researchers also measured whether the intervention would generalize to other nonpreferred difficult tasks and preferred difficult tasks where the assistance request was not taught.

## Results

Before the intervention, Sam displayed problem behavior 85% of the time when asked to do a nonpreferred difficult task and 0% of the time during the intervention. Sam requested assistance during each of the last 10 intervention sessions. For the untaught difficult and nonpreffered tasks, researchers found that Sam displayed problem behavior 82% of the time during the first half of the sessions and 32% of the time during the second half. He used the request assistance 0% during the first half and 30% of the time during the second half. For the untaught preferred and difficult tasks, Sam displayed problem behavior 63% of the time and did not request

assistance at all. The request for assistance did generalize somewhat to other nonpreffered tasks but did not generalize at all to preferred difficult tasks.

Once the request for assistance was directly taught with the preferred difficult tasks, Sam displayed problem behaviors 10% of the time at the end of the intervention. He requested assistance 80% of the time at the end of the intervention.

Reichle, J., Drager, K., & Davis, C. (2002). Using requests for assistance to obtain desired items and to gain release from nonpreferred activities. *Implications for assessment and intervention. Education and Treatment of Children*, 25, 47-66.