

## **Autism Classroom Resources Podcast Episode 10 Transcript October 20, 2019**

[0:00] Welcome to the Autism Classroom Resources Podcast the podcast for special educators who are looking for personal and professional development I'm your host Dr. Christine Reeve. For more than 20 years I've worn lots of hats in special education but my real love is helping special educators like you. This podcast will give you tips and ways to implement research-based practices in a practical way in your classroom to make your job easier and more.

[0:28] Music.

[0:35] This episode 10 of the Autism Classroom Resources Podcast and we have been talking about challenging behavior and functional behavior assessment We are on Step 2 which is gathering information and we're talking about data collection. Specifically we are talking about the type of data that you need to take to do a functional assessment and determine the function of the behavior and try to get as good view of your students in an understanding of their behavior as possible.

So this week we are talking about antecedent behavior consequence data. I have a couple of free tools that you'll be able to download at the end and I will be also sharing some tips for how to make sure that your ABC data is meaningful and helpful to what you're trying to do. So let's get started.

[1:34] Diving right into data collection there are lots and lots of types of

data that we can take about behavior. We could take frequency counts where we count each time behavior occurs. We can take the same frequency data that we just took and divide it by how long we observed and collected the data to get a rate so that we can compare across time periods. We can take what we call scatter plot data. We record that a challenging behavior occurred in a specific time of day or time.

During the day we can take data on how long the behavioral occurs. We can take data on how long before the behavior starts. I'm a data geek, so basically I could go on and on and on but that's a different podcast or a different episode.

However, the real crux of using data for decision-making in an FBA is that you have to focus on the function, which I talked about. And all of those that I've just described you a really good job in counting or assessing the form of the behavior, how often it happens, how long before it starts. But it doesn't necessarily tell us anything about its function. So since we know that we are all about function rather than form here, those types of data will give us some kind of baseline data, which I'll talk about when we talk about behavior plans. But they really don't inform us for an FBA in terms of actually developing hypotheses or ideas about what the function of the behavior is.

Typically if we're trying to figure out the function, we need information about the context of the behavior-- so where and when does the behavior occur, what was going on before it occurred, what happened in the environment after it occurred. And usually we take this in the form that we call Antecedent Behavior Consequence data or ABC data.

ABC data is really critical to the process of a functional behavior assessment in a school setting where you're not able to manipulate the

different situations that you find your students in. So, for instance, if I were doing an experimental FBA, I would be working with a student and presenting specific things to see if they made the behavior more likely to occur and following them up with consequences that may make them more likely in the future and taking frequency data, duration data, intensity data to see how that progresses. And then choose my functions from that. Traditionally and typically in a school setting.

[4:14] Traditionally and typically in a school setting, we are looking for patterns of behavior. Typically, in order to do an experimental FBA, you really want to have some good training in it; you want to make sure that you've got safeties in place if the behavior is severe. There are lots of other things that go into that. I'm going to focus on a naturalistic assessment, which is what we call it when we use ABC data and we develop hypotheses of why the behavior occurs.

[4:42] Now, the key to a good FBA using ABC data and doing natural observations is getting good data. The more clear and comprehensive the data is, the better we're going to be able to draw conclusions about potential functions. So let me talk briefly about what makes up an antecedent behavior consequence data sheet.

[5:08] What is an antecedent? Now an antecedent is what happens before the behavior occurs. I want to be clear that that does not necessarily mean it is a trigger. If we already knew what set the behavior off, we would not need the data. So what we're trying to capture in the antecedent section is simply what is happening in the environment before or as the behavior starts. And that means that we're trying to capture not just what teachers are doing.

[5:45] But also what students are doing. What else is going on? Are we in a crowded room? Are the buses outside the door? The more information you can provide about what's happening in the environment before the behavior occurs the better. And granted the antecedent will almost always be something that you are writing down by memory because you weren't anticipating that the behavior would occur. So, it's just really important that we recognize that we are not waiting for the behavior to happen and then looking for what the trigger was. We're hoping when we go back to our data that we will be able to figure that out and see a pattern. But if we, again, if we knew what the antecedent was, we wouldn't need to write it down; we wouldn't need to take this data to try to figure it out.

[6:40] And so typically you would be describing more than one thing at a time. So, it might be the teacher was talking to another student, and the student was asked to work by himself, and the principal came to the door, and another student started to cry.

[6:57] All of those things may happen before the behavior. None of them may actually be related to the behavior, but we don't know that until we start to look for patterns when we talk about analyzing the data.

The behavior, I think it's pretty clear. It is the challenging behavior that we are tracking and we're trying to get a sense for, usually, the severity, the intensity, some element of the severity of the behavior to try to figure out if there are certain things that cause of the behavior to ramp up over time. So do they show us signs? Do they start to hum or sing or yell before they hit people? Those are really good things to know when we go to develop a behavior plan.

[7:42] The consequences are not consequences. They're not what we think about when we think about consequences. In our society we tend to think of consequences as "He needs a consequence!" which is what I hear all the time. And my answer is usually "no, he needs support." So a consequence in our language here, is simply what occurs after the behavior. It does not indicate that it was in reaction to the behavior. It could be anything that happens in relation to the behavior.

So it can be that the buses pulled away-- had nothing to do with the behavior. It could be that the principal left the doorway--- it could still have nothing to do with the behavior. We are looking for patterns of things that happen that might reinforce the behavior, that make it more likely to happen because that follows it. So, we're looking for that, but again, we don't know what it is, so we're trying to get as much information about the context-- about where we are with the behavior. What is going on in the area where the behavior occurs? What was going on as it ended or afterwards? So, it might be something where you sent him to timeout, or you removed him from a situation, and you did it intentionally. But it might also be that someone reprimanded him. And the consequence was that he got a lot of attention for that behavior, even though we thought it with negative behavior.

So those are the ABCs of the data collection. And I have a free ABC data sheet that I'm going to share with you and talk about a little bit more at the end, but I want to give you some tips about how we want to make sure we're taking the data.

So there are three things I want you to really remember as we take data down. The first is to record objective information. Remember that data is always meant to be objective. But data is only as objective as the

observer. So taking data on challenging behavior is probably one of the most difficult times to be objective.

[9:59] Challenging behavior makes the best of us emotional. At times we get frustrated, upset. And just because we're having trouble figuring it out, it's frustrating. And it's important to try to avoid this clouding and coming into the collection of your data. The language that we use in writing about the behavior, in this case, is as important as the information that we need to record.

There's a big difference between someone reading "Simone did not follow the teacher's instruction given to the class." That's just the facts. That's just what we need to know. That's very different, than "Simone is purposely unresponsive and does not listen to teacher's directions." Well we don't know that she's really not listening. We know that maybe she didn't hear it, maybe there's lots of other explanations.

So you know it's very different to say "Following the teacher's instruction to the class to line up, Simone remained to her seat drawing on a paper." Okay that's what happened. We're not interpreting any kind of intention to Simone that we can't see, we're merely describing the behavior that we see.

[11:08] That's very different than "Simone was oppositional and refused to follow the teacher's directions." Just the wording itself would make someone look at it and say that's not objective. I already know that the person writing that not objective data really kind of has it in for Simone and wishes she would just shape avoid making judgments about the staff and the student. up. And that's going to be a problem when we go to write the behavior plan because it doesn't tell me exactly what she did. So we



also want to make try to avoid making judgements about the staff and the students.

[11:38] So remember that you, if you were the teacher, will probably not be the only person who reads this data. Always imagine, a parent reviewing the data or worse, a hearing officer in a due process. Everything you record on a datasheet becomes part of the child's educational record. So always write with the idea that someone else is going to read it. But that is not the why, that I'm the reason that I'm saying this. The reason that I'm saying this is that knowing exactly what Simone did is going to be much easier when we go to analyze the data than knowing what somebody thinks she did or interpreted what she did. So you want to make sure that you are recording what you see, but that you're not reading into the behavior what may or may not be true.

For instance, saying that a student raised his hand to answer three questions and the teacher did not call on him is much different than saying the teacher ignored him and never called on him. The first is objective and measurable. The second is a generalization and non-objective because it puts your interpretation of the situation into what actually happened.

Similarly the teacher asked him a question that she knew he couldn't answer. Is different than the teacher asked him who the third president of the United States was and he did not know the answer.

[13:03] So certainly a pattern of questions he stated he did not know might indicate that the teacher is not asking questions at his level. It's possible she's deliberately setting him up for failure, but it's equally possible she doesn't know what his level is.

[13:21] And you certainly don't know whether one or the other is the case, so the takeaway here is to keep your emotions out of it.

So my second tip actually deals with the feelings and emotions of the students rather than you write only what you can observe. We all have feelings and emotions and I'm not debating that but you don't know what someone else's emotions are from watching them. Most people know someone who gets really quiet when they're angry. And most of us know someone who throws and screams when they get angry. Same emotion different behavior, and we can't really tell what that emotion looks like for an individual.

For some of our students we can ask them, or they can express them, but sometimes the things that they express are not an accurate depiction of their actual emotions either. For instance, the teenager who regularly says I hate you. probably doesn't actually hate you

I'm so depressed probably doesn't mean the same thing for one person that it does for another. We cannot determine what someone else is really thinking or feeling. And sometimes they aren't accurate reporters of that either.

So think about the difference between these two statements he decided to kick the student. As opposed to he kicked the student as he walked by his desk. The first, he decided to kick the student, gives you some clue about its trying to tell you that you know that he made a conscious decision to do this. He kicked the student is actually the behavior that occurred. That's what you observed.

[15:16] You know, he hates the math teacher instead of he exhibits the most frequent challenging behaviors in math class are two different things. Maybe it's math he doesn't like, or maybe math is hard for him, or



maybe there's a history involved with math that we don't know about and it has nothing to do with the math teacher.

So again you want to make sure you know that you're not giving intent where you don't know intent occurs.

We know whether or not things happen more frequently in someplace. We know whether or not somebody engaged in a specific behavior.

But the takeaway here is if you can't see it, you can't know if it's true and it's not that things that we can't see don't exist and that they don't influence behavior because they do. Human behavior, as I said, is very complex. But we don't know what it is so it doesn't help us,

So we're much better off being objective and keeping the students emotions out of it. And you might say he said he hates the math teacher and then stormed out of the room or then you left the room.

[16:32] You may say what he says. But that is a behavior that you're observing so if you can't see it you can't know if it's true.

And number three is don't replace your observations with your interpretation of the function. For those of us who get that there is a purpose to challenging behaviors and they serve a function, it's hard for us to remember when we're taking data to just record what happened and not spend our time trying to figure out why. When we say he kicked her because he wanted her attention, we may or may not be right.

It's more precise to say he kicked her and then made eye contact with her and laughed and the teacher turned and talked to him. So that may indicate that he's looking for a reaction and he got a reaction. But always remember that if we knew the function of the behavior we wouldn't need to take the data. So presuming the facts function as we're taking the data

gets in the way of interpreting it differently. If I say he does this for attention, you might automatically look at it when you look at the data and say, "oh it's attention-seeking." When in reality it's that he did this and the teacher left and over time we find a pattern of escape instead.

[17:59] So similarly don't describe the function in place of describing the behavior. Don't say he tried to get her attention when what you saw was he kicked the teacher when she was talking to another student and she turned and told him to stop.

[18:15] It's okay to write what a possible function would be, but try not to write things like he had an attention-seeking behavior.

Okay that looks like a lot of different things. I'm not sure what it looks like and you're presuming a function that, again if we knew the function, we wouldn't need to take the data. And that's the takeaway with that one.

So, those are just some tips to help make your antecedent behavior consequence data as clear and objective as possible so that when you're looking at it once you have collected it all, you can start to look for patterns. And we'll be talking about that in a future episode.

So let me take just a minute. I've got a freebie that I want to describe for you and tell you how to find. I also want to let you know that the [Special Educator Academy](#), if you want to take a deep dive into behavioral problem solving, we have an entire course specifically on problem solve it on Behavioral Problem Solving that takes you through defining the behaviors, the functional assessment, developing hypotheses, and developing the plans. And along with that course we have a very active community of other special educators similar to yourselves who are sharing ideas about behavior. And it's a great way to, the best way

to access me and get help with trying to figure out how to navigate all these different systems.

I also have behavioral data sheets that includes a number of editable data sheets in my TPT store and you will find the link to that and Special Educator Academy and the freebie at [autismclassroomresources.com/episode10](https://autismclassroomresources.com/episode10).

I have an ABC PDF download for you. Sign up for the newsletter and you will be able to download that for the resource library. And I also have a link to behavior data sheets that have a number of different editable tools for ABC data collection in my TPT store.

[20:16] And if you're in the Special Educator Academy, don't buy the behavior data sheets because you have them in the academy. And if you haven't found them in the academy, email me and let me know and I will find them for you.

So I hope that gives you some good ideas of things to try. Definitely go to the show notes at [autismclassroomresources.com/episode10](https://autismclassroomresources.com/episode10)

If you have questions or things you'd like to share, hop over to our free Facebook group at [SpecialEducatorsConnection.com](https://SpecialEducatorsConnection.com) and I'll also put that link on the blog post page.

Thank you so much for spending this time with me this week. I hope you'll come back next week when we will continue talking about ABC data and what we do with it.

[21:00] Music.