

Autism Classroom Resources Podcast Episode 13 Transcript November 10, 2019

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 effective. Welcome back and I am so glad that you have joined us again. We are talking about behavior, which I know is an issue for many of us in special education classrooms. I am Chris Reeve, I'm your host and up to now we've taken our data, we have gathered all of our information and today we're going to start getting to the good stuff because we're starting to get to the point where we're going to look at why in the world is this behavior happening in the first place and what are we going to do about it?

And so if you go over to the blog at autismclassroomresources.com/episode13 (one three), then you will be able to download a free template that will give you the process that I use for creating hypothesis statements that develop directly into behavior plans. You also will see a number of visual examples that I obviously cannot give you on a podcast, so that may make it a little bit easier. So you can go to the blog post and you can see all the different examples of hypothesis statements, download the template and you'll also be able to download a transcript or read this if you would rather make sense of it that way. It gets a little interesting when I start to talk about these things without any visuals, because you know how I love visuals. So let me give you just a quick disclaimer as well.

I'm going to give you hypothesis statements in this podcast and I'm going to kind of give you a summary of the information about the student's behavior. It's going to sound like those instances came from one instance, but they didn't. We have to triangulate all of our information, our information from staff, our information from families, our data collection, our record review, all the things we've talked about up until this point are going to go into that hypothesis statement. So they are all very important and I'm going to pick up from where we've triangulated all that information. We've got some idea about some setting events, we've seen what happens before, we've seen what happens afterwards and put it in kind of a compilation. So it isn't as easy as I make it sound because as I often say, human behavior is just not simple. But when you just hear me talk about it, the cases kind of sound like I'm just picking out one instance. I'm not picking out a single episode of behavior, I'm using a composite of all the different information. So let's get started.

[Music]

We're now moving into step three in our five step process of meaningful behavioral support and that is really developing our hypothesis statements. Now keep in mind that a hypothesis is a best guess. We don't know that this is what's actually driving the behavior until we confirm our hypothesis and I'll be talking about that later in the series and how we can do that. Because you can do it when you develop them and you can test them more likely you will develop interventions that address them and see if they work when we're within a school setting. We want to make sure that when we are developing our hypothesis statements that we are clearly tying them to the data that we're not getting lost in our

interviews and things like that. We want to make sure that we're accounting for that interview and that less objective information, but that we are making sure that our data is solidly supporting our hypothesis. That's why we took it.

Writing our hypothesis statements is critical to the success of the intervention plan because they should lead you to what your behavioral solutions are going to be and in the blog post that goes with today's podcast, you will find a download that you can get that actually structures your hypothesis statements. One of the things that I like about using this hypothesis statement structure is I can take my antecedent information and my setting event information and put it in one block. Then my behavior goes in the next block and how the environment is responding or what's happening in the environment comes afterwards. So it's very easy to take my ABCs and translate them into this. I can then take this set up and say, when this happens he is likely to engage in this behavior and in the environment this commonly happens if that's what my data trends are telling me.

That then allows me to take those antecedents and make adjustments to the environment so that we can prevent the behavior from happening. It allows me to know if he start off with smaller behaviors, that should be an indicator to me that something bigger is coming, then I should intervene earlier and it lets me know what do we need to change about how we react or respond to the behavior or what's happening in the environment after the behavior so that we can reduce the reinforcement to it. And all of that gets directly mapped onto the hypothesis from the hypothesis statement. So go to autismclassroomresources.com/episode13 and download the hypothesis statement graphic and it will walk you through how to put that together. And you can also download a transcript and you can also read this post if you'd rather do that rather than listening.

So let's talk for a few minutes about what goes into your hypothesis statement. One is the setting events. So that leads us to how do we eliminate or reduce the impact of distant factors that might influence the behavior. So our setting events in our hypothesis, he is more likely to engage in this behavior when X, Y, and Z, tell us we need to address X, Y, and Z in some way. Now as we've said in episode 11 we cannot always make X, Y and Z go away. If I could make you sleep through the night, I do it. But I do know that maybe I can modify what I asked you to do on a day when you didn't sleep well at night or a day that you don't feel well or a day that you didn't take your medicine. Maybe I modify my demands, maybe I have you participate in group activities less and that's where that brainstorming process that we'll talk about when we get to intervention plans becomes really key.

But your setting events are going to tell you what you need to try to accommodate for if you cannot change it. Your antecedents are going to lead us to to know exactly how to restructure the environment to prevent the behavior. Our behavior tells us whether or not the form of the behavior is relevant to the function. So does he only scream and get attention, but when he hits people ignore him. Probably what happened the other way around, but it is the form related to the function. Most of the time, it's not in my experience, but it is possible that you will have a student that engages one kind of behavior because people maybe come to him and another type of behavior because it gets people to go away.

The consequence tells us what might be maintaining the behavior. So we need to know how we need to change our response to try to prevent the behavior from increasing over time. So when we use the graphic organizer for the hypothesis statements, we have three boxes. When the student and we fill

that in, he will. That's the behavior. And as a result this happens. And the setting events kind of go over that. So when this situation is in place, when this student does this or encounters this, he engages in this behavior and this is what happens in the environment.

So to give you an example of a hypothesis, when the student, so when faced with situations with social or academic demands, particularly those involving language. So very specific. I've been able to take my data and say this almost always happens in situations with social or academic demands, so not other kinds of demands. And those that involve making him practice language related tasks are much more likely to have problem behaviors. The behavior is when faced with those situations, he sometimes, because it's not every single time hits, screams and or bites others, and then what happens as a result, he is sometimes removed from the situation, the task is delayed by the behavior or staff provides assistance in completing the task. And those are all consequences that often differ based on what situation he's in and what setting he's in and things like that, but they were common consequences to this behavior that basically kept him from having to do the activity or delayed it in some way.

Now that's a whole lot more descriptive than a function that just says he engages in this behavior to escape. Because now I know when he's faced with situations with social or academic demands in particularly those involving language, we need to maybe include more easy tasks in with our heart, with our language demands. We need to give him maybe more breaks during that time. We know what his behavior is and he does a constellation of behavior. There's not one specific form of behavior related to this situation and then we need to give him a way to replace this because it is an escape. We need him away to ask for a break because the result of his behavior is having to be removed or having the task be delayed. It's essentially his escape related. So we want to make sure that we've got a replacement behavior that focuses on that and we will talk about a in a whole episode about replacement behaviors because they aren't often what many people think they are, but back to task so you can see how that gives me much more specific information about where I'm going to address my behavior intervention plan.

Now I may get even more specific. I may say something like James appears to engage in challenging behavior to escape from tasks that are difficult for him. Some of these tasks are work-related. Some may be overwhelming or difficult socially, and some may be things that are frustrating for him like waiting. Engaging in significant challenging behaviors serves to gain assistance or removal from these situations effectively.

You may also have, James sometimes engages in challenging behavior to protest or express frustration about what not being allowed to have something that he wants. So we know what situations he's likely to have the problem in. And we also know that his behavior is complex. And you've heard me say this throughout this series. Human behavior isn't simple and rarely except in very young children occasionally, but rarely do we see behavior serving only one function very frequently. We see it having maybe a main function, but also another function. So often we will see a student who engages in behavior to escape. But when you give him just a break where nobody interacts with them, you continue to see problems because that behavior was also to get attention. So it got him out of the task and it got people engaging with him together. So never think when you're writing your hypothesis statements that you have to be limited to one function. We will have to pick what we're going to do when we get to the behavior

plan based on that. So our setting events factor into when the student section of the hypothesis and they help us explain why behaviors happen on one day in relation to an antecedent and on another day they don't.

So Jame's data indicated that the behaviors occurred on some days and not on others and further investigation into the data showed us that days on which he hadn't had his medicine were more likely to result in challenging behavior. One solution makes sure he always takes his medicine. We may be able to do that. And I've certainly had students that we've said, you know what, send us medicine to school. We're happy to give it to him first thing in the morning if they're having a hard time getting into it. Sometimes even at school, James wouldn't necessarily take his medicine. He put in his mouth, he spit it out, 20 minutes later we'd find out he hadn't taken it. Another solution factored into his program and the hypothesis statements, on days when James has not had his medication, he is and he is presented with a language task, he is likely to engage in these behaviors which then result in being removed from the task.

So maybe on the days when we knew he hasn't taken his medicine, we adjust our demands so that we might lower that antecedent that sets that behavior off. So let's look at a few other examples for different kinds of functions. So let's look at Sammy and Sammie's data, one of his instances is when has been to more group activities during a day, these behaviors are more likely to occur when he checks his schedule and sees the teacher icon, he falls on the ground and screams. Sometimes he does this when he transitions out of the room for assembly and group activities. So this is kind of my summary of what we see in his data. Sammy screams and cries when the staff tries to redirect him, he screams louder. If given the opportunity to go to a quiet area and calm down, he stopped screaming and he's calm and the outcome is his staff moves them to the work table or the upcoming activity. His behavior continues.

So that tells us that when we look at Sammie's behavior, Sammy appears to engage in challenging behaviors to escape from tasks that are difficult for him. Some of these tasks are work-related, some may be overwhelming or difficult socially and some may be things that are frustrating for him like waiting. Engaging in significant challenging behavior serves to gain assistance or removal from these situations effectively. Sammy is more likely to engage in these behaviors when he's had a lot of group work during the day. So I put my setting event kind of at the end of that one. But you can see it's obviously an escape from work and social situations that is the real underlying function. But I now know that there are certain tasks that I need to adjust to prevent the behaviors. I can teach him a way to escape appropriately as a replacement behavior.

And my outcome needs to be that the behavior doesn't get him out of the task as quickly as the replacement behavior. And we'll talk about all of that more when we talk about behavior support plans. But I want you to understand how it all lines up. Let's think about Simon. Simon has had several instances talking to his friends in the atrium of the high school and suddenly in the middle of the conversation he started telling the other kids that he was going to kill them, the other kids left them alone and which tell the teacher. So let's think about the function for Simon or the hypothesis when presented with unstructured social interactions, which is when Simon is in the atrium of the school, there's nobody there setting up interactions. Simon's violent threats have been successful in extricating him from the social situation and escaping from the social demands. So what we're saying is that he is

trying to escape social situations, unstructured social situations, set him up to have these behaviors and this is a very efficient manner of getting people to leave him alone. So I now know that maybe I need to structure his social interactions a little bit more. I need to teach him a better way to get people to leave him alone more appropriately. And then we need to work on probably some underlying social skills as part of that as well.

Let's look at Jimmy. Jimmy was playing with the other kids on the playground and they were playing horse with the basketball and when it was Jimmy's Turney missed the basket. The other kids told him he got the letter S and the teacher, her, Bobby, tell him better luck next time and slap him on the back. Okay, very common. Hey, I'm trying to make you feel better kind of activity kind of behavior. Jimmy then hit Bobby and they got into a fight. When the playground supervisor asked what happened, Jimmy told her Bobby was bullying him. When we looked at Jimmy's data, we found a large pattern of difficulty in social situations as the antecedent and that he was interpreting the perspectives when we talked to other kids that he was accusing of bullying him or fighting with them. He would tell them that, that they had done something.

And all of the things that he described were things that from the perspective of the person who did them, they were meant to be supportive, not problematic. So in knowing Jimmy and everything we know about Jimmy, we know that Jimmy has significant difficulty interpreting the perspectives of others and therefore understanding their intentions in his environment. He frequently interprets their behavior as a negative action toward himself. So when presented with an action, he interprets it negatively and he responds in a way to escape from that situation. So he gets removed from the situation because he's fighting. It gets him removed from the difficult situation. And so we've got an escape from social situations, but there's an underlying setting event of not understanding the perspectives of other people. And this is something we see a lot with our students with autism, that social piece is a big piece, but it's also something I see a lot with students who have other types of disabilities other than autism where people aren't necessarily picking up on the social thinking and the social perspective piece of it because they don't have that diagnosis.

So keep that in mind as we're working with some of our students with emotional disturbances and things like that. Let's look at two more. It's time for Jimmy to be doing some math seat work and instead he gets up and he runs to the computer, he sits down and when the teacher tries to move him back to his desk, he throws himself on the floor and kicks her. So in this case we've got a kid who clearly wants something that he can't have. It's time to do work. And so he's going to that thing that he wants and he's behaving this way until it ends up being his term. So we've got an obtaining function of a tangible item. Jimmy is highly interested in the computer when presented with a situation in which he has to wait his turn on the computer, he falls on the floor and kicks and screams until it is his turn.

Now let's look at one has an automatic function because I think that's a really hard one to focus on. Abe engages in a variety of repetitive movements throughout the day, including hitting his forehead and head with his hand. He will engage in these behaviors when there are no demands and there is no one to attend to him. These behaviors appear more frequently during downtime and appear to provide some type of internal reinforcement. So they occur more likely when people are not around and the staff report that he seems calmer after he hits himself. So that's kind of a summary of Abe. So our

automatic reinforcement hypothesis might be when asked to wait or left to work independently or without someone specifically engaging him. Because remember, we can only have an automatic function if it would happen when nothing else is there and no one is around because that means there are no other factors.

That's the way we rule it out. It can't simply be, we don't know what the function is. So we think it's automatic. It's automatic, which some people call a sensory function. I think that's a little misleading. And I talk about all of that in our episode on functions, which I'll link in the show notes, but we really want to make sure that our antecedent is that he's kind of left alone with nothing to do. The behavior is that he frequently hits his head with his fist and following this behavior, his demeanor appears calmer. If stopped, he'll begin to hit himself harder and scream. So that's kind of our consequence for that behavior. So our hypothesis might be Abe engages in a variety of repetitive movements throughout the day, including hitting his forehead and head with his hand. He will engage in these behaviors when there are no demands and there is no one around to attend to him.

These behaviors appear more frequently during downtime and appear to provide some type of internal reinforcement. His demeanor appears calmer after completing them. So that tells us that if we lead Abe alone, we need to give him something to do that he will engage with because not having that is going to be a trigger for the automatic self injury behavior. We know that when he does this, we need to engage him in something so that the behaviors decrease rather than simply trying to stop him. So this then leads us to what our behavior support plan is. So I want to finish just with a few do's and don'ts about hypothesis statements. You want to make sure that you do include as much information as possible. I realized that when I talk about hypothesis statements, some people will think that they're kind of wordy, but I find that wordy to be a good summary of the function of the behavior that can lead us directly into our behavior support plan. And I'll talk in our next episode of how we do that.

Only describe what you can see and observe. And we talked about that when we talked about the data collection. And so I'll link to that episode. But earlier in the series we've talked about the fact that if I can't see it, I don't know that it's happened and so I really have to focus on the behaviors that I see. You want to make sure that we do include our setting events into our hypothesis statements because they are things we're going to have to address in our behavior support plan and we need to verify our hypotheses. And so one thing that we can do is set up a situation similar to the thing that we think is setting off and reinforcing the behavior and see if it happens. So if the behavior is not self-injurious or really dangerous, then we could actually set up situations, take data and see if the behavior occurs in the situations that we think that they do.

Another thing that we can do is develop a behavior support plan that we know is tightly tied to our hypotheses and take data to see whether or not the behavior continues. If it does continue that then confirms our hypothesis. If it does continue, then it tells us we need to go back and re look at our hypothesis. So we can use our intervention as our way to verify our hypotheses. But it's critical when we do that that we make sure that our hypothesis statements and our behavior support plans are very tightly linked. And this format that you can download on the blog page actually will give you that linkage. So let's talk about some things you shouldn't do with your hypothesis statements. Don't get misled by the form of the behavior. Don't assume that because somebody is biting or eating things that they're not supposed to have, that it is an automatic reinforcer.

Those behaviors can have outward impacts on an antecedent as well. So just because it involves a sense does not mean it's a sensory function. Don't assume functions. I think a lot of times we assume the automatic and function or the sensory function because we can't see what the pattern is. But that's not really a valid way to make that decision as I've talked about earlier. Don't assume that a behavior is only one function. Very frequently, behavior has more than one function and you might have more than one hypothesis. So you might have more than one hypothesis that describes the range of behaviors that the student is showing or the range of situations that the behaviors are occurring in. And don't stop taking data. Now you don't necessarily need to continue to take ABC data unless you really don't know what your functions are. So if you haven't been able to come up with a hypothesis statement, you need more data.

If you have a hypothesis statement, take that, make sure you've got solid baseline data of how often behaviors are occurring now. He can do that if you've been taken ABC data throughout the day, he can do that by adding a pure incidents. Then look at taking something like frequency data or duration data to monitor your plan and we'll talk about that in a future episode. But it's important that we don't stop taking the data just because we've developed our hypothesis. So I will be back next week and I will talk more about designing behavior support plans and how we take this information and actually turn it into something that actually may change the behavior of the student in your classroom, which I know is the piece that all of you have been waiting for, but you have to have these pieces in place in order to get to that place.

So that will be our next topic and I will give you some examples and we'll kind of walk through how do you take this information and turn it into that. If you would like to do a bigger deep dive into behavioral problem solving, I highly encourage you to check out the special educator Academy. That is where you'll find me. I'm available in our forums to answer questions, provide support and also our behavioral course has a wide variety of data sheets, strategies, videos and information about this entire process and hopefully pulls it all together. And then when there are questions about it, people can come to the community and ask them and we're all working off of the same page. You can find more information about the special educator academy at specialeducatoracademy.com come try our free seven day trial and see if it's for you. Thank you so much for spending this time with me. I really appreciate it. I hope that this has been helpful in giving you some ideas about formulating hypotheses for your students, and I hope to see you again in our next episode.

[Music].