Autism Classroom Resources Podcast

Episode 19 Transcript

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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 to the Autism Classroom Resources Podcast. I am Chris Reeve and today we are finishing up our series on behavioral problem solving and so this will be our last episode in that series. But I know that I'll be back in the future with more podcasts on behavior in general.

So today I want to talk about our last step, which is implementing and monitoring our plan. It's important to remember that this process really uses the scientific method in the method that we're using, in a naturalistic assessment which is what we've been talking about, is going to involve implementing it, monitoring it, and verifying your hypotheses based on your interventions. And I think that verifying it with your implementation is probably one of the strongest ways to show whether or not your assessment was accurate or go back and problem solve and that process is going to be very important. So that's what I'm going to talk about today are the two steps that go into that process. So let's get started.

The process of implementing and monitoring our plan is what will verify our hypotheses of our functional behavior assessment. And there are really three steps that we need to look at. The first is determining how you are going to take data and take the data so that you know if the behavior is actually improving.

The second is that we need to make sure that the plan is being implemented with fidelity because without that we don't have a true test of our hypothesis. If we're not actually implementing, for instance, our replacement strategies, we're not going to have the ability to say, Oh, it's our FBA, that's wrong.

And finally, if our plan isn't working, we need to problem solve why that is and where the problem is. Sometimes that means going all the way back and redoing the FBA, but sometimes it means just squeaking what we're looking at.

So those are the three steps I'm to talk about. Our first step is going to be taking our data to monitor the student's behavior. And this is a really critical point because if we aren't taking data that we can actually compare to our data from before the FBA or during the FBA, then we may think that a behavior is improving only to find out that it isn't.

One of the things that I see a lot in my consulting is I will check in after a week or two after the behavior plan has been put in place and everybody's been trained. And I'll say, "How are things going?" And they'll say, "Oh, it's so much better." And then I'll go in and I'll do observations and I'll take more data. Or I'll look at the data that they're taking or combination and I'll find that it really isn't better. What is better is their feeling about it. So we feel better when we have a plan and when we're not stressed. Because we have a plan. We don't feel that the behavior is as significant as it was. So some, it's something like a placebo effect, but it's also just human nature. When you feel like you've gotten things set up and you ... You know what you're going to do to respond to the behavior, you, you seem to feel that it is not as bad as it was. So it doesn't happen all the time, but sometimes it does and the data is our only objective way of really looking at whether or not our plan is working.

If we are not sure of the functions, so let's say we're not really sure about the outcome of our FBA, we might continue to take ABC data. And I will put a link to the episode where we talked about taking ABC data just in case you haven't heard it.

But generally, if you feel pretty strongly that you're on the right track, you need less information in the monitoring stage than you did in assessment. Which is good because we need a lot of information in assessment. So usually we can take frequency or we can take duration. And sometimes we can also take severity or intensity. Those are really the issues that we want to look at from monitoring.

Now I have a number of blog posts that I'm going to link in the show notes that will show you different types of data collection that you can take, because I think it makes more sense to see it than for me to describe it to you. But I think there are a few strategies that we can use that cut back on the amount of time that's required, but still give us valuable information. I'm going to talk for just a minute about how we decide what kind of data that we need.

Generally, if we're looking at behaviors that are maybe short in duration, or what we call discreet (they, they happen in the end very quickly). There's not a concern. You know, things like crying, are things that have a longer element, that you need to know how long they've been crying. Things like hitting are more discreet. If we're looking at behaviors that are more discrete, then generally a frequency assessment is probably what we're going to use. And we might use a counter. We might use a self-graphing monthly frequency chart. Or we may just use some other type of self-graphing system depending on how often the behavior happened during baseline. And I've got examples of those in the blog posts that I'll post in the show links. I also have a set of self-graphing frequency sheets and some tools in my behavioral data sheets on TPT that I'll also link to in the show notes.

So if we're just looking at frequency, we can do some sort of self-graphing or counting kinds of system, but let's say that we're looking at something like crying or screaming or tantruming or something that has a longer duration. Then we're going to need to know the duration because here's what can happen. As you go through this process, let's say we have a student who is crying and that's what we're targeting. Well maybe he moves from crying for 20 minutes, five times a day to now he only cries for 10 minutes, but he does it 10 times a day. So sometimes we need to know both the duration and the frequency because sometimes the duration will get shorter, but the frequency will stay the same. Another example might be a student who is screaming and the duration has usually been for an hour, uh, and he does it three times a day.

Now he still does it three times a day. So he has the exact same frequency, but it only lasts for five minutes. So that change in duration really shows an impact of your behavior plan that your frequency would not show. So you want to make sure if you're looking at a more long-term behavior that you're looking at a duration measure that you can use that will give you both the duration of the incidents and the frequency of the incidents, because those both could change and could affect your outcome. And finally, the third area that you may want to look at is the severity or the intensity of the behavior. Because again, maybe I used to have 20 incidents of behavior every day or on average and now, and they were all at a level five. They were all the worst that they could be. He was hurting himself, he was hurting other people.

Now I have 20 incidences, but they're all, ah, I hit you and I'm done. They're not that severe. So then I might say, wow, the behavior hasn't improved if I'm only looking at frequency. I need to look at the severity because sometimes that will tell me. Similarly, I could have a frequency go down, but the severity go up. So sometimes you're going to need a combination of those variables. Now let me talk for a minute about severity cause we don't talk a lot about that. Uh, when we talk about data collection, we do have some reliable methods of intensity rating. I typically will use some kind of a rating scale and as long as the staff is trained and they're all on the same page with what the scale is and the scale is well-defined, you can get a daily rating or an episode-by-episode rating depending on the situation for your students.

So, you might have a scale that zero is no behavior, mild is there's a one, it's no injury potential. Moderate is it could leave bruises. That's a 3 and a 5 is severe with severe injury potential. You may break it down into more levels depending on the nuances of the behavior. And typically, I develop this scale based on the student's past behavior. You can start with a more generic one, and that will give you some information. But you want to make sure that whatever you're doing, you've got a consistent scale and then everybody's on the same page.

And I will have an example of a rating scale on the blog post that goes with this podcast. And I'll have a link to the rating scales that are part of my behavioral data sheets as well. So those are the three areas that we want to think about collecting data for.

Depending on the behavior, there are tons of ways that we can do it. There are tons of different sheets and part of it will depend on what works for your classroom and your student and gives you the information that you need. But just off the top of my head, you could use a scatter plot which would tell you where the behaviors are happening or what time of day they're happening. You could use an interval data collection where you're taking data as to whether or not it occurred during an activity or a set time period; like every five minutes did the behavior occur. You can even teach the student to self monitor and use the self-monitoring data as your behavior tracking. So sometimes I have students that use a 5- point scale to self monitor how they are feeling throughout the day.

Sometimes I'll use a travel card, which is simply a card that the students take around with them to their classes. So for my older students in particular that each teacher checks off what behaviors they have seen. And sometimes I will make a dedicated data sheet combining these factors. And you could also use, if you have a student who has significant instances of behavior that are social problem solving in nature, you could also use a social autopsy or social debrief form as your method of assessing how frequently you're having to do that as your method of determining whether or not it's improving or not.

But if you never used that before or you don't have any kind of data to relate it to from before your assessment and your implementation of your plan, you probably are going to want another measure in there as well. Because then you're going to say, well now we have five social autopsies but we didn't have any before. Well we didn't have any before because we weren't doing them. So you want to think about that.

So once you decided on your data collection strategy, you want to take data. And so you want to have a few weeks where you start the plan, you get it in place, you get everybody comfortable with it, you've made sure that everybody was trained on it. And then you want to implement it for a couple of weeks because, think about it. Behavior is pretty complex. We've talked about that. And you want to make sure that you're giving it time to actually change. And so if it's, you don't want to try something for a day and then say, Oh well that didn't work. I see that a lot. We did a token system, we did it for half a day. It didn't work well. It takes a while for something like that to work. You're changing behavior and it doesn't happen overnight. It also takes a while for the staff to get comfortable with it.

The second piece of this process that we need to take into account is making sure that our team is implementing the plan with fidelity. So we need to make sure that we have trained our staff. We need to make sure that they are implementing it the way that the program was intended. We need to make sure that we're checking in with them to answer any questions that they're having if we're outside of the classroom. So we want to make sure that we set up regular meetings to re meet with the team and discuss the progress and review the data. But we also want to make sure that we are establishing some way of assessing that our implementation is going right, correctly. Because you could have a great FBA and a great behavior plan, but if it's not being implemented reliably and effectively, then your problem is your behavior plan, not your FBA conclusions.

So I usually will take the behavior plan and make a monitoring checklist from the items in the plan. I will have those items and do an observation every week or every couple of weeks or have the school psychologist or the school counselor come in and do some observations, just check and see whether or not the plan is being followed. Are they implementing the social stories correctly? Are they presenting the option card? Are they actively teaching the replacement strategies? Are they being reviewed frequently enough? And then are they responding accurately? And so it's easiest for me to take the elements of the behavior plan and just check off. And if they aren't, that becomes a place that I need to go in and target.

If you're a classroom teacher and you're the one who's doing this, you might do a man down zoning plan where you're deliberately setting up your classes if someone is absent. Which may free you up to do those kinds of quick observations. And I'll put a link to a post about what that means and how to do it in the show notes as well.

Let's say that your behavior plan is being implemented with amazing fidelity and your data is showing that the behavior is not improving. So after a couple of weeks we've been putting this in place, you then want to sit down with the team, look at the data, and if the data says it's not working, we need to problem solve why? And so that's where that teamwork becomes really, really important. These are some of the questions that you want to ask to make sure that you're getting at the root of the problem.

One is, are the interventions a good match to the environment? So are they fitting well in the environment? Are they working correctly in the environment?

The second is, are the interventions a good match to the student? So have you chosen things that the student wants to do or will do or will buy into? So if I put say an Incredible 5- point Scale plan into place and the student doesn't like it and doesn't implement it, then it's not going to work and I'm going to have to find a different solution.

The next one is making sure that you have implemented it faithfully.

Another is to ask, do we need to try new strategies or are our reinforcers or our motivators not working?

And so we want to really look at the plans, how they're working in the environment, how they're working for the student. We may come together as a team and say, I don't think our understanding of this behavior is really clear and we need to go back and reassess.

We may say, this is what I think it was when we started. Now the behavior has changed functions and so I think we need a new assessment. So at any point this could happen a year later, you could then come back and say, well that plan used to work but it doesn't. Then we need to come back and see our, our functions that we came up with and hypothesized are they accurate.

And if our behavior is not improving and we know we're implementing well and we know it's a good fit and we know that our reinforcers are powerful, then we may have to go back and take more data and revisit our FBA in order to assess if behavior has changed. If there's other things going on and sometimes you will see behaviors change their function over time. You want to make sure that you've included that in your discussion. And then you're going to be much better off dealing with this as a team. Because the best way to problem solve is to throw out a whole bunch of different ideas, get everybody's input and then pick out the ones that make the most sense in terms of fitting your problem.

So hopefully that gives you some overview and maybe some closure to our behavioral problem-solving process. It is very much like the scientific method. We assess, we implement and then we look at whether or not our hypotheses are accurate. And if they're not, we go back. This really does make up our verify stage of verifying our FBA. If our behavior plan is implemented and the behavior improves, then maybe we just need to do some fine tuning. Or maybe everything is fine and we don't have to worry about whether or not, you know, we know at that point that our FBA is accurate.

So I hope that gives you some ideas of things to think about as you go through this process. I would love to hear more about what you think and your experiences with this process in our free Facebook group at specialeducatorsconnection.com.

We do have a whole course on behavioral problem solving as well as a community where I hang out regularly to be able to give feedback and ideas of implementing the training in the Special Educator Academy. So definitely come check that out.

And I will have a number of links autismclassroomresources.com/episode19. That will have links for posts on data collection. So you can see examples.

I will make sure that I'm linking to my behavioral data sheets for self-graphing data sheets and rating scales on both TPT and my store. I want to remind Special Educator Academy members that if you are a member of the Special Educator Academy, those data sheets are part of your membership so you do not need to buy them.

I want to thank you once again for spending this time with me. I hope that this has been a helpful series in how we look at behavior and how we can make it work within a classroom. I hope you'll come back next week when our episode will be pulled from the Special Educator Academy and we'll focus on why you need to be taking a break.