Welcome to the Autism Classroom Resources Podcast, the podcast for special educators who are looking for personal and professional development.

Christine Reeve: 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.

Hello there. It's good to have you back. Welcome to the Autism Classroom Resources Podcast where we are finishing up our month of talking about the relationship between communication and behavior. I'm going to veer off track just a very little bit today to talk about what happens when you put that amazing behavior plan into place and you got everyone trained—you thought—and you thought it was going really well and it turns out that the behavior didn't get any better. I hate that. It's like so much work went into getting to that point and now, what do you do? Do you have to start all over? No, not necessarily. But how do you know what you are going to do? That is what we are going to talk about today. Grab your favorite beverage and let's get started.

As a consultant working in schools, it was interesting because oftentimes, people thought behavior plans were working even when the data said they weren't. It's funny what your mind will do sometimes. When we have a plan, things seem better even when they're exactly the same. I would call and staff would tell me that things were so much better since we put the behavior plan in place but when I looked at the actual data, things were exactly the same. All that was different was how the staff felt and thought about it. They had a plan for what they were going to do about the behavior, so it stopped being so overwhelming for them, which was great. It was less stressful, so it seemed better, but in reality for the student, it was still the same.

Step one in this process is making sure that you know if, how, when, and where the behavior has actually changed. To do that, you have to look at your data. You wanted to make sure that you had a data system in place when you put your plan in place to give you some type of measure overall of the student's behavior before the plan started and after you put your plan in place.

Now, it could be that you've got ABC data that you took that gave you some frequency level early on and you're comparing that to some frequency that you're taking after. You didn't have to keep taking ABC data. You probably didn't need that level of detail after you put the plan in place. You can just compare how frequent the instances are. I'm not saying you have to take extensive baseline behavior data in your classroom. But you do have to have some measures so you can do some comparison.

I've got some behavior data sheets that I use that have rating scales, that have self graphing frequency. There's lots of easy ways. I'm going to share some blog posts in the show notes for you that will give you some tools that are easy to use and that will show you some ways to do that. That hopefully will not occupy a ton of time. But the data is important because it's really the only way to get a really objective view of what's really going on.

When you're able to look at your data, you want to look at it for three things. One, is the behavior better, the same or worse? Number two, is it the same or different in all settings or only in some settings? Number three, does anything really stand out differently in the data? By that I mean, is the data showing that the behavior is more intense but less frequent, or more frequent but less intense? That can be useful to know.

For instance, I've got a post about using rating scales that can be useful if the intensity of the behavior is a consideration. It may be that you didn't know that was going to be a consideration early on but maybe you want to put that in place and take some data over time to be able to monitor that going forward. You don't always note if any of the staff is saying something different than what the data show, maybe they're saying, "I don't know his behavior. His hitting doesn't hurt as much but he seems like he's doing it more frequently." That's an indication that the intensity might be something you want to track because maybe the frequency looks like it's getting worse but if it's not as severe, maybe it's not as big of an issue.

Then you can also interview the staff and find out what the staff is saying. Is there a disconnect between your data and the staff perceptions? Sometimes they're saying, "Well, it doesn't seem like that big of a problem. I don't have as many bruises," but the data is saying that it's happening more frequently. That is important.

It's also important if the staff is sharing information that maybe wasn't collected on your data sheets, things like, "Well, he's had a rough couple of weeks because other kids have been making fun of him," or something like that or, "His parents have been out of town for two weeks and he's been staying with his grandmother," that's important to know, or "It's allergy season, so he's been on medication." That's useful to know. That might make a difference in interpreting your data.

Once you know what your data and any other information can tell you, then you can start to think about what you might need to make changes to. If the behavior is the same as it was before you started intervention, the next step is to find out if your behavior strategies are actually being implemented the way they're supposed to be. I'm not saying that the staff is purposefully not implementing your behavior plan, I'm not saying that, but maybe they are finding it hard to implement the plan in their setting, maybe the plan's not a good fit for the setting that they're in, so give them a chance to tell you what's working for them and what's not.

Go through the elements of the plan and find out if they are implementing it. Maybe they forgot about an element, "Oh, I forgot we were using a social story. I forgot we were using option cards for that. I forgot I was supposed to be preparing him for that class." That's okay. Don't penalize them for that but it does help to know that it was not being implemented because then that tells you don't throw out the plan, just go through and implement it better, and see if that helps.

At this stage, I just sit down and talk with them, and I go through the plan and find out what's working, and what's not, what's been implemented and what's not. I find out how they feel about implementing the plan too. Maybe they thought that they could implement something, then when they went to do it, it was like, "Oh my gosh, it was a nightmare." We couldn't trade off the materials. We always found the materials weren't where they needed to be. This token board

was always in the other classroom," or something like that. That's troubleshooting. You've got to be able to troubleshoot those things.

Those might be where the whole thing is falling apart. Let's not throw out the plan until we've troubleshooted those issues. This is a good time for them to tell you what's not working so that you can solve the problem. It's also a good time for them to tell you things like maybe the student is rejecting the strategy.

That happens a ton with my students in general education, my students in high school and junior high who are like, "I don't want to look different than the rest of the kids. Don't give me that card." I need to then figure out what we're going to do with that because we're giving him a travel card or we're giving him a point system and he doesn't want to be caught dead with that. We need to figure out how we're going to make this work. That's something we have to figure out.

If something isn't being implemented for whatever reason, then you brainstorm what to do instead, not everything is a good fit so sometimes, we need to make changes. Just remember that one solution is not the only solution. We can always find a different solution.

Next, you want to look at your strategies and see if you've given them enough time to be able to see a change. If you feel like you've given it enough time to start seeing changes to the behavior, then you might want to look at, "Do you need more preventive strategies in place? Are your antecedent strategies like using visuals or a first-then board or giving warnings before transition or reminders for staying on task, are they not working for some reason? Is the replacement behavior taking too long to ramp up or is it just not a good fit for the student or this situation? Is there an issue overall? Is there an issue with buy-in from the student or the staff?"

Look at the data with that. Is the student using the replacement behavior strategy at all? Is the replacement strategy being directly taught? Are there sessions being set up to teach the students specifically, for instance, to ask for a break when he is able to receive one immediately? If not, then that's something that we might need to make sure is addressed. You have to make sure you're getting that repetition in there rather than just relying on opportunities that present themselves in the natural environment.

I talked about this in Episode 123. I'll link that in the show notes in case you haven't listened to it. I talked about the need for repetition if you're using functional communication training. You got to get your reps in your practice of getting it over and over in an easy setting.

Next, if you have gotten the replacement behavior taught and the student is demonstrating it but the behavior still isn't decreasing, then you want to make sure that the problem behavior isn't getting less reinforcement than the replacement behavior. You want to make sure the replacement behavior is getting reinforced and the problem behavior is getting less reinforced. What happens when the problem behavior occurs? You might need to observe that in order to figure it out.

Whether you are the special ed teacher or an outside person or a behavior specialist, whoever it is that is supporting this student, if you are a special ed teacher and this is your class, think

about using the one-man down zoning plan where for part of the day, that is a time that he has this behavior, you use a one-man down zoning plan. I will make sure that post goes into the blog post. I've got a link for what a one-man down zoning plan is and how it can help to free you up to do this observation. I'll put that link in the blog post for this episode.

It's possible that you might have to tweak the responsive strategies in order to make sure that that replacement behavior gets that reinforcement faster, easier, and more consistently than the problem behavior, just like I talked about in Episode 123. Then the team is going to need to work on prompting to ask for the break in the group activity. All that stuff is going to have to be addressed.

Finally, if all of those things look absolutely fine and the behavior is occurring even though all those parts are being followed to the letter, that's when you have to really think about going back to the drawing board and redoing your FBA. Because remember that if you're doing a naturalistic functional behavior assessment, the intervention phase of your process is your verification phase of your FBA. It's verifying your hypothesis of the functions of your behavior. If your behavior plan is written to clearly match the functions of your behavior and it's being implemented accurately, then your function hypotheses may be incorrect.

Now, that might mean that your original hypotheses are wrong, welcome to science, or it might mean that your student's behavior has changed function, or possibly, it might have more than one function that's interfering and you've only captured one of them. It doesn't necessarily mean that you're wrong, it just means that there's other stuff involved. That's fine. There's nothing wrong with that. It happens all the time. That's why we have a verification phase.

If you've been taking some data throughout this process, you might not need a lot of extra data to redo your hypotheses. You might have to just go back and re-look at some of your assessment data from your FBA. Look over your data. Determine if you need more information or if the process above of looking all over and thinking about that behavior plan implementation gave you more information to determine new hypotheses, and what that might be. If that's the case, then great. If not, then maybe you collect more data and you go from there.

The FBA process is set up as a scientific method. It's trial and error, and you have a hypothesis when you start. It's not guaranteed to be right, it's not guaranteed to stay the same because that's how science works. We have to follow where the data leads us. Don't feel like you've done anything wrong, just because the FBA didn't work the first time. The FBA is a living document. It rarely is a document that I do once and it never changes.

I know that schools tend to look at FBAs and think of them like psych assessments that are good for three years, then we might redo them. But FBAs are different. They're not an assessment, like an IQ test that we can say is valid for three years because behaviors are not like a standard, a sized assessment that we can say this construct is valid and remains the same. They change because behavior changes, people change, environments change, contexts change. All that means is that behavior changes. That's how it works.

That means that the FBA is going to change. Sometimes, it's very stable but more often, it's not. In reality, we want it to change because that's actually what we're trying to do is get behavior to change. We're trying to get it to change so that it reduces the problem behaviors and the positive behaviors increase. Essentially, we're asking it to change.

But don't throw it out because you have a ton of great information to work with. That's part of the process that you've already done. The process of trying to figure out your next step is also great information. Don't get discouraged and don't feel like you've been doing it repeatedly and not getting anywhere.

If you feel like you have repeated this process multiple times and it isn't getting you anywhere, then that might be a time that you bring in somebody from outside. That might be a school psych if you're the teacher. It might be a counselor, it might be a BCBA or a behavior specialist but it could also be somebody outside your district or a contractor outside your district. It just depends on how your district works. But never be afraid to ask for help.

Never be afraid to ask for somebody outside your environment either because it really is helpful to have somebody from outside your environment look at your context. It's hard to see it from the inside sometimes. That's how we all grow, is from those interactions.

Those are the steps that I take when a behavior plan isn't working. If you are looking for more ideas about how to address and handle behavior in the classroom, come take a look at The Special Educator Academy. We have a whole course on FBAs and behavior support plans. We have a ton of other resources on behavior, specifically for you. We also have a whole course on setting up classrooms and how we set them up to minimize behavior, and keep students engaged in instruction.

Whether you're a special ed teacher, whether you work with students with emotional behavior disabilities, work in a self-contained classroom, work with students with autism or you're starting out in an ABA classroom, we have a pathway set up just for you, of material that is customized just for you. Come get your seven-day free trial at specialeducatoracademy.com. If you stay beyond your free trial, book a free call with me and I will help you plan out how to make the most of your time in membership.

Thanks so much for tuning in today and sharing your time with me. I know that your time is precious. I hope it's been helpful and that you'll hit your subscribe button on your favorite podcast app, and maybe leave a review. I will be back next week. I hope that you'll join me then. Until then. Have an amazing week.