THINKING FUNCTIONALLY
About Problem Behavior

SETTING EVENT
Having a younger sibling crying on the way to school.

ANTECEDENT
Working individually on an assignment.

BEHAVIOR
Getting out of the assigned seat when not supposed to.

CONSEQUENCE
The teacher turned and asked the student to return to her seat.

WHY WE SHOULD THINK FUNCTIONALLY

Proactively teaching students appropriate behaviors is important in preventing behavior problems. Students learn about how to engage in appropriate behavior by modeling and practicing them. Having no proactive support system for teaching behaviors is associated with increases in student aggression, vandalism, truancy, and dropping out.

The principles of positive behavior support assume that: (a) behavior is "learned" and can therefore be unlearned; (b) it is important to teach alternative behaviors; (c) punishment does not teach new behavior; and (d) student behavior won't change until adult behavior changes.

EXPLANATIONS FOR STUDENT BEHAVIOR

Behavior is communication. In order to understand the message they are trying to communicate, we must examine the environment. Behavior occurs for two main reasons:

To obtain something desirable (tangibles, peer, parent and teacher attention)

To avoid something unpleasant (academic instruction or non-preferred tasks)

Understanding the function of the behavior is the first step. This comes from understanding of the ABCs:

ANTECEDENT
What happens before the behavior

BEHAVIOR
Operationally define the behavior

CONSEQUENCE
What happens after the behavior occurs

Recording ABC Data

When recording ABC data, remember to: (a) objectively define the problem behavior (i.e., it must be measurable and observable); (b) record the start and end time; (c) identify the context, antecedent, and consequences in which the behavior is occurring; and (d) identify a potential function (i.e., is the student trying to get or avoid something?)

Remember to teach, monitor, and reward students for appropriate behavior prior to focusing on punishment.

SETTING EVENTS

Setting events are environmental events that have an indirect impact on problem behavior. They momentarily change the value of the reward or punishment, and either increases or decreases the likelihood that a behavior will occur.

Setting events "set up" problem behavior. Antecedent's "set off" problem behavior.

Examples include missing breakfast, crowding, having a fight on the way to school, getting bad grades, having a substitute teacher, or forgetting to take medication.