



# Effective Strategies for Problem Behaviors

Tamara Marder, Ph.D., BCBA-D

Dawn Fraser, M.Ed.

Johns Hopkins University School of Education

# Learning Objectives

1. Apply the principles of behavior in order to understand why challenging behaviors occur.



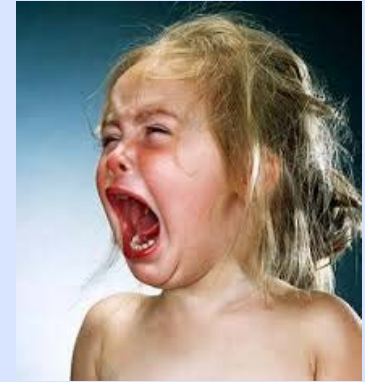
2. Pinpoint behaviors that interfere with home-based activities.



3. Apply practical strategies for addressing challenging behaviors at home.

# What Types of Challenging Behaviors?

- Hitting others
- Screaming, crying, yelling
- Hitting self
- Breaking objects, furniture, walls
- Throwing items, toys, or other objects



# When should we make changes?

- When...
  - Danger of hurting self or someone else
  - When it interferes with learning or being a part of something new
  - When it might be socially stigmatizing



# Understanding All Behavior

## Principles of Behavior

- Human behavior is determined by environmental arrangement of events that occur prior to (antecedents) a behavior and after a behavior (consequences)
  - Phone ringing
  - Driving a car
- A functional relationship between a behavior and these environmental events



# Antecedents

- Antecedents associated with challenging behaviors
  - Something that *precedes or comes before* the behavior occurs
  - Removal/termination of preferred activity
    - Turning off favorite DVD
  - Presentation of non-preferred activity/stimulus
    - Time to take a bath
  - Low attention/no attention
    - Adults having a conversation



# Consequences

- Consequences associated with challenging behaviors
  - Something that *follows or comes after* the behavior occurs
  - Access to a preferred activity
    - 5 more minutes of TV following crying
  - Removal/termination of a non preferred activity or task
    - Delay in taking a bath following a tantrum
  - Access to attention (positive or negative)
    - Adults stop having conversation and attend to child



# Consequences are Reinforcement

- Reinforcement
  - A consequence that follows a behavior and results in an increase in that behavior in the future
- Two types
  - Positive reinforcement
    - Something is provided immediately following a behavior and increases the likelihood that behavior occurs again
  - Negative reinforcement
    - Something is removed immediately following a behavior and increases the likelihood that behavior occurs again





# Positive Reinforcement

Antecedent	Behavior	Consequence	What was provided?
Instruction to Tie Shoes	Student Ties Shoes	Go outside to play	Access to playground
Parents talking and child with toys in adjacent room	Child has a tantrum	Parents stop talking and attend to the child	Attention
Child watching television, parent says it is time for bed	Child cries and whines, "I don't want to go to bed!"	Parent says, "ok five more minutes!"	Access to more television

# Negative Reinforcement

Antecedent	Behavior	Consequence	What was removed or avoided?
Loud noise occurring when driver sits in car	Seatbelt is applied	Loud noise stops	Loud noise
Dinner time, child asked to sit at the table	Child cries and has a tantrum	Request to come to table ends, dinner brought to child	Demand to sit at the table
Parent tells child to clean up toys	Child screams and cries	Parent cleans up the toys	Demand of cleaning up the toys

# Understanding Why Challenging Behaviors Occur

- Reinforcement is the first consideration when examining challenging behaviors
  - What is reinforcing this behavior?
  - The inappropriate behavior will continue to occur because there is some type of reinforcement increasing the probability of its occurrence
    - It works!



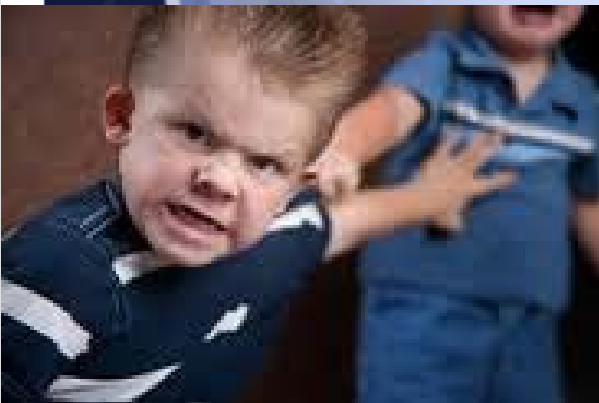
# Common Causes

- Escape/avoidance
  - Engaging in tantrum to avoid having to take a bath
  - Being presented with school work and throwing materials on the floor
  - Biting parent to avoid having to brush teeth
  - Crying to avoid having to sit on the toilet



# Common Causes

- Attention
  - Hitting peer when teacher not in the room
  - Having a tantrum when teacher talks to another child
  - Children may not always see a difference between “good” attention and “bad attention”



# Common Causes

- Access to preferred items or activities
  - Child reaches for computer game while and teacher says “we can play later” and child hits teacher
  - Tantrum to get dessert before dinner
  - Turn favorite television show off, cries and tantrums until it is turned back on



# Common Causes

- Automatic reinforcement
  - Flapping, finger flicking, repetitive behaviors
  - Doesn't seem to have an obvious consequence (escape/avoidance, attention, access to preferred)
  - A behavior that sounds good, looks good, tastes good, smells good, feels good to the touch, or the movement itself is good (Rincover, 1981)



# Communication

- There is a link between behavioral function and communication
  - Challenging behavior is a way to communicate
    - I don't want to!
    - I want that!
    - Leave me alone!
    - Look at me!
    - I don't feel good!





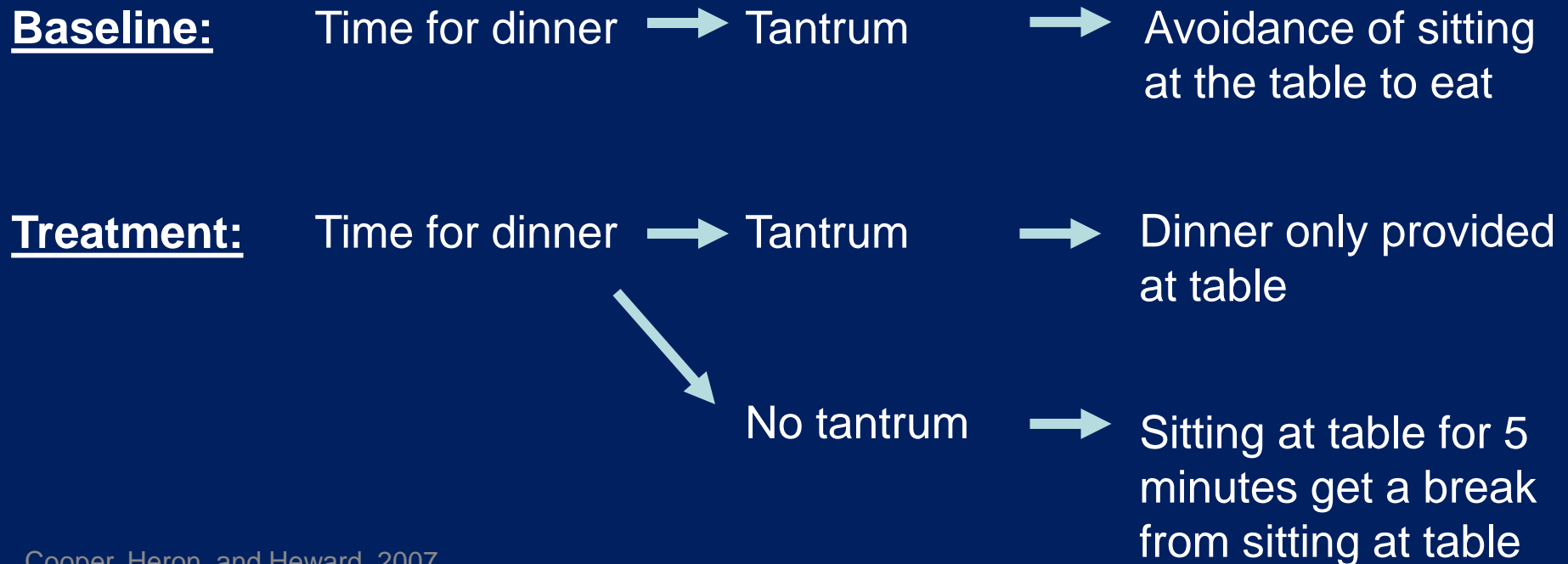
# In order to change....



- Approaches to changing or stopping challenging behaviors should be linked to understanding the cause or function
  - Function of pinching is attention, then provide attention outside of pinching occurring
- Need to teach replacement behaviors
  - Function of hitting brother is to get a toy from brother, teach child to say “my turn”
- If you attempt to address behavior before you have a handle on the function (through assessment and data collection), you may find effects, but they will be short-lived

# Example of behavior maintained by escape/avoidance (DRO)

Differential Reinforcement of Other Behavior – providing reinforcement for desired behavior and not for an undesired behavior



# Example of behavior maintained by attention

Noncontingent Reinforcement (NCR) - providing attention on a schedule

**Baseline:** Parents talking → Throwing → Reprimand  
Low attention materials (Attention)

**Treatment:** Parents talking → Schedule of  
Low attention attention  
(5 minutes)

# Example of behavior maintained by automatic reinforcement

**Baseline:** Time to play with toys → Hand flapping → Automatic reinforcement

**Treatment:** Time to play with toys → Hand flapping → No response, redirect to toys  
Time to play with toys → Hands on toys → Reinforcement delivered (attention/praise for hands on toys)

# Intervention Guidelines

- Intervention should be linked to the function of the challenging behavior
- Need to teach replacement behaviors

If you attempt to address behavior before you have a handle on the function (through assessment and data collection), you may find effects, but they will be short-lived



# Resources

- Autism Speaks Family Services Challenging Behaviors Toolkit  
[http://www.autismspeaks.org/sites/default/files/challenging\\_behaviors\\_tool\\_kit.pdf](http://www.autismspeaks.org/sites/default/files/challenging_behaviors_tool_kit.pdf)
- Zero to Three  
<http://www.zerotothree.org/child-development/challenging-behavior/tips-tools-challenging-behaviors.html>
- Autism Training Solutions  
<http://www.autismtrainingsolutions.com/autism-video>