

# Misunderstanding Misbehavior:



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Looking beyond the child in  
assessment and intervention planning

ECE Pre-Conference Workshop

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UBC

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# Workshop Agenda

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- Contrast past and current understanding of behavior
- Case example – a story to illustrate the process
  - Functional Behavior Assessment
  - Positive Behavior Support Plan
- Throughout the story, development of general principles
- Questions and applications



# Understanding Behavior

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## **PAST**

- Behavior Management
  - Focus on consequences

## **CURRENT**

- Behavior Support
  - Focus on environment, teaching strategies and behaviors, positive reinforcement



# Understanding Behavior

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## **PAST**

- Behavior Management Plans
  - Focus on consequences of misbehavior, some attention to consequences of acceptable behavior, rarely focus on “reasons” for misbehavior

## **CURRENT**

- Behavior Support Plans
  - Focus on understanding “why” -- the function or communicative intent, and teaching alternative behaviors



# Understanding Behavior

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## **PAST**

- Consequence-based plans
  - Focus on what student must do to get or avoid something we provide

## **CURRENT**

- Antecedent-based plans
  - Focus on teacher changing the environment – time, space, materials, and interactions, and teaching new skills



# Understanding Behavior

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## **PAST**

- Philosophy of Controlling Behavior
  - Problem behavior controlled or eliminated
  - Positive behavior expected, regardless of environment

## **CURRENT**

- Philosophy of Teaching Behavior
  - Positive behavior needs to be taught in a conducive environment
  - Potential for lasting change

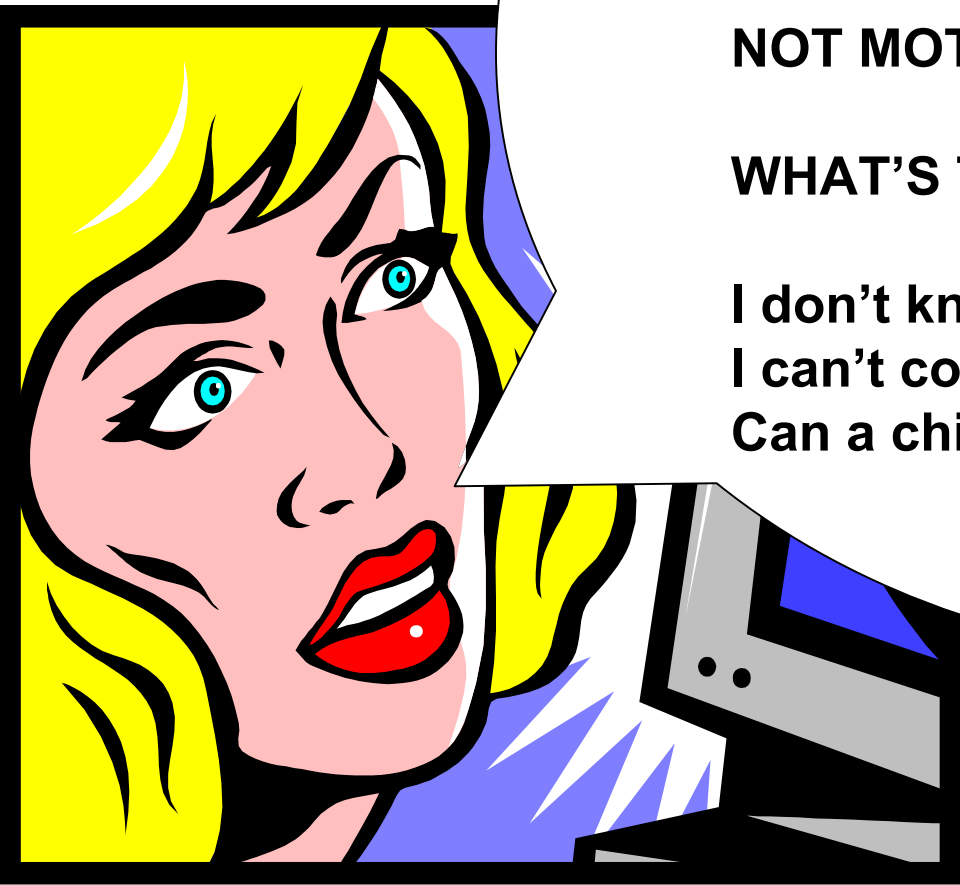
## **Mrs. Brown and Dr. McKee**

Mrs. Brown, a Kindergarten teacher, has asked Dr. McKee to consult with her regarding Joey, a 5 year-old student in her class. It is the beginning of October and at this point most students have settled in well and are living up to the expectations of Mrs. Brown's class, that is, except for Joey. Mrs. Brown describes Joey as a defiant child who is not at all motivated to learn or to participate in anything "cognitive". She further describes him as "impulsive, fidgety, disruptive, aggressive, and rude." She is also concerned about the obscene language he uses and wonders about the lack of appropriate models and expectations in the home. Mrs. Brown is feeling quite frustrated about Joey's disruption of the classroom. She does not believe she can control Joey's behavior, and she is not hopeful that he will be able to change.

Dr. McKee, after listening to Mrs. Brown's concerns, assures her that these are concerns that are quite common with teachers of children at this age. Mrs. Brown asks if Dr. McKee will give a diagnosis of something like "ADHD or Oppositional Defiant Disorder" for Joey. Dr. McKee explains to Mrs. Brown that the purpose of the assessment is not to give a diagnosis, but rather to try to figure out "why" the behavior is occurring and then to develop a plan that will support Joey in learning more appropriate classroom behavior. Figuring "why" will involve looking at the behavior's communicative intent, to look for triggers or predictors of behavior, and to look at effective ways of providing support within the classroom that may include altering the environment and teaching new skills.

They agree to a process that starts with some observation in the classroom and a Functional Assessment.





**ADHD? BEHAVIOR DISORDER?**

**OPPOSITIONAL DEFIANT DISORDER?**

**DISRUPTIVE, RUDE AND AGGRESSIVE**

**NOT MOTIVATED TO LEARN ANYTHING**

**WHAT'S THE HOME LIKE?**

**I don't know how to deal with this!**

**I can't control this child!**

**Can a child like this change?**

**Why is Joey doing this?  
What is he trying to tell her?**

**I wonder what sets off the  
behavior?  
Let's look at the activities and the  
schedule?**

**What is the function of this  
behavior?  
Does he want attention? Does he  
want to avoid something? Does he  
get something when he does this?**

**I can help Mrs. Brown understand  
what's going on...She'll be able to  
handle this.**



Back to the story.....

Observations in the classroom

## **Summary of Observations**

The following describes a typical sequence of events that occurred in one of several observations in the classroom. Joey enters the classroom, dropped off by his mother. He reluctantly says “goodbye”, but then hangs up his coat and proceeds to the mat along with the other children. Once the children are settled and the bell rings, Mrs. Brown claps her hands several times to get the children’s attention. She then introduces and reads a story called “All About Me”. Joey appears attentive throughout the story. He wriggles a bit on the mat, but is not disruptive. Dr. McKee notices that when it is question and answer time Joey’s hand is up a lot and when called upon he gives some very insightful answers. No problem behaviors were observed, and in fact, compared to other students Joey appeared to be very engaged in the learning task.

## **Observations Continued**

Mrs. Brown then introduces the journal activity for the day. She tells the students they will be making their own books “All About Me”. She writes the title on a flip chart. She explains that today the students are to make their title page, copying the words “All About Me” and their name onto the title page and drawing a picture of themselves.

She instructs the students to move to their work stations.

## **Observations Continued**

Students sit in small groups of 3 – 4 around tables. Joey has been placed at his own table (as Mrs. Brown is concerned about the impact of his disruptive behavior on other students). He sits at his table, looking back and forth from his blank page to the words written on the flip chart. He begins to trace the word “All” in the air. Then he takes his pencil, using a fist-like grip, and attempts to write the title. The “A” is unrecognizable. He erases it and again looks intently at the words on the flip chart. He begins again, and this time makes a whole in the paper with his pencil from pressing so hard. He clenches his fists, grimaces, and then grabs his cover sheet and rips it to bits. He yells “ I hate this \*\*##\* school”.

## **Observations Continued**

Mrs. Brown, who had been at another table helping some students, turns to Joey. “Joey, that is very inappropriate behavior”, she states. “I hate you too you ##\*\*\*# teacher” Joey yells. “OK Joey, time to go to your cubby to think about the kind of language we use in this classroom! When you have calmed down you can come back and re-do your title page.” Joey takes the title page (in bits) along with his pencil and throws it across the room. He then runs to the cubby room, covers himself in his coat and huddles in a ball. After a few minutes Joey opens up his lunch kit and begins to eat his lunch. He remains silently in the cubby room for a long time.

## **Observations Continued**

Journal period ends. The teacher announces that it is now free choice time. Joey runs out of the cubby room and heads for the block center. “Oh no, Joey”, says Mrs. Brown, “Before you have any free time, you have your title page to complete.” Joey yells “I really hate you...you dumb teacher!” and he kicks over the block area. A block hits a girl on the back. “OK Joey, that’s it, I’m calling Mr. Kinsley to take you to the office to talk about this behavior.” Joey’s behavior escalates and he continues to scream obscenities at the teacher and kick the wall.

Soon a male teaching assistant arrives. Joey is physically removed from the classroom.

Unfortunately, other observations followed a similar pattern.



# Functional Behavioral Assessment

A decorative graphic on the left side of the slide consists of a light green vertical bar, a white rounded rectangle overlapping it, and a dark blue horizontal bar below the title.

# Functional Behavioral Assessment

- 1. What do the problem behaviors look like?**
- 2. What appears to set off the problem behavior?**
- 3. What function does the behavior serve?**
- 4. What are the setting events for the behavior?**

Back to the story.....

Functional Behavioral  
Assessment

## **Summary of the Functional Assessment and Positive Behavior Support Plan**

Dr. McKee and Mrs. Brown met to discuss his observations, and to try to figure out what Joey was communicating by his behaviors, what might be precipitating the problems, what the function of the behaviors might be, and how to develop a positive support plan for Joey that would likely decrease the problem behaviors. They invited Joey's mother to participate in all of the meetings regarding her son.

## **Functional Assessment Continued**

They identified several problem behaviors in the classroom: Joey used inappropriate language, appeared disrespectful of the teacher, disrupted journal time and free play time, kicked walls and toys, and did not complete his work. Joey's mother was surprised to hear about how disruptive her son had become in the classroom. Apparently he did not behave this way at home, although he had commented to his mother that he "hated school" because it was "too hard" and the teacher was "mean". As for the swearing, Joey's mother shared that her older son and his friends who were 12 years old, sometimes used this kind of language especially when she was out of earshot and she concluded that this is where it had been learned.

# What do the problem behaviors look like?

- Inappropriate Language
- Disrespectful of the teacher
- Disruptions
- Kicking Walls and Toys
- Not completing “written” work

## **Functional Assessment Continued**

After several observations and conversations they realized that what seems to set Joey off was the journal writing or any pencil and paper task. Joey was consistently on-task, interested and also appeared cognitively capable during the circle time, but his behavior escalated when he was faced with fine-motor and written output tasks that appeared to be too difficult for him. He did not know how to ask for help in an appropriate way and appeared to become frustrated with his own inabilities to complete the task. Contrary to Mrs. Brown's initial thoughts, Joey did not seem to be "unmotivated" to learn. He seemed to be trying very hard to accomplish the task (e.g., tracing letters in the air), but became overwhelmed when faced with repeated failure. In addition, when given teacher reprimands his behavior escalated.

# What appears to set off the problem behavior?

- Journal writing
- Paper and pencil tasks
- Fine motor and written output tasks
- Difficulty copying from model
- Tasks “too difficult”-- repeated failures
- Teacher reprimands



## **Functional Assessment Continued**

They also noticed that on many days Joey would eat his lunch when he was sent to the cubby room. Joey's mother confirmed that sometimes Joey didn't have time to eat breakfast in the morning, and they realized that he was probably hungry on these days. When they reviewed some recent incidents, they realized that on the days when Joey was hungry his behavior was particularly difficult.

So what was Joey trying to communicate by his behavior?

They agreed that Joey appears to be using his behavior to escape or avoid difficult written output tasks as well as teacher reprimands.

# What function does the behavior serve?

- Escape or avoid difficult tasks
- Escape teacher reprimands

# What are the setting events for the behavior?

- Skips breakfast, comes to school hungry



# Positive Behavior Support Plan

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**Putting All the Pieces  
Together**



# Positive Behavior Support Plan

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- 1. Setting Event Strategies**
- 2. Predictor Strategies**
- 3. Teaching Strategies**
- 4. Consequence Strategies**

Back to the story.....

A New Understanding of Joey's  
Behavior

## **Positive Support Plan**

As a result of all components of the analysis they thought about a positive support plan.

To begin with, Joey's mother agreed to send extra food with Joey and Mrs. Brown introduced an early snack period that would allow all children the opportunity to eat early in the morning if hungry.



# Setting Event Strategies

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- Extra food from home
- Early snack period



## **Positive Behavior Support Plan Continued**

They looked at the types of assignments that appeared difficult and realized they all had written output and visual copying demands. Mrs. Brown adapted these types of assignments for Joey. For example, they realized that Joey needed help with developing a proper pencil grip and fine motor coordination. They referred to the occupational therapist to get help with a skill development program. They let him use a larger pencil with a ball in the middle to facilitate his printing. Rather than expecting Joey to copy words from a flip chart, Mrs. Brown gave Joey his own copy of the words to place beside his page, sometimes let him trace over words printed in dot form, or had him work cooperatively with a peer. Because they realized that Joey had a very good vocabulary and good oral language, sometimes Mrs. Brown scribed Joey's ideas allowing him to "write" more interesting stories that were not so discrepant from his language abilities.



# Predictor Strategies

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- Adapted task requirements
- Necessary skill development
- Adapted equipment
- Provide cooperative learning tasks
- Provide preventive assistance with difficult tasks
- Change seating arrangement

## **Positive Behavior Support Plan Continued**

They also agreed that Joey needed to learn some ways to ask for help before getting frustrated. They decided that initially Mrs. Brown would keep a close eye on Joey to watch for signs of frustration and would intervene early to provide assistance before he became overwhelmed. They decided that Mrs. Brown would give Joey lots of positive praise at every attempt he made to do the work and she would also reinforce him for asking for help. They decided to teach Joey to ask a peer for help if the teacher was busy, and this was facilitated by changing Joey's seating so that he was at a table with a helpful peer who was also a good role model.



# Teaching Strategies

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- Teach Joey to ask for assistance from teacher
- Teach strategies for seeking peer assistance
- Teach alternative de-escalating sequence (acceptable escape/calming plan)

## **Positive Behavior Support Plan Continued**

They realized that there would still be times when Joey would need to escape if he became overwhelmed and they wanted to allow for this in an acceptable way, rather than yelling, screaming and kicking. Joey's mother shared that whenever he was upset at home he would retreat to his room, curl up in his bean bag chair and squish playdoh. Joey's mother had realized that Joey was a sensitive child that needed to take some space at times and had always allowed for this, thus avoiding any escalating behaviors as had been occurring in the classroom. Mrs. Brown decided to set up a little "time away" area in the classroom where Joey and any other student could choose to go to if they needed to calm down. Joey would be prepared for this choice. It was also agreed that if Joey became too upset because the work was too hard, he would not be further punished by being denied access to the free choice time. In fact, at the first sign of appropriate behavior after an episode of a "meltdown", Joey would receive lots of positive praise from his teacher.



# Consequence Strategies

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- Reinforce re-entry to classroom activities
- Frequent praise for doing work
- Provide assistance when requested
- Reinforce efforts to seek assistance
- Redirect to alternate escape
- Reinforce use of alternate escape
- Reinforce use of new skills

## **Positive Behavior Support Plan Continued**

By reframing Mrs. Brown's initial understanding of Joey's behavior through the functional analysis a positive behavior support plan was developed. The focus shifted from pathologizing the child and family to manipulating the environment, teaching replacement skills and focusing on positive reinforcement that would lead to long term change and success for Joey. This new understanding also had a positive impact on Mrs. Brown. She no longer felt frustrated and hopeless about her inability to change a child labeled, perhaps as "oppositional and defiant", but now felt more hopeful that she had control to change Joey's behavior by using her skills as a teacher and by altering the environment.

**I hadn't thought about a fine-motor problem! No wonder he was frustrated!**

**Joey must have felt awful, wanting to do the work but not being able to!**





**He does have potential!**

**Rearranging a few things  
has really made a  
difference, both for Joey  
and for me!**





**I can teach this  
child!**

**This feels good!**