

HOW DO I KNOW IF THIS IS WORKING?

GOAL

Understand ways to measure behavior and the common variability in behavior so you can make informed decisions about when it's time to try something new.

BACKGROUND

Consistently utilizing interventions that don't come naturally to you puts a strain on your time and patience. You started this journey to help your child and improve some specific challenging behavior.

Now it's time to ask yourself whether you should continue on the path you're on or change interventions? How do you know if what you're doing is actually working?

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT THE BEHAVIOR

To find out if what you're doing is actually working, you must measure the behavior both before and during your intervention. In ABA, we call this data collection. You can measure behavior in a variety of ways.

- How often does the behavior happen?
- How often does the behavior occur over a specific period of time?
- How long does the behavior last?
- How intense is the behavior?

The more information you collect, the fuller picture you have of the behavior, but you need a system that is easy for you to keep up with.

CHOOSING A DATA COLLECTION METHOD

The right data collection method measures the important aspect of behavior and is easy for you to use. Choose a method of measuring the behavior by asking these questions:

WHAT DO YOU WANT TO KNOW ABOUT THE BEHAVIOR?

Data is only useful if it measures the important aspect of the behavior you're interested in.

DOES THE BEHAVIOR FREQUENTLY START AND STOP?

Some behaviors have a clear stop and start while others seem to speed up and slow down over a period of time.

DOES THE BEHAVIOR TEND TO LAST FOR A LONG PERIOD OF TIME?

Some behaviors happen in a split second and others occur over a period of time.

WOULD THE BEHAVIOR BE MORE ACCEPTABLE IF IT WAS LESS INTENSE?

Not all challenging behaviors need to be stopped. Some are more appropriate when they are less intense.

WHAT IS YOUR COMFORT LEVEL WITH COLLECTING DATA?

A data collection method is only helpful in making informed decisions if you use it.

Method	Example Behaviors
Frequency	Biting, slamming doors, throwing objects, climbing on a table
Rate	Jumping from a shelf, kicking another person, interrupting someone talking
Duration	Tantrums, crying, screaming, running
Likert Scale	Screaming, rough play, hitting an arm to get someone's attention

TYPES OF DATA

Each data type measures a different aspect of behavior and can be appropriate for different types of behaviors

You might choose to collect frequency data for behaviors that don't occur throughout the entire day or that occur in spurts during the day. Rate data is better for behaviors that occur at moderate frequencies throughout the day. Both methods are good for behaviors that have a discrete start and stop. It's easy to see when they begin and end. Especially if they take a short period of time, even a fraction of a second, to complete.

Collecting duration data is useful for behaviors that don't have a discrete beginning and end. That is, it's hard to see when it actually starts and stops. These behaviors also may continue over a period of time which could be minutes or even hours. For example, when a child begins crying, you might not realize that the whining that led into it was the start of an episode of actual crying. The child might slow down or even briefly stop crying then start again in a matter of moments. It can be hard to see when the behavior will actually be finished.

A Likert scale measures the intensity of a behavior on a scale of 1-5 or even 1-10. Since this measure is somewhat subjective, meaning not everyone would assign the same intensity level, it's usually best to use this method along with one of the other methods listed. A Likert scale is best for measuring behaviors that are more acceptable when they occur at lower intensities.

FREQUENCY AND RATE

Counting behavior

For frequency or rate data, you might choose to use simple tally marks on a sheet of paper or white board. You could use a counter app on your phone or you could move coins or beads from one pocket to another. Any way that you can count the number of times the behavior happens will work for these data. To turn frequency data into rate, simply count the behavior over some period of time such as per hour or per day.

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DURATION

Measuring how long behavior lasts

For duration data, you need access to a clock or stopwatch. Many smart watches have stopwatches built in or you can use one on your phone. Simply track how long the behavior continues each time he engages in it. You will then need to record how long the behavior lasted. Again, you can do this on paper or in an app on your phone.

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LIKERT SCALE

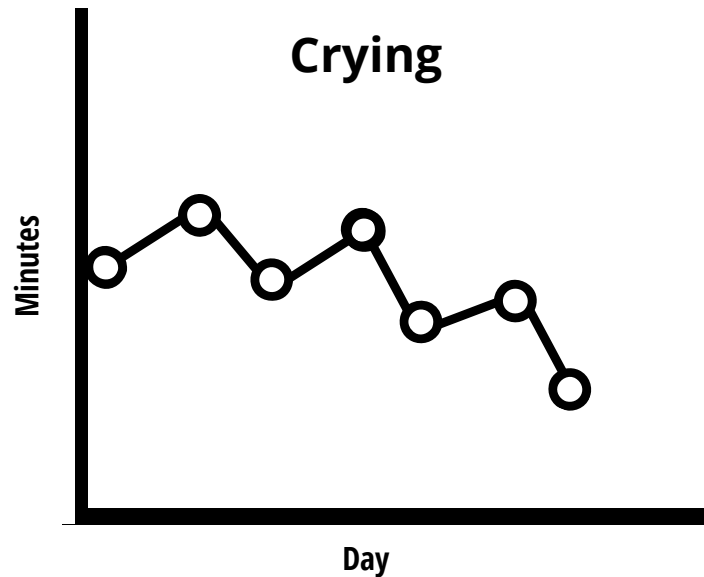
Measuring intensity of behavior

When recording the intensity of a behavior on a Likert scale, you simply need to write the behavior down and then rate the intensity on a scale of 1-5. This method also gives you a frequency of the behavior by counting the number of ratings if you rate the behavior each time it occurs.

Behavior	Likert Scale				
	1	2	3	4	5
	Least intense				Most intense

WHICH DATA COLLECTION METHOD MAKES THE MOST SENSE TO YOU?

SEEING CHANGE IN THE DATA



Behavior changes gradually over time

Once you collect the data, the best way to see changes in your child's behavior is by graphing the data. Your BCBA can graph it for you unless you are using a data collection app that will generate the graph automatically. Most graphing is done in apps or online programs, but spreadsheets are also easy ways to quickly see changes in behavior. This graph shows the change in the duration of crying over a 7 day period.

Variability in behavior

Your child's behavior fluctuates from day to day. Here are a few things to keep in mind.

Behavior often gets worse before it gets better. Your child might act out because you change the way you respond to his behavior. This is normal and not a sign that the plan won't work.

Also, once behavior improves, it's possible old behaviors will come back. Your child might engage in an old behavior to see if he can get the result he got in the past. Again, this is not a sign that the intervention isn't working. You just need to stick to the plan and stay consistent.

Your BCBA will let you know if it's time to try something else.





BEHAVIOR CHANGE TAKES TIME

Behavior change happens gradually over time. Collecting and graphing data helps us see if the interventions are working and when it might be time to try a new strategy.

Images are of models for demonstration purposes and do not depict children with autism.