CONTEXT OF BEHAVIOR

GOAL

Begin to understand how the context of a behavior, the events directly surrounding it, can make a behavior more or less likely to occur.

BACKGROUND

Children, and many adults, can't tell us why they do something, and often the reason a behavior continues isn't obvious. To understand why behavior occurs, we look at the context that surrounds the behavior.

In ABA, we call this the ABCs.. This stands for antecedent, behavior and consequence.

IT'S ALL ABOUT THE DATA

Often the individuals who benefit from the support of ABA therapy experience the world differently. It can be difficult to understand why they engage in a behavior because their perception of their environment is different from ours.

For this reason, ABA professionals use data to make decisions about treatment. By collecting data, practitioners can view behavior objectively, without the bias of their own experiences and perceptions.

As a parent or caregiver, you can use these same strategies. It can feel cumbersome at first but it's worth the effort. We'll even show you some tricks along the way!
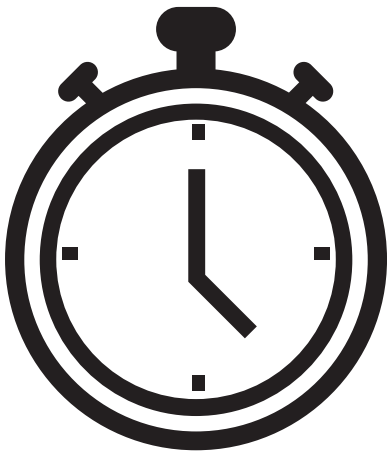
THE CONTEXT

ANTECEDENT

Happens +/- 30 seconds BEFORE a behavior.

Often referred to as the trigger. The antecedent is observable, but it may not be obvious.

Common antecedents include:
- Giving a demand
- Restricted attention
- Restricted access to desired items
- Unstructured time
- Transitions

BEHAVIOR

The behavior you want to learn more about.

It may be desired, as in a behavior you want to occur more frequently; or undesired, as in a behavior you want to occur less frequently.

In ABA we are careful to define the behavior objectively, avoiding placing judgments such as emotions. For example, when defining a tantrum or an outburst, we avoid using the term "mad" such as "Rebecca gets mad." Instead we include what the behavior looks like (what you see), which could be "Rebecca throws herself on the floor and kicks her feet."

Common behaviors include:
- Tantrums
- Aggression
- Refusal (noncompliance)
- Following directions
- Eloping
- Flopping

THE CONTEXT

CONSEQUENCE

Happens +/- 30 seconds AFTER a behavior.

When you hear the word "consequence" it might bring to mind some form of punishment, like time out. However, a consequence isn't necessarily an artificial consequence intentionally applied by someone else. It may be a natural result of an action, or something an individual does without thought, such as giving your child a hug when she appears upset. The consequence is observable, but may not be obvious.

Common consequences include:
- Offering a choice
- Reprimand
- Reward
- Remove item
- Discussion
- Ignoring behavior

SETTING EVENTS

Happens BEFORE a behavior but could be hours or even days prior.

In addition to the ABCs, we also consider setting events. A setting event sometimes impacts behavior. It's something that occurs before a behavior but more remotely than an antecedent. Some setting events are within your control but others are not.

Common setting events include:
- Change in medication
- Lack of sleep
- Hunger
- Change in routine
- Presence or absence of a specific person

HOW DOES IT WORK?

WRITE IT DOWN!

So, how can you use the context of the behavior to understand it? You'll begin by writing it down. Collecting ABC or SABC data allows you to take an objective look at the context of behavior and look for patterns.

There are many ways for you to do this. The images here depict two common options. Either write in what occurred or use a form with check boxes to more quickly record what happened. You can download data sheets from our Resources page:

https://masteraba.com/pt-resources/.

Setting Event	Antecedent	Behavior	Consequence

Setting Event	Antecedent	Behavior	Consequence
☐ Hungry ☐ Tired ☐ Person Present ☐ Change Medication ☐ Change in Routine ☐	☐ Demand ☐ Item Restricted ☐ Attention Reduced ☐ Unstructured Time ☐ Transition ☐	☐ Tantrum ☐ Eloping ☐ Flopping ☐ Refusal ☐ Aggression ☐	☐ Offered Choice ☐ Reprimand ☐ Discussion ☐ Removed Item ☐ Ignored ☐

HOW TO COLLECT DATA

The form with the empty boxes allows for a more complete documentation of events surrounding the behavior you want to learn more about. Simply write in exactly what happened before (antecedent) and after (consequence) the behavior. Also document any potential setting events that potentially impacted the behavior. This form requires more time to fill in and analyze than the form with checkboxes and may consequently result in less frequent data collection.

Setting Event	Antecedent	Behavior	Consequence

The data sheet with checkboxes allows for quick documentation of behavioral events. Simply check off what happened. The limited number of choices makes analyzing the data simple. Easily count the number of occurrences for each option to determine which occurs most frequently. You'll learn more about how to use this data in a future lesson.

Setting Event	Antecedent	Behavior	Consequence
☐ Hungry	☐ Demand	☐ Tantrum	☐ Offered Choice
☐ Tired	☐ Item Restricted	☐ Eloping	☐ Reprimand
☐ Person Present	☐ Attention Reduced	☐ Flopping	☐ Discussion
☐ Change Medication	☐ Unstructured Time	☐ Refusal	☐ Removed Item
☐ Change in Routine	☐ Transition	☐ Aggression	☐ Ignored
☐	☐	☐	☐