



# CAPTAIN X Newsletter

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## Spring Edition

April is National Autism Awareness Month! This represents an excellent opportunity to promote autism awareness, autism acceptance and to continue the fight to ensure all individuals receive Evidence Based interventions to achieve the highest level of independence and quality of life. With this in mind, Captain X has chosen to focus on "Self-Advocacy" to highlight the importance of using current EBPs to achieve a higher quality of life and greater level of independence.

Depending on his/her age and ability, self-advocacy can mean anything from communicating preferences in the home (e.g. letting you know he'd rather have an apple than an orange for a snack) to letting an employer know that he needs a reasonable workplace accommodation (e.g., a change in workspace lighting).

Our Spring Newsletter highlights Functional Communication Training (FCT) and Functional Behavior Assessments (FBA) as tools that can help in developing self-advocacy skills. FCT is an excellent method to teach empowering communication skills. FBAs are an effective tool used in guiding self-advocacy interventions. FBAs allow us to identify the problem so targeted interventions can be implemented.

### Improving Self Advocacy Skills

- **Practice how to disclose their autism:** Teach your child safe people to disclose their specific needs to. This may include teachers, disability advocates, or employers, depending on your child's particular situation.
- **Practice when to disclose their needs:** It's important to help your child learn that self-advocacy is important, but there is a time and a place for full disclosure. Teach your child to request his needs, but not to over-share.
- **Teach the individual with autism how to articulate their strengths and weaknesses:** Ask your child to try and identify his strengths and weaknesses first. Then provide him with additional examples and how they impact his life on a daily or long-term basis. Remember to stress that everyone has strengths and weaknesses and that the more self-aware you are, the greater opportunity you have for growth.



# Functional Communication Training (FCT)

## What is FCT?

FCT is an evidence-based practice for children and youth with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) from 3 to 22 years old. Some learners with ASD display inappropriate, maladaptive, and even aggressive behaviors towards others and themselves. Often, these behaviors stem from difficulties with communication, leading to unexpected and often undesirable methods to obtain certain wants, needs, and interests. FCT addresses these interfering behaviors by systematically identifying the function of the behavior and providing a replacement behavior in the form of appropriate communication that enables the learner to get his or her needs met in a more acceptable way.

## Parents' Corner

### Why use FCT with my child?

- FCT is helpful for learners with social communication deficits and challenging behaviors, because it provides a more acceptable form of communication to achieve the same desired outcome.
- Some of the problematic behaviors that can be addressed by FCT include aggression and self-injurious behaviors, tantrums, running away, and/or disruption.

### What activities can I do at home?

- Think about challenging behaviors your child exhibits as a form of communication and try to identify other ways to communicate that need.
- When trying to develop an alternative way for your child to communicate a need (such as requesting a favorite toy), think of the simplest and easiest way to do that. For example, can the child learn to point to a picture of the desired toy?
- Remember to praise or provide reinforcement when your child uses a more appropriate form of communication to get his or her needs met.

## Steps for Implementing

### 1. Plan:

- Identify an interfering behavior appropriate for FCT (i.e., screaming).
- Determine the function of the interfering behavior through Functional Behavior Assessment (i.e., what is the child trying to obtain or avoid/escape by screaming?).
- Choose a replacement communicative behavior (i.e., a more appropriate way to obtain or avoid/escape.)
- Ensure all team members are familiar with the replacement communicative behavior.
- Gather and organize supporting materials.

### 2. Use:

- Teach the use of the replacement communicative behavior using a most to least prompting hierarchy (i.e., provide the maximum assistance needed at first and then gradually provide less help).
- Reinforce/praise when the child attempts to use or uses the more appropriate replacement communicative behavior.
- Remove the reinforcement for the interfering behavior (for example, do not provide a toy if the child screams in order to obtain it).
- Teach the child to use the appropriate replacement behavior with a variety of people and in different settings (generalization).

### 3. Monitor:

- Collect data on the interfering behavior and learner's replacement communicative behavior.
- Determine next steps based on the learner's progress.

# Functional Behavior Assessment (FBA)

## What is an FBA?

FBA is an evidence-based practice that will assist the IEP team in understanding the function or purpose of a specific interfering behavior.

## What is a Behavior Intervention Plan?

A behavior intervention plan is developed in the school setting when a student is demonstrating behaviors that impede the learning of self or others. A behavior intervention plan is developed to identify behavior interventions to remediate these behaviors.

However, when the reason for exhibiting these behaviors are unclear, a functional behavior assessment (FBA) is necessary. An FBA, like all other assessments in special education requires parent consent through an assessment plan and the assessor has 60 days to conduct the assessment.

## Steps for Implementing

### 1. Plan:

- Establish a multidisciplinary team.
- Identify and define interfering behavior.
- Review records of learner.
- Select assessment procedures.
- Develop a plan for collecting baseline data.

### 2. Use:

- Collect data using selected assessment procedures
- Collect data on the occurrence of the interfering behavior (A-B-C behavior analysis).
- Analyze collected data.
- Develop a hypothesis statement.
- Test hypothesis to ensure it is correct.
- Identify appropriate EBPs to address interfering behavior.
- Develop behavior intervention plan (BIP) with strategies for increasing replacement behaviors and learning opportunities.

### 3. Monitor:

- Collect data on the interfering behavior and learner's replacement behavior(s) to determine if BIP is working.
- Determine next steps based on the learner's progress.

## Three methods of data collection:

FBA is an evidence-based practice that will assist the IEP team in understanding the function or purpose of a specific interfering behavior.

1. **Review of Records** - records will be reviewed to determine history of behavior and previous interventions utilized and effectiveness of previous interventions.
2. **Interviews** – information from pertinent school staff will be gathered. These may include teachers, instructional assistants, service providers, parents, ABA home program staff and sometimes the students themselves.
3. **Observations** - often times is the most time-consuming part of the assessment. But, in order to be thorough and comprehensive, the student should be observed across all subjects, classroom, and outside of the classroom and when with service providers.

# Tips for Professionals

## Functional Communication Training (FCT)

- Stereotypic behaviors are often NOT targeted by FCT, as they might not serve a clear communicative function, but problematic associated with repetitive behaviors can still be addressed using FCT.
- Use an FBA to guide the selection of an appropriate replacement communicative behavior that will fulfill the same function as the interfering behavior.
- The first form of the replacement communicative behavior should be as simple and low effort as possible for the learner to use effectively.

## Functional Behavior Assessment (FBA)

- Select one person as the FBA coordinator who will coordinate data collection, answer team questions and ensure FBA is implemented as intended.
- If the learner is demonstrating multiple interfering behaviors, select the interfering behavior which creates a safety concern to address first.
- Collect data on the interfering behavior during various times and settings.