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20th June 2024

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23rd June 2024

„Making sense of behavior”

Making Sense of Behavior

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That's weird;
must be
autistic.



There seems to be a presumption that if behavior of someone with disabilities is weird

- It must be part of a diagnosis
- It can have little or no meaning
- It is out of the child's control

Diagnoses Piled On

- Autism
- ADHD
- OCD
- Tourette
- Etc.



Problems with these Diagnoses

- Create a reality that may not exist
- Lack explanatory value
- Ignore the uniqueness of the behavior
- Lead to multiple drug treatments

What is the difference?



•Behavior is learned

•Behavior is chosen



Behavior is chosen

- Think about the behavior of your child
 - What is the purpose?
 - What is the communication?
- Ask yourself what is functional about the behavior? How does it help them?
- Ask yourself why your child is willing to accept the consequences?
- Behavior is often the creative solution the child develops to cope with their situation.

All behavior has a purpose



Key Points



Behavior has meaning. Once the purpose of the behavior is understood, the behavior can make sense.



Behavior is a form of communication and needs to be "read" to understand its meaning.



Trying to change behavior without first understanding it can be ineffective and even damaging to the child.



Behavior can be the creative means by which a child is able to function.

We have to observe very carefully

To see what the child is doing.

To see what the behavior is doing for the child.

To understand what it may be communicating.

One way to do this is to imagine what the child is saying.

Justin: 9-year-old with CHARGE

When Justin is touched, he often hits.

- I hate surprises, therefore,...
- I don't like being touched,...
- I wanted to acknowledge your presence,...
- I like you very much,...
- I need more warning before you approach me,...
- I have been touched too much and I cannot tolerate it anymore,...
- I was telling you that I'm ready for work,...
- I was asking you to come back later,...

Understanding Justin

How do you know what he was communicating?

- A. Look for patterns
 - A. How often, where, when, with whom
- B. Decide how to respond
 - A. How we respond is communication to Justin
- C. Justin's behavior and how we respond forms a communication system
 - A. Communication builds relationship
 - B. Communication builds trust



It is a communication relationship

- Behavior is the foundation for building communication
- Communication develops in the context of relationship
- Our response to behavior is part of a communication event
- What does our response communicate to the child?
- Think about what you want your response to say, keeping in mind the goal of communication
- Think about how you are responding



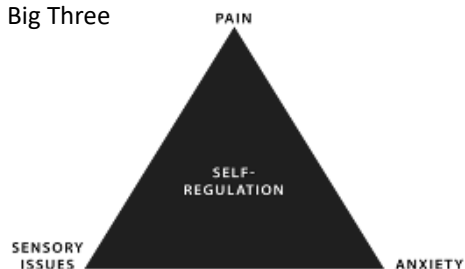
Stress

- Unpredictable environment
- Communication frustration
- Lack of sense of control or agency
- Dysregulated arousal
- Interpersonal challenges



(Nelson & Ivy)

The Big Three



Pain: Jacob's ear



Why pain is so important

- Can affect normal brain and neurological development
- Can affect sleep
- Can interfere with exploration of the environment and learning
- Can interfere with the development of attachment and trust
- Once tolerated may be ignored even while it is affecting health and behavior





Sensory processing problems

- Frequently occurring in genetic syndromes
- Exacerbated by sensory impairments
- Associated with anxiety and OCD
- Even incidental sensory events may overload the child
- May lead to sensory self-stimulation
- Need to intervene very carefully to avoid meltdowns



What could our kids possibly have to be anxious about?



We like to know what is going on.

- What are we doing right now?
- What are we going to do next?
- What did we just do?



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When we are not sure...

- We become anxious
- We engage in behavior which expresses our feelings
- We engage in behavior or activities that help us feel more secure



Thinking about behavior

- Is it due to pain?
- Are the sensory systems over or underloaded?
- Is the person anxious?

Self-Regulation Challenges: Plane Travel



Self-regulation begins with a goal



- What do you want to have happen?
- What must you do to make it happen?

Self-regulation of pain

- Pain anxiety and pain catastrophizing
- Tension, distress, nervousness, irritability
- The role of stress

- Changing one's thoughts and expectations
- Meditation
- Distraction



This is self-regulation of sensory systems



Self-regulation of anxiety

- Making life more regulated
 - Routine
 - Predictability



If this was easy

- I would have nothing to talk about.
- There would be no behavior problems.
- You could all go home and fix it.
- Patience, persistence, and the courage to be imperfect required.



Thanks to my Lab

