



# IDENTIFYING AND UNDERSTANDING WHY BEHAVIOR OCCURS

## *WORKSHEET 3.1 in PFS Course Workbook*

This worksheet can be used to support you and your children to move toward more constructive solutions for future challenges. The suggestions below will help you understand, evaluate and motivate your children toward more acceptable behavior even during stressful situations. Remember if certain needs were not met by behaving in particular ways, then kids would stop behaving in those ways.

“Behavior” is a powerful way of communicating our feelings and our needs. Even without using words, the behavior alone effectively communicates both personal and complex feelings and thoughts (sometimes even before we realize that this is what we are thinking and feeling). This can include messages such as: “I’m scared,” “I am feeling unimportant,” “I’m lonely,” “I’m bored,” “I’m jealous,” “I need you to notice me.”

### **The Pillars for Success program will teach you that:**

- I.** There are only three universal needs that trigger behaviors:
  1. Attention
  2. Basic survival needs (safety, warmth, hunger)
  3. Control and power over a situation
- II.** It is possible to identify the triggers that result in challenging and/or defiant behavior.
- III.** Behaviors are weakened or strengthened by the responses that precede and follow them.
- IV.** Behavior helps a person to get his needs met regardless of age.
- V.** Behavior can also occur to avoid or escape something unpleasant or try to overcome a wide variety of unhappy outcomes (i.e. penalties, embarrassment, pain, fear, loneliness, feeling insignificant, or loss of a toy or other valued possession).



- VI.** Challenging behaviors do not occur without cause; there are ALWAYS explanations for behavior even if we are unaware of them. There is a direct connection between challenging behavior and how the child/youth is feeling. The problem is not how the child/youth is feeling. The problem is that how he is feeling affects his behavior and he may not recognize why the behavior is happening and neither do the adults in his life.
- VII.** "Misbehavior" might actually be adaptive (and intended to meet a justifiable and understandable need). "Misbehavior" is actually a coping mechanism as the child tries to take care of his own needs and feelings the only way he knows how. For example, if a child feels he is not getting the attention he wants then he may choose to display behavior that draws attention to him. If a child feels that his cherished toy is being threatened, he may strike out physically to establish "power and control."

**VIII.**

The triggers for behaviors can often be identified. What happens as a result of the behavior should be examined to see which needs the behavior fulfills. Is the purpose of the behavior to get attention, satisfy a basic survival need, or to gain control and power over a situation? Or perhaps all three?

Challenging behavior can simultaneously serve more than one of the three major needs. The goal is to determine why the behavior is occurring and to help the child recognize and meet that need in acceptable ways. Ask yourself, "What does the child control, receive, or avoid as a result of the behavior?"

In order to better understand behavior, identify the areas below. With this information, you will know enough to respond to challenging behavior in a way that allows the child to deal with events and feelings more directly and effectively.

**DESCRIPTION OF THE PROBLEM BEHAVIOR:**

Can you "see" what the child is doing? Is he throwing a tantrum, screaming, jumping up and down? Has he been crying for longer than a couple of minutes, or is he showing aggressive behavior with other children, adults, or even pets?

**FREQUENCY, DURATION, AND INTENSITY:**

Statement of how often, how long, and how intense the behavior is on a scale of 1-10. (1 = mild and 10 = severe). An example of a behavior rating might be: 1-3 x/day for 10 minutes at a level 6.



### **TRIGGERS:**

Description of the signs that predict the behavior, which can include a number of variables, such as situation, the people involved, and any related details. Is the behavior more likely to occur at a certain time of day or in a specific location? Does it happen when something changes in the child's life? Be sure you are using behavioral terms to describe triggers.

### **FUNCTION:**

Statement of what the child is trying to accomplish with the behavior. Examples include trying to get something, trying to avoid something, attempting to escape punishment, trying to protest something he doesn't like, or trying to establish control over any given situation. It may also be due to hunger, need for safety, or seeking attention.

### **REPLACEMENT BEHAVIOR:**

Statement of the behavior that is preferred over the challenging behavior. What choices are acceptable for the child to meet his needs, whether it is attention, basic survival, control and power, or some combination of the three? Be sure this is stated in **behavioral terms**.

### **ENVIRONMENTAL CHANGES:**

Supports needed to teach and establish the replacement behavior. How can the situation be restructured to reduce triggers? How will the child be taught to use the more appropriate behavior to get his needs met? What changes are needed to support the new behavior?

### **REINFORCERS (REWARDS):**

Consider the child: what type of encouragement, activities, objects, or foods are attractive enough to the child to be used as effective rewards to reinforce positive behaviors? How often will these rewards be given? These special privileges and treats should only be given when the child displays the replacement behavior.

Once you have figured out what is causing the behavior, how will you respond to the child at the earliest signs of the problem behavior? More importantly, how will you respond to the child's needs to avoid those behaviors completely **BEFORE** they occur?



## Behavioral Assessment Adult Worksheet

Description of the behavior that is disruptive or challenging

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How frequently does it occur, for how long, and how intense is the behavior?

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What is happening before the behavior occurs? (Triggers)

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What purpose does the behavior serve? (Think of the three basic needs.)

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What would you like the child to do instead? (Replacement behavior)

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What do you need to do or create to motivate the child to choose an acceptable behavior?  
(Environmental changes, supports)

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How are you going to reward the desired behavior? (Reinforcers)

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Strategies to be used if the behavior occurs again:

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