



Functional Communication Training (FCT)

FCT can teach your child how to communicate their needs and wants. This flyer explains how to use FCT with your child.

What is Functional Communication Training?

Functional Communication Training (FCT) is used to teach your child an appropriate way to communicate what they need or want (their desired outcome). It is based on the fact that most behavior communicates a message. Problem behaviors, like throwing an object, are a type of nonverbal communication used to ask for what a child wants or needs. For example, a child may scream in order to get attention or to avoid doing work.

How do I use FCT?

For FCT to be successful, you will need to follow these important steps:

1) Find out why the problem behavior is taking place

A functional analysis of a problem behavior is done first to find out the reason(s) why the problem behavior is taking place.

There may be a number of messages that your child's behavior is communicating. The purpose of the message can be placed in one of these categories:

- To get something positive, like attention, a pleasurable activity or a food item.
- To get out of something that is unwanted, like work or adult requests.

2) Teach an appropriate way to communicate needs.

After you find out the reason for the problem behavior, your child should be taught to use an appropriate way to communicate that will give them the same outcome as the problem behavior..

Here are 2 examples:

- Teaching your child to ask, "Am I doing good work?" instead of using disruptive behavior to get attention.
- Teaching the statement, or sign, "stop" or "break" instead of using aggression to get out of doing a work task.

By using an appropriate statement, your child can get the same result as they did for being disruptive.

3) Choose a communication system for your child

Words, pictures, gestures, or other alternative communication systems may be used. The type of communication system you use depends on your child's ability to use it, how easy it is to use, and the likelihood that others will respond to it. The communication system must be used as part of your child's overall program. At first, you will use direct instruction to teach your child the communication system. Each time your child uses the appropriate way to communicate their needs, they should be rewarded by getting what they want.

4) Ignore or correct the problem behavior

The problem behavior should never lead to what your child wants or needs. For example, your child should only get attention from you when they use the communication system, not when they display problem behaviors. Your child will learn to get what they want by using the appropriate replacement behaviors.

What are the benefits of FCT?

- Your child will learn that appropriate communication leads to

consistent and positive results.

- Your child is an active participant in treatment and is in control of when they get what they need or want.
- FCT focuses on developing and maintaining appropriate behavior and decreasing problem behavior.

What else do we need to consider?

- Over time, your child will have different needs and wants to communicate. You will need to continue to assess your child's desired outcomes.
- At first, your child will need to have their desired outcome given to them every time they communicate appropriately. This can be time consuming for parents, teachers, and other care providers. But, it is important so that your child can learn that when they communicate appropriately they get what they want or need.
- As the relationship between appropriate communication and desired outcome is strengthened, you can start to delay your child's desired outcome.

Resources Communication-based intervention for problem behavior: A user's guide for producing positive behavior change. Carr, E. G., Levin L., McConnachie, G., Carlson, J. I., Kemp, D. C., & Smith. C. E., 1994. Communicative alternatives to challenging behavior: Integrating functional assessment and intervention strategies. Reichle, J. and Wacker, D., 1993.

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