



Sunday, August 4, 2019

Breakout Session G41 • 2:45-3:45 pm • Chantilly Ballroom West

That's Weird. Why Would my Child Act This Way? Trying To Make Sense out of Behavior.

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Presenter Information

Tim Hartshorne is a professor of psychology, specialized in school psychology, at Central Michigan University. His doctoral degree is from the University of Texas at Austin. He also has a master's degree in counseling and is a licensed professional counselor. He is the grant holder for DeafBlind Central: Michigan's Training and Resource Project, which provides support to children who are deafblind in Michigan. Much of his work is influenced and motivated by his son Jacob, who was born in 1989 with CHARGE syndrome. Tim's particular interests include understanding the challenging behavior exhibited by many individuals with deafblindness, CHARGE, and related syndromes, and also how severe disability impacts the family. He is the lead developer of a deafblind intervener training module on behavior for the National Center on Deaf-Blindness. He has been awarded the Star in CHARGE by the CHARGE Syndrome Foundation. His research was recognized in 2009 with the Central Michigan University President's Award for Outstanding Research. He is a frequent presenter on CHARGE and deafblindness.

Presentation Abstract

The first thought that seems to accompany concern about the behavior of an individual with CHARGE is how to stop it. However, it is very hard to change a behavior you do not understand. Behavior does not occur in a vacuum; behavior is chosen because in some way it works for the individual. Our first thought should be how it works. Why does the child with CHARGE hang upside down? Because it compensates for some of their sensory deficits. Knowing what to do, if anything, to change a behavior benefits enormously from understanding why the child does it. Instead we are tempted to provide a diagnosis, particularly autism, to explain the behavior. But such "explanations" do not explain anything. Typical questions we should be asking ourselves include, "is this behavior a way to cope with pain," "is this behavior a means for dealing with anxiety," "does this behavior help compensate for sensory issues," "does this behavior make the person feel more secure in their environment?" These are the questions that lead us to interventions that can work.

Learning Objectives

- Participants will understand problems with the diagnosis of autism.
- Participants will be able to consider reasons for peculiar behavior.
- Participants will understand the benefits of viewing behavior as chosen.

Trying to Make Sense of Behavior

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

Step One

- Understanding the purpose
 - Why would the child choose this behavior?
 - How does the behavior make sense? (When the goal of the behavior is understood, the behavior often makes sense.)
- What does the behavior communicate?

Emma walks to the bus. What is going on?

- She does not want to go to the bus.
 - Is there something going on she does not like?
- She does not like how the assistant is holding her
 - Train the assistant
- She left something at school
 - Ask her
- She is tired and walking is a strain on her
 - Give her more time
- She is distracted by activity going on around her
 - Take a moment to investigate

How do we make it stop?

- Understand behavior first
- All behavior has a purpose
- All behavior is communication

Communication Hypothesis

Behavior often functions as a primitive form of communication for those who do not yet possess or use more sophisticated forms. Carr et al.

- Does not mean the behavior necessarily has communicative intent
- Does not apply only to those who do not talk
- Does not imply that individuals systematically and intentionally use problem behavior to influence others.
- But we can understand and read the behavior of an individual as communication

Justin: 9 year old who is deafblind

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 any more,...
- 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?

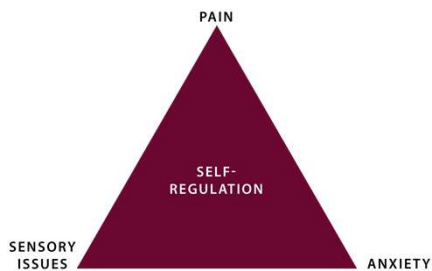
- A. Look for patterns
 - A. How often, where, when, with whom
- B. Decide how to respond
 - A. How we respond is communication to Justin
- C. Justin's behavior and how we respond forms a communication system
 - A. Communication builds relationship
 - B. Communication builds trust

It is a communication relationship

- Our response to behavior is part of a communication event
- What does our response communicate to the child?
- Think about what you want it to say, keeping in mind the goal of communication
- Think about how you are responding
 - Is it consistent with your message?

Managing Behaviors through Communication

- First identify the purpose of the behavior – what does it communicate?
- Then let the person know that you understand the communication – they have to know that you know what they want
- Teach the person a different way to let you know what they want – word, sign, picture, object, expression
- Respect communication
 - It has to work before you can shape conditions



Jessica's behavior

- Jessica will only sit in her chair for about 10 minutes at school before she wants to get down.
- When she is told that she must stay in her chair longer she tantrums and has a meltdown.
- One day she scratched her intervener and then flung herself from the chair and ran to a corner of the room where she lay down on the floor.

Jessica

- What did Jessica communicate?
- Was the issue
 - Pain?
 - Sensory?
 - Anxiety?

Not in school you don't!

- Jessica likes to hang upside down
- How do we stop this?!?
- Was the issue
 - Pain?
 - Sensory?
 - Anxiety?

As we plan for Jessica

What is the priority in responding to Jessica's behavior?
Is compliance or communication more important?
How can we build communication and trust with Jessica?
Can we teach her another way to make requests?

One way of sorting and categorizing varied behaviors would be to list them in increasing order of urgency for intervention in the form of the following questions:

1. Is this a behavior that just bugs you personally, so that it can be accepted and ignored?
2. Is this a behavior that seems to help the child to function in a positive way, so that it can be accepted and ignored?
3. Is this a behavior that seems to help the child to function in a positive way, but should be reduced, or replaced by another, better behavior over time?
4. Is this a behavior that is undesirable and needs to be reduced or replaced fairly quickly?
5. Is this a behavior that needs to be prevented immediately?

A young boy in bed slaps himself hard on the head.

- Where on the urgency hierarchy?
- Why would he choose this?
- What is he communicating?
- Pain? Sensory? Anxiety?
- How should we respond?
 - 1) We have choices for how to respond
 - 2) How we respond is communication to Eddie
 - 3) We must be very careful to avoid behaving in a way that Eddie can misinterpret
 - 4) Our response starts to shape his behavior
 - 5) His behavior, in response to us, is further communication

Understanding the setting in which the behavior occurs

- People
- Space
- Time

Managing the environment to prevent behavior problems

Consider what you could do to make the environment of your child safe and secure to enable their optimal development, and to avoid challenging behaviors

- Familiar – how could you create an environment that feels safe and secure to the child?
- Regular – how could you create an environment that is predictable to the child?
- Responsive – how could you create an environment that anticipates and responds to the behavior of the child?
- Meets basic needs – how could you create an environment that anticipates and responds to the needs of the child?

For each question, consider the impact of people, time, and space, and sensory impairment.

PRINCIPLES

- If you know the purpose, the behavior makes sense
- Behavior may serve many purposes
- Communication, communication,...
- Observe carefully to identify purpose
- Goal of intervention is education
- Change the environment, not individuals
- Lifestyle change is the ultimate goal

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