Selecting and Defining Target Behaviors

- Is extremely important
- Need to use specific methods to identify and define target behavior
- Also need to identify relevant factors that may inform or influence intervention

Pre-assessment Considerations
- Ethical considerations
  - Authority
  - Permission
  - Resources
  - Social validity

Five Phases of Assessment
1. Screening / Assessment
2. Defining problem or criteria for achievement
3. Pinpointing target behaviors
4. Monitoring progress
5. Following-up

Screening / Assessment Methods
1. Indirect measures
   - Interviews
   - Checklists
2. Direct measures
   - Tests
   - Direct Observation
3. Environmental Issues

Role of Assessment

Interviews
- May need to identify list of potential target behaviors
  - What and when
  - Avoid ‘why’
- What is/are the primary concern(s)
### Validity issues
- Issues are verified through data collection
  - Direct observation
  - Use of questionnaires
  - Self-monitoring

### Interviewing Significant Others
- Develop behavioral descriptions
  - What, when, how
  - Avoid 'why'
  - Move from general to specific
- Determine participation

### Checklists
- Provide descriptions of specific behaviors and conditions under which each should occur
- Can be done alone or with an interview
- Often are very specific
- Typically use Likert-scale assessments
- Some ask about antecedents and consequences

### Examples
- Child Behavior Checklist
- Adaptive Behavior Scale - School
- Adaptive Behavior Scale - Residential and Community

### Direct Measures
- Issues with standardized tests
  - Need consistent administration
    - Compares performance to specified criteria
    - Norm-referenced
  - Limitations
    - Do not specify target behaviors
    - Do not provide direct measure of behavior
    - Licensing requirements
- Direct and repeated
- Natural environment
- Identifies potential target behaviors
- Preferred method
## Features of ABC recording

- Descriptive
- Temporally sequenced
- Description of behavior patterns
  - Full attention, 20 - 30 min
- Observations only, no interpretations
- Repeat over several days
- Can use a variety of techniques
  - Time Sampling, etc.

## Ecological Assessment

- Is the data on individual and environment
  - Physical features
  - Interactions with others
  - Home
  - Reinforcement history
- Evaluate amount of descriptive data required to address current need

## Issue – Reactance

- Is the effects of assessment on behavior being assessed
  - Obtrusive assessment has a great impact
  - Self-monitoring most obtrusive
- Reduce reactivity
  - Unobtrusive methods
  - Repeat observations
  - Take effects into account
- Often need two to three weeks for self-monitoring

## Defining Target Behaviors

- Role and Importance of Definitions
  - Definitions required for replication
  - Replication required to determine usefulness of data in other situations
  - Necessary for research

## Importance of Definitions to Practitioner

- Accurate, on-going evaluation requires explicit definition of behavior
- Operational definition
  - Complete information
  - Accurate and believable evaluation of effectiveness

## Two Types of Definitions

- Function-based
  - Designated according to effect on the environment
- Topography-based
  - Identifies the shape or form of the behavior
### Reasons to Use Function-based Definitions
- Includes all members of response class
- The function of behavior is most important feature
- Simpler and more concise definitions
  - Easier to measure accurately and reliably

### Reasons to Use Topography-based Definitions
- Behavior analyst does not have direct, reliable, or easy access to functional outcomes
- Cannot rely on function of behavior because each occurrence does not produce relevant outcome

### Writing Target Behavior Definitions
- Accurate
- Complete
- Concise
- Inclusions
- Exclusions

### Other Uses
- When natural outcome is not within control of behavior analyst
  - Logistical, ethical, or safety reasons
  - E.g., Function of elopement is a lost child
  - In these cases, *function-based definition by proxy*
    - More restrictive definition that keeps behavior within control of analyst

### Other Uses
- When the relevant outcome is sometimes produced by undesirable variations of the response class
  - E.g., A basketball player scores with a sloppy shot from the free throw line
  - Definition should encompass all response forms that produce relevant outcomes

### Characteristics of Good Definitions
- Objective
  - Refer only to the observable
- Clear
  - Readable and unambiguous
- Complete
  - Delineate boundaries of definition
Purpose of Good Definitions

- Precise and concise description
- Reliable observation
- Accurate recording
- Agreement and replication

Testing a Definition

- Can you count number of occurrences?
  - Should answer “Yes”
- Will a stranger know what to look for based on definition alone?
  - Should answer “Yes”
- Can you break the target behavior down to smaller, more specific components?
  - Should answer “No”

Setting Criteria for Behavior Change

- Selected because of importance to clients
  - Increase, maintain, generalize desirable behaviors
  - Decrease undesirable behaviors
  - Valued and meaningful behaviors have social validity

Set Criteria Before Modifying

- Setting criteria as important as defining
- Range of acceptability
- Must identify optimum range prior to modifying
- Must know when to terminate treatment
- Eliminate disagreements on effectiveness

Two Approaches for Setting Criteria

- Assess performance of highly competent people
- Experimentally manipulate different performance levels to determine optimal results

Prioritizing Target Behaviors

1. Threat to health or safety
2. Frequency
   - Opportunities to use new behavior
   - Occurrence of problem
3. Longevity
4. Potential for higher rates of reinforcement
Prioritizing Target Behaviors

5. Importance
   - Skill development
   - Independence

6. Reduction of negative attention

7. Reinforcement for significant others
   - Social validity
   - Exercise caution when considering

8. Likelihood of success
   - Research
   - Practitioner’s experience
   - Environmental variables
   - Available resources

9. Cost-benefit
   - Costs include client’s time and effort

Target Behavior Ranking Matrix

- Numerical rating of potential target behaviors
- May need to increase client, parent, and staff participation
  - Resolve conflict
  - Build consensus
  - Can be difficult

Sample Ranking Matrix

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Behaviors</th>
<th>#1</th>
<th>#2</th>
<th>#3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Does this behavior pose a danger?</td>
<td>0 1 2 3 4</td>
<td>0 1 2 3 4</td>
<td>0 1 2 3 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How long-standing is this problem or deficit?</td>
<td>0 1 2 3 4</td>
<td>0 1 2 3 4</td>
<td>0 1 2 3 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Will changing this behavior produce higher rate of reinforcement?</td>
<td>0 1 2 3 4</td>
<td>0 1 2 3 4</td>
<td>0 1 2 3 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How likely is success in changing this behavior?</td>
<td>0 1 2 3 4</td>
<td>0 1 2 3 4</td>
<td>0 1 2 3 4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Monitoring Progress

- Are you getting the information you want
  - Is it accurate
  - What are problems with the data collection
  - Are their side effects of the data collection

- Ongoing monitoring is critical to ABA

Conclusions

- Need good definitions and techniques to identify target behaviors
- Accuracy at the written and observation level are critical
  - Must know what is INCLUDED
  - Also must know what is EXCLUDED in the definitions and observations
Social Significance

- Consider whose behavior is being assessed and why
  - Is it unacceptable to change behavior primarily for benefit of others?
  - To what extent will proposed change improve the person’s life?

- Both questions relate to ethics and philosophy