Autism Practice Brief

Autism Q&A:
The Foundational Five

QUESTION: What is The Foundational Five?

ANSWER

Our understanding of how best to support the learning of individuals with ASD always evolving. With new autism research becoming available, it is necessary for educators, medical personnel, parents, and other service providers to stay up-to-date on best practices, evidence-based interventions and strategies available to support those with ASD.

Evidence-based practice (EBP) are those practices that have been researched and are widely accepted and recognized as effective techniques. From the research, there are five practices that form the cornerstone of our instructional process. Applying these practices provides a solid foundation for learning. Each of these practices are all easily individualized, can be used in conjunction with other strategies or interventions, and they are all based on the principles of Applied Behavior Analysis.

The Foundational Five include:
- Antecedent Based Intervention,
- Visual Supports,
- Systematic Instruction,
- Reinforcement, and
- Social Communication Intervention.

1. *Antecedent Based Intervention*

In order to understand Antecedent Based Intervention (ABI), it is first important to understand three term contingency or the ABCs of behavior. The ABCs, in this case stand for antecedent, behavior, and consequence. The antecedent is what happens directly before the behavior. Then the behavior occurs. Finally, the consequence is what happens directly after the behavior.

Antecedent:	Behavior:	Consequence:
Teacher says get out math book	Student starts working	Teacher provides praise

For example: A teacher tells a student to get out his math book and complete page 32 (the antecedent). The student gets out his math book and starts working (the behavior). The student then finishes his assignment and is provided with praise (consequence).

ABI are evidence-based and proactive strategies designed to prevent the occurrence of interfering, or problematic behavior. ABI focuses on modifying the environment and changing the elements that could trigger an interfering behavior. In other words, the goal of ABI is identifying what in the environment is leading to the interfering behavior to occur and putting strategies in place that will PREVENT the issue from reoccuring. These proactive strategies help the student feel safe, in control, and prepared!

Specifically, ABI includes modifying the environment, providing choices, and using motivating items. Modifying the environment can include many different considerations such as physical structure and visual clarity, visual supports, schedules, and routines.

2. *Visual Supports*

Individuals with ASD are often visual learners. Visual learners prefer that ideas, concepts, and other information are associated with images and other techniques such as graphs, graphic organizers, and illustrations. A visual support is a picture, a schedule, graphic representation, or written word used to prompt a student regarding a rule, routine, task, or social response. It is anything you can see that helps to provide clarity and promotes independence! Visuals are an essential tool that are beneficial to everyone and can be used across all settings. Visual supports can help an individual complete tasks or routines independently, decrease interfering behavior, and assist in adjusting to changes more readily.

3. Systematic Instruction

Systematic instruction is the plan and evidence-based strategies used for teaching. It includes strategies such as prompting, shaping, task analysis, and chaining implemented in a systematic manner. Providing these types of supports to students helps them to be successful and gain skills faster. It also allows us to know how to alter instruction to promote stronger success. The key is to think about instruction methodically so there is a systematic plan that is consistently implemented. The plan should include the following steps:

- Introduce the skill or concept
- Reinforce success
- Fade the supports
- Ensure the student can independently complete the task

4. Reinforcement

Reinforcement focuses on increasing positive behaviors. By definition, reinforcement is something provided after a behavior occurs that increases the likelihood that the behavior will occur again in the future. Essentially, reinforcement is a tool that builds or strengthens a targeted behavior by PAIRING the reinforcer with the behavior. We ALL benefit and learn from reinforcement in some way! Most of us are reinforced through things such as paychecks and vacations. Individuals with ASD often need more reinforcement, especially as they are learning a new skill. It's important to understand that the types of reinforcement used for individuals with ASD may seem odd to you, but are highly motivating to that individual. Some examples might be access to an iPad or an activity like swinging, praise, food, or even a token. When implementing this tool, remember that reinforcement should immediately follow the targeted skill. It's also important to understand that multiple reinforcers are more effective, and the type and amount of reinforcement is based on the difficulty of the skill you are teaching. The more difficult or new a task is may require higher levels of reinforcement.

5. Social Communication Intervention

Due to the primary characteristics of ASD, we know that every student with ASD benefits from some form of instruction in communication and social skills. No matter where an individual falls on the spectrum, it is our responsibility to provide them with a meaningful way to communicate their wants and ideas in order to access the world. Since we communicate with other people, it's easy to see how communication and social skills intertwine. In order for students to be more successful in school, home, and their community and to prepare individuals with ASD for adulthood, it is vital that address social and communication skills. Because challenges with social communication are part of the diagnostic criteria for ASD, we know that many individuals will need assistance with functional communication, joint attention, nonverbal communication, and developing relationships with others. Teaching these types of skills can be complex and overwhelming. This is why it is so important to pull in all the elements of The Foundational Five -- ABI, Visual Supports, Systematic Instruction, and Reinforcement, as each of these vital skills is addressed.

QUESTION: Why are The Foundational Five Important?

ANSWER

The Foundational Five are important because they really provide the building blocks for effective instruction. Well planned and consistently implemented instruction is key to supporting all students, and especially those with ASD. By implementing these five practices, you have a good base on which to build the rest of your instruction.

QUESTION: What are some tips to help me succeed?

ANSWER

Five tips for success when implementing The Foundational Five:

1. It's important to understand that consistency is key. If these strategies are only implemented part of the time, the individual may have a more difficult time learning and maintaining new skills.
2. It's important to provide choices for individuals with ASD, and equally important to respect the decisions an individual makes. Opportunities for choices and respect for our decisions helps us feel like we are in control of our lives.
3. Positive reinforcement is a powerful tool and depends on knowing what motivates an individual. Motivation is a result of success and empowerment, sometimes we have to look for opportunities to develop competence.
4. Understanding strengths and interests is important for individuals with ASD. Individuals have many unique strengths, talents, and interests that can benefit them and society.
5. Independence is always the goal. Prompting and reinforcement are powerful tools that can be intensively used, but can also be faded to encourage independence. Also, it is important to provide the individual with ASD time to respond before prompting. Processing times can vary greatly and a little extra 'wait' time can be very beneficial!

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