

CONTEXT STORY

Asha at the Sand Box



Asha is a three-year old girl who looks forward to playing in the outdoor sandbox. Asha gets very excited when she has a chance to dig with her hands and build mountains. However, when the teacher reminds Asha that it is time for her to tidy up and go inside, she often continues to play in the sand. When approached by a teacher Asha throws sand and toys at the teacher.

Does the story about Asha at the sand box sound familiar to you – perhaps you have a child like Asha in your classroom?

If so, then you've actually taken the first step of identifying a problem behaviour that may be putting a child at risk. In this case, Asha's problem

behaviour is also interfering with her social, emotional and intellectual development.

Deciding what to do next may be difficult. Here's the 3-step approach we followed in Understanding and Changing Behaviour.

STEP 1:

Decide Where to Start

We've identified that Asha's actions at the sandbox are problem behaviours. Let's take a moment to describe what we see or hear. Describing the behaviour will help us be consistent when gathering information a bit later.

When given a verbal direction to tidy up – Asha continues to play.

When approached by a teacher after the first direction, Asha throws objects.

In order to better understand Asha's behaviour we will observe and record each incident of the behaviour described above. We will use the ABC Functional Assessment Card for the next five days.

We will also speak with Asha's parents to find out if she has any difficulty following instructions, and whether or not she throws objects at home.

Now let's move on to the next step.

STEP 2:

Gather and Analyze

After speaking with Asha's parents, we learned that she sometimes tantrums when asked to get ready for bed. Asha's father also noted that he usually has to tell Asha to do something about 2 or 3 times before she complies. He says that, "Asha seems to be so focused on an activity that she just does not want to stop".

Throughout the week there were 8 incidents where Asha demonstrated the problem behaviour. We recorded our observations for each one using the ABC Functional Assessment Card. After analyzing all the information we noticed a few things about Asha's behaviour:

- The behaviour occurred every day during the morning outdoor play time while Asha was at the sandbox.
- The other three incidents were indoors during free play time – at the dramatic and blocks centres.
- Asha often played alone during these activities.
- We noticed a pattern in what happened before the behaviour. Asha was playing alone. A teacher would tell Asha to tidy up. She did not follow the instruction and continued to play.
- When the teacher gave the verbal direction to "tidy up", she was often behind or not very close to Asha.
- When the teacher approached Asha to provide physical assistance to follow through, Asha threw objects.
- The consequence to Asha's throwing of objects was not very consistent. Sometimes, teachers let her play for a few more minutes, while others immediately removed her from the area. In both cases, Asha does not tidy up.

We also looked at our daily schedule to see what activity came after the "tidy up" time. After outdoor play, we went indoors to the washroom and then to have lunch; Asha didn't have any difficulties with these specific routines. After indoor play, we had circle time where Asha participated and enjoyed singing along with her peers.

The results from the functional assessment suggest that the *function* of the behaviour is to *obtain an activity* (obtain more play time). Another possible function of the behaviour is to *escape an activity* – Asha may be escaping the activity that comes after "tidy up" time. But we're going to focus on "planning for change" for the first possible reason seeing as the activities that come after "tidying up" are ones that Asha also enjoys.

Now it's time to move onto the next step and plan for change.

STEP 3:

Plan for Change

Planning for change involves making the behaviour irrelevant, inefficient and finally ineffective.

MAKING THE BEHAVIOUR IRRELEVANT

We can make the behaviour irrelevant by preventing or controlling the things in the environment that happen before the behaviour.

Let's take a look at some ways to prevent the behaviour from happening by making rules and transitions clearer, modifying teaching methods and using visuals.

TRANSITIONS

Establishing a consistent transition routine around tidying up time will certainly help Asha follow through with directions and understand that play time is over. We're going to give all the children a 5 minute warning before tidy up time. Then we'll sing the "Tidy Up" song so that Asha will have another cue to make the transition.

TEACHING METHODS

To prevent Asha from throwing objects, we will remove as many of the items around her or that are within her reach. Then we can continue with the transition routine, singing the "Tidy Up" song, etc.

When giving instructions or preparing Asha for the transition, teachers will give them directly to Asha, get down on her level, and be sure to make eye contact.

USING VISUALS

We will also post a "daily schedule" with photos representing each activity/routine of the day. We will post one near the circle time area

and teachers will carry mini daily schedules with them (individual pictures on a key ring). Asha can be shown the picture of the upcoming activity to help her to understand change. This visual support will also assist Asha to prepare for a transition.

MAKING THE BEHAVIOUR INEFFICIENT

To make behaviour inefficient, we might choose to teach specific adaptive, educational and social behaviours. By teaching these types of behaviours, we eliminate the need for the problem behaviour.

At other times, we may teach an alternative behaviour. An alternative behaviour serves the same function as the behaviour being replaced but is seen to be more appropriate by other children, adults and the general public. To be successful, it requires equal or less physical effort and complexity but results in the same type of pay-off for the child.

We are going to teach Asha to follow the instruction of "tidy up". For specific details on the strategies and teaching techniques we used to teach Asha to "follow instructions" to tidy up visit our "Teaching New Skills" section.

MAKING THE BEHAVIOUR INEFFECTIVE

The last step is to make problem behaviour ineffective, meaning that it no longer works for the child. Keeping in mind that the behaviour may not change right away – we are aware that it is very common for problem behaviour to increase before it decreases when implementing changes. The key is to be consistent with our plan.

When Asha demonstrates the problem behaviour, all teachers will respond by quietly moving out of the path of objects being thrown. Teachers will also provide hand-over-hand assistance to ensure that Asha tidies up one or two items before moving to the next activity.

It will also be important to make the behaviour ineffective in all the places a child finds herself.

Asha at the Sand Box, continued

Changing a problem behaviour that continues to be rewarded in other settings is confusing to the child and frustrating for everyone.

Throughout this process we spoke to Asha's parents about our concerns, and shared the strategies that we implemented. As Asha also had difficulty with transitioning at home, we provided the family with similar strategies to follow and visual tools to use. Our partnership with parents is the key to success.

If the problem behaviour persists then we will have to re-assess but it is important for us to give our plan time to work. Be patient! Some behaviours can take a couple of weeks to change.

For more information:

- Visit our two part series workshop on Understanding and Changing Behaviour - [Why does he do that?](#) and [Planning for Change](#).
- Learn more about the assessment tool we used called the [ABC Functional Assessment Card](#).
- Find out how we taught Asha to [Follow Instructions](#).
- Take a look at the [Creating a Behaviour Support Plan Tip Sheet](#) to help you develop and keep track of your plan for dealing with problem behaviour.
- Read more about [Preparing Children for Transitions](#).
- Take a look at the [COMMUNICATION POSTERS](#) for tips on modifying the way you talk to a child to help him better understand and respond.