

# Functional Communication Training (FCT)

## Brief Introduction

Functional communication training (FCT) is a positive behavior support (PBS) intervention designed to reduce problem behaviors by replacing them with meaningful or functional communication, whether verbal or gestural. The emphasis of the communication is on functionality as opposed to form.

## Description

Functional communication training (FCT) emerged from the literature on functional behavioral assessment (FBA) as a systematic practice to replace inappropriate behavior or subtle communicative acts with more appropriate and effective communicative behaviors or skills. FCT is always implemented after an FBA has been conducted to identify the function of an interfering behavior. When using FCT, teachers/practitioners analyze the interfering behavior to determine what the learner is trying to communicate. For example, is the learner biting peers when she wants a toy that another child has? Or is the learner yelling in class so that he will be sent out of the room? After teachers/practitioners have identified the function of the interfering behavior, they then implement FCT to identify and teach a replacement behavior that is easy for the learner to use and serves the same purpose as the interfering behavior, but in a more appropriate way (Frazone, 2009).

FBA meets evidence-based criteria with 10 single-case design studies. According to the evidence-based studies, this intervention has been effective for toddlers (0–2 years) to young adults (19–22 years) with ASD. FBA can be used effectively to address communication, behavior, school-readiness, academic, and adaptive skills

## Brief Adapted from

Collet-Klingenberg, L. (2008). *Overview of functional behavior assessment*. Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin, Waisman Center, The National Professional Development Center on Autism Spectrum Disorders.

Fettig, A. (2013). *Functional behavior assessment (FBA) fact sheet*. Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina, Frank Porter Graham Child Development Institute, The National Professional Development Center on Autism Spectrum Disorders.

## Matrix of FCT by Outcome and Age (years)

Social			Communication			Behavior			Joint Attention			Play			Cognitive			School Readiness			Academic			Motor			Adaptive			Vocational			Mental Health		
0-5	6-14	15-22	0-5	6-14	15-22	0-5	6-14	15-22	0-5	6-14	15-22	0-5	6-14	15-22	0-5	6-14	15-22	0-5	6-14	15-22	0-5	6-14	15-22	0-5	6-14	15-22	0-5	6-14	15-22	0-5	6-14	15-22			

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### Functional Communication Training (FCT) Research Summary

Ages	Skills/Intervention Goals	Settings	Outcome
0–22 years	Communication, behavior, school readiness, academic, adaptive	Home, school, community	EBP

\*The information found in the Research Summary table is updated yearly following a literature review of new research and this age range reflects information from this review

#### Research

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# Functional Communication Training (FCT)

## Steps for Implementation

Adapted from the NPDC

### ***Step 1. Identifying the Interfering Behavior***

- A. Identify an interfering behavior or a subtle communicative form that may be an interfering behavior.

### ***Step 2. Completing a Functional Behavior Assessment (FBA)***

- A. Complete a high-quality FBA that includes:
  - i. indirect assessment (e.g., interviews, record reviews, questionnaires) and
  - ii. direct assessment (e.g., A-B-C observation).
- B. Identify the function of the interfering behavior.

### ***Step 3. Identifying a Replacement Behavior as a Substitute for Interfering Behavior***

- A. Select a form of communication that is appropriate to the learner (e.g., signing, verbalizations, pictures).
- B. Choose a replacement behavior that:
  - i. can be taught in a short amount of time and
  - ii. allows the learner to quickly learn the behavior and gain access to the reinforcement.
- C. Identify a replacement behavior that is acceptable and appropriate for the environment and the learner.
- D. Choose a replacement behavior that is recognized by multiple communicative partners.
- E. Incorporate attention-getting into the replacement behavior if necessary (e.g., when using sign language).

### ***Step 4. Designing Implementation Data Collection Procedures***

- A. Implement data collection procedures that are functional, meaningful, and available to team members responsible for data collection.
- B. Data are collected:
  - i. before FCT is implemented (typically during the FBA process) and
  - ii. during the implementation of FCT (e.g., weekly).

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- C. Data collection focuses on:
  - i. antecedents,
  - ii. prompts required by the learner to produce the replacement behavior,
  - iii. frequency of the replacement behavior,
  - iv. frequency of the interfering behavior, and
  - v. consequences of the replacement/interfering behavior (i.e., what happens right after the replacement/interfering behavior).
  
- D. Use data to monitor FCT effectiveness and whether aspects of FCT need adjustment.

### ***Step 5. Manipulating the Environment to Elicit the Interfering Behavior***

- A. Teach the replacement behavior in the environments where the interfering behavior occurs.
- B. Manipulate materials or activities to provide opportunities for repeated practice of the replacement behavior.

### ***Step 6. Planning Opportunities for Generalization***

- A. Teach the replacement behavior(s) with multiple communication partners.
- B. Teach the replacement behavior(s) across multiple environments.
- C. Train communicative partners to respond to the learner's use of the replacement behavior.
- D. Introduce varied vocabulary for requesting, if appropriate for the learner's developmental level.

### ***Step 7. Prompting Learners to Use Replacement Behavior(s)***

- A. Prompt the learner to use the replacement behavior, beginning with a prompt that ensures errorless learning.

### ***Step 8. Not Reinforcing the Interfering Behavior***

- A. Do not reinforce any instance of the interfering behavior, if possible.
- B. Intervene as minimally as possible if the interfering behavior is potentially dangerous.
- C. For subtle communicative acts, make the interfering behavior less efficient than the replacement behavior by:
  - i. pausing after the learner uses the subtle communicative act,
  - ii. asking, "What do you want?"
  - iii. prompting the learner to use the replacement behavior, and
  - iv. providing reinforcement for using the replacement behavior.

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### ***Step 9. Providing Reinforcement***

- A. All communicative partners consistently provide immediate reinforcement in response to the replacement behavior.

### ***Step 10. Shaping the Response***

- A. Initially accept any approximation of the replacement behavior.
- B. Begin to require more conformance to the desired replacement behavior as training continues.

### ***Step 11. Fading the Use of Prompts***

- A. Teachers/practitioners slowly fade the use of prompts, using data and time delay.

### ***Step 12. Increasing the Time Between the Replacement Behavior and Reinforcement***

- A. Teachers/practitioners talk with team members to determine a reasonable amount of time for learners to wait between production of the replacement behavior and delivery of reinforcement.
- B. Teachers/practitioners slowly increase the length of time between the production of the replacement behavior and the delivery of reinforcement.

### ***Step 13. Monitoring Learner Progress***

- A. Collect progress-monitoring data for individual learners to determine:
  - i. Learners' use of communicative acts in different settings
  - ii. The type and intensity of prompts needed by learners to use communicative acts correctly
- B. Use progress monitoring data to determine next steps.