Guidelines for Using Functional Communication Training (FCT)

Definition and Goal

- FCT is a form of differential reinforcement of alternative behavior that involves teaching an individual to use a functional communicative response. For FCT to be effective, the communicative response must result in the student gaining the same reinforcement that challenging behavior has previously provided (e.g., access to attention or preferred items or activities, escape and avoidance of less preferred tasks or activities) as identified by a functional behavior assessment.

- In addition to teaching a functional communicative response, a key component to the success of FCT is the withholding of reinforcement for occurrences of challenging behavior.

Materials for Implementing FCT

Data sheet, timer, potential reinforcers

FCT General Procedures
1   Conduct a functional behavior assessment.
2   Select a communicative response. The response should be something that can be acquired quickly and is recognizable by others.
3   Identify a time of day, activity, setting, and duration of time that you will implement FCT.
4   If the student engages in high rates and intensities of challenging behavior, make sure you have a safe setting where you can protect the student and others.

5 Teach the student to use the communicative response by implementing a most-to-least or least-to-most system of prompts. Initially, reinforce each instance the student uses the communicative response without engaging in challenging behavior.

6 Withhold reinforcement for challenging behavior.

7 Once the student can independently and consistently use the communicative response, gradually introduce a delay to when the student receives reinforcement.

8 Generalize FCT to other times of the day, settings, activities, and people.

9 Gradually, increase the complexity of the communicative response.

FCT Procedures (Escape Function)

1 Identify a task or activity (in which challenging behavior has occurred) that you will have the student complete (e.g., spelling). Break the task into small components (e.g., write 1 spelling word).

2 Identify a mode of communication and the message to reinforce (e.g., saying, "I want a break.", touching a break card, signing break, pressing break symbol on student's voice output device).

3 Ask the student what they want to work for.

4 As soon as the student chooses a preferred item or activity, say, "We're working for_____."

5 Provide the instructional cue. "Write the word _____."

6 If the **student complies and does not engage in challenging behavior,** provide enthusiastic praise (e.g., "You spelled _____! Well done!) and **quickly prompt them to ask for a break** (e.g., "If you would like to take a break, say, "Break please".)

7 If the **student communicates appropriately,** immediately remove the spelling task and provide a brief break (e.g., 1 minute) with the preferred activity. Repeat this process for the length of the training session.

8 If the **student engages in challenging behavior before completing the task,** if feasible and safe to do so, neutrally (without talking to the student about his/ her behaviors) block and position yourself so that the student cannot move away, throw or destroy any work materials or hurt himself or others. Wait until the student is calm and not engaging in challenging behavior for 15 seconds. Remind the student of what they are working for and provide the instructional cue (e.g., "We're working for _____, spell _____." As soon as the student complies, provide enthusiastic praise and prompt them to use the communicative response to ask for a break. Immediately provide a break with a preferred activity.

9 If the **student engages in challenging behavior during the break** teams can: (a) ignore the behavior, OR (b) remove access to the preferred activity and redirect the student back to the work task. When choosing options, teams should consider how easy or difficult it is to redirect the student back to the work task, remove access to break activities, and the potential for challenging behavior to escalate to unsafe and unmanageable levels.

10 If the **student engages in challenging behavior when asked to communicate**, wait 15 seconds or until the student is calm and prompt the student to communicate (e.g., "If you want a break, you need to say, "break"). You may need to use a prompting system to model or help the student use the communicative response. If the student refuses to communicate, even with assistance, bring the task back out and provide another instructional cue.

11 Gradually, as the student is successful, increase the length of the task or number of tasks the student must complete before they can ask for a break.

FCT Procedures (Attention Function)

1 Briefly interact and provide attention to the student (e.g., 30 seconds to 1 minute).

2 Tell the student you need to do some work or help another student. If they want you to come back they can use the communicative response (e.g., "Raise hand, say, "I need help", or "Come play").

3 If the **student uses the communicative response without engaging in challenging behavior,** give immediate praise for communicating appropriately (e.g., "Great job raising you hand!) and provide your attention (come back over and interact with student) for 30 seconds. to 1-min. **Repeat Step 2.**

4 If the **student engages in challenging behavior when asked to use the communicative response,** remove your attention for 15 seconds or until the student is calm and prompt the student to communicate using assistance as needed. As soon as the student communicates appropriately, provide specific praise and give your attention. After 1 minute remove your attention. **Repeat Step 2.**

5 If the **student engages in challenging behavior when your attention is removed,** continue to ignore the student and withhold your attention until the student is calm for 15 seconds. Remind or prompt the student to use the communicative response if they want your attention.

6 If the **student engages in challenging behavior when they have access to your attention**, teams can either (a) ignore the behavior or (b) if feasible, remove their attention by stepping away for 15 seconds or until the student stops engaging in challenging behavior. Once the student is calm they should be prompted to use the communicative response to re-gain your attention."

7 Repeat this process for the duration of the FCT session.

8 Gradually, as the student is successful, increase the length of time the student must wait to gain access to attention following the use of a communicative response. This can be done by introducing a "wait" signal.

FCT Procedures (Tangible Function – Access to Preferred Items)

1 Briefly (1 minute) provide the student with access to a preferred item/activity.

2 Let the student know it's your turn to play with the item or it's time to put the item away, if they want to continue playing, they need to ask (e.g., use the communicative response).

3 If the **student asks appropriately,** provide specific praise and allow the student to continue playing with the item. Following 1 minute of access, repeat this process for the duration of the FCT session.

4 If the student **engages in challenging behavior when asked to use the communicative response,** withhold access to the preferred item, wait until the student is calm for 15 seconds and then prompt the student to use the communicative response. **Repeat Step 2.**

5 If the **student engages in challenging behavior when they have access to the preferred activity,** teams can either (a) ignore the behavior or (b) if feasible, remove the preferred item or activity for 15 seconds or until the student stops engaging in challenging behavior. Once the student is calm they should be prompted to use the communicative response to re-gain access to the item or activity.

6 Repeat this process for the duration of the FCT session.

7 Gradually, as the student is successful, increase the length of time the student must wait to gain access to a preferred item/activity following the use of a communicative response. This can be done by introducing a "wait" signal.

Examples of Functional Communication	
Function of Behavior	**Alternative Behaviors**
Avoidance and Escape	Asking for a break Asking to leave a school activity or setting Asking to go to the calm down area
Access to Attention	Asking for help Raising hand
Access to Preferred Items and Activities	Asking for iPad time Asking for a turn