

Treatment of Escape-Maintained Self Injury through Functional Communication Training and Mood Identification

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Introduction

Differential reinforcement of alternative behavior (DRA) has been shown to reduce rates of problem behavior. Functional communication is a typical replacement behavior for these aberrant behaviors. (Carr & Durrand, 1985). In addition, Derby et al. (1997) indicated the importance of generalization training when maintaining low rates of problem behavior and increasing rates of the replacement behavior. The purpose of the current study was to treat self-injury with the use of a token economy and DRA for functional communication. In addition, mood identification was paired to assist the individual in choosing the replacement behavior over the aberrant behavior.

METHOD

Participant

The participant was a verbal 12-year old male diagnosed a mood disorder-NOS, and mild mental retardation. He resided in a short-term behavioral stabilization unit for treatment of severe self-injurious behavior (SIB) and aggression.

Materials and Setting

Sessions were conducted in a 7' x 8' session room equipped with a table and two chairs or in a naturalistic environment. Materials consisted of academic tasks, a token board, stickers, and emotion cards.

Dependent Measures

Frequency of SIB and functional communication were the dependent measures. SIB was defined as biting self (other than fingers), kicking self, pushing fingers forcefully into eyes, hitting head on a hard surface or with open or closed hand, grabbing or punching neck, banging knees together, and hitting face with knee. Functional communication was defined as an independent vocal request for help and or a break in an appropriate tone.

PROCEDURE

Functional Analysis

Results of a functional analysis suggested SIB was maintained by escape from tasks that were delivered with limited choice and had no clear beginning and end. Baseline sessions were identical to this demand condition.

Prior to each treatment session the therapist reminded the participant to ask for break and or help when a task was difficult.

In addition, the therapist reviewed the emotions; happy, sad, nervous, and mad with the participant. The participant had access to these emotion cards throughout the session and was reminded to identify with these cards once his mood changed.

Treatment Sessions

Demand materials were placed on the table and the therapist prompted the participant through the tasks using a prompt hierarchy. A token board was visible to the participant at all times. Contingent upon SIB the participant was reminded to request for help or a break and was directed to his emotion cards. Prompted

requests for help and or break were honored; however, there was no token delivery. Independent requests for help resulted in 1 token and break resulted in 2 tokens. Once the participant earned 10 tokens he could exchange them for a reinforcer. The break lasted one minute.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results indicated SIB decreased with the implementation of a token board and functional communication training. During baseline ($M= 4.08$) and the reversal ($M= 2.4$) rates of SIB were higher than the initial treatment phase ($M=.13$) and the phases which followed the reversal ($M=.006$).

The replacement behavior of functional communication was higher during the initial treatment phase ($M= .44$) than baseline ($M=0$). When treatment was removed functional communication decreased to rates of zero. Once treatment resumed functional communication increased ($M=.47$), however, when the length of the session increased, overall functional communication decreased ($M= .1$). Mood identification was encouraged but not a required response. This skill was not acquired and the rate of independent mood identification throughout the study was zero.

It can be concluded that the use of functional communication training and a motivational system such as a token economy can be effective when treating escaped maintained SIB. Since functional communication returned to rates of zero during the reversal it can be indicated that the token board may have served as a visual cue to the participant. One limitation of the study is that criterion to increase time was based on low rates of SIB and not functional communication. Further research should focus on increasing rates of functional communication before generalization training.

