

# Understanding the ABCs of Behavior in Children

(Oh – and in everyone else)

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# Behavior – what is it?



**“The way in which an animal or person acts in response to a particular situation or stimulus.”**

# Dispelling the myths about behavior...

- Behaviors are not singular events
- Behaviors do not occur at random
- Behaviors do not “come out of nowhere”

# Behaviors

Behaviors are always part of a larger chain



# The ABCs

- Antecedent: anything that happens before a behavior/skill
  - The triggers or set-up
- Behavior: actions
  - What was said or done? **OBSERVABLE** and **VISIBLE**
- Consequence: anything that happens right after a behavior/skill
  - Reaction/response to the behavior/skill
  - Makes behavior/skill more or less likely to occur again over time

**A**

ANTECEDENT

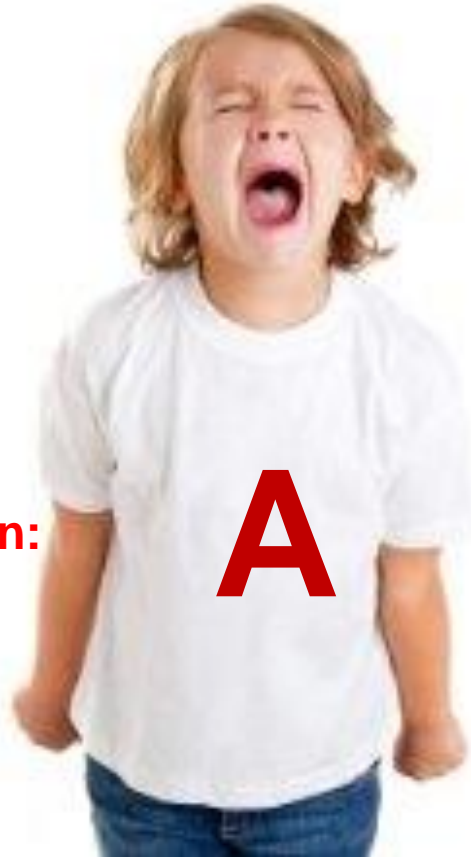
**B**

BEHAVIOR



**C**

CONSEQUENCE



Parent Behavior Chain:

**A**

**B**

# Behaviors

What are they?

- Observable ACTIONS



# Behaviors



Wanted/Desirable



Unwanted/Undesirable



# Behaviors

- When we talk about behavior, we need to be specific...
  - **SPECIFIC:** what happened? what was said?
  - **DETAILED:** describe what the action looked like
  - **MEASURABLE:** consider intensity, duration, frequency

# Behaviors

Where do they come from?  
Why do they occur?



- All behaviors have a purpose or goal (FUNCTION)
- They do NOT occur at random.

# Behaviors

## **BEHAVIORS OCCUR BECAUSE THEY WORK!**

If a behavior does not work, IT WILL NOT CONTINUE!

This is true for BOTH desired behaviors/skills and undesired ones.

# Behaviors

If we want undesired behaviors to change (or go away), two things must happen:

1. That behavior must no longer WORK
2. A new, desired (more appropriate) behavior works better

These are known as *replacement behaviors*.

# Behaviors



# Behaviors

How do we teach good replacement behaviors?

It depends on the original behavior's goal, or FUNCTION.

**ALL BEHAVIORS HAVE A  
FUNCTION!**

# Functions of Behavior



# Functions of Behavior

## Obtain/Get...

- Things you want (tangibles, power)
- Attention from others (does not matter if it's positive OR negative attention)
- Self-stimulation

## Avoid/Escape...

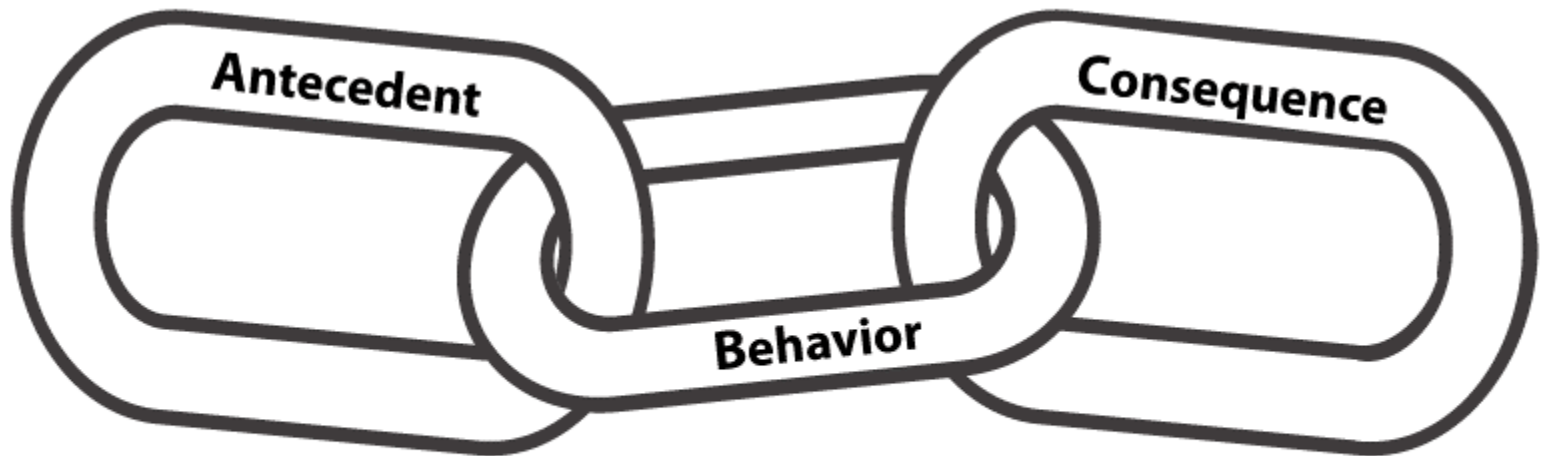
- Something you don't like/want (pain, overstimulation, boredom, aversive)

Communication... then habit



# ABC Chain

- Behaviors arise due to ANTECEDENTS, and are maintained by CONSEQUENCES



**Complete Learning Trial**

# Antecedents:

What are they?

- The triggers or set-up that elicits the behavior
- Without this initial context, the behavior may not occur
- Can immediately precede the behavior, or be a contextual influence

# Behavior

People, Relationships: their actions, words, expressions, tone

Environment: physical setting, weather, system, activity

Internal state: hungry, sleepy, nausea, etc.

Sensory: sights, smells, sounds, etc.

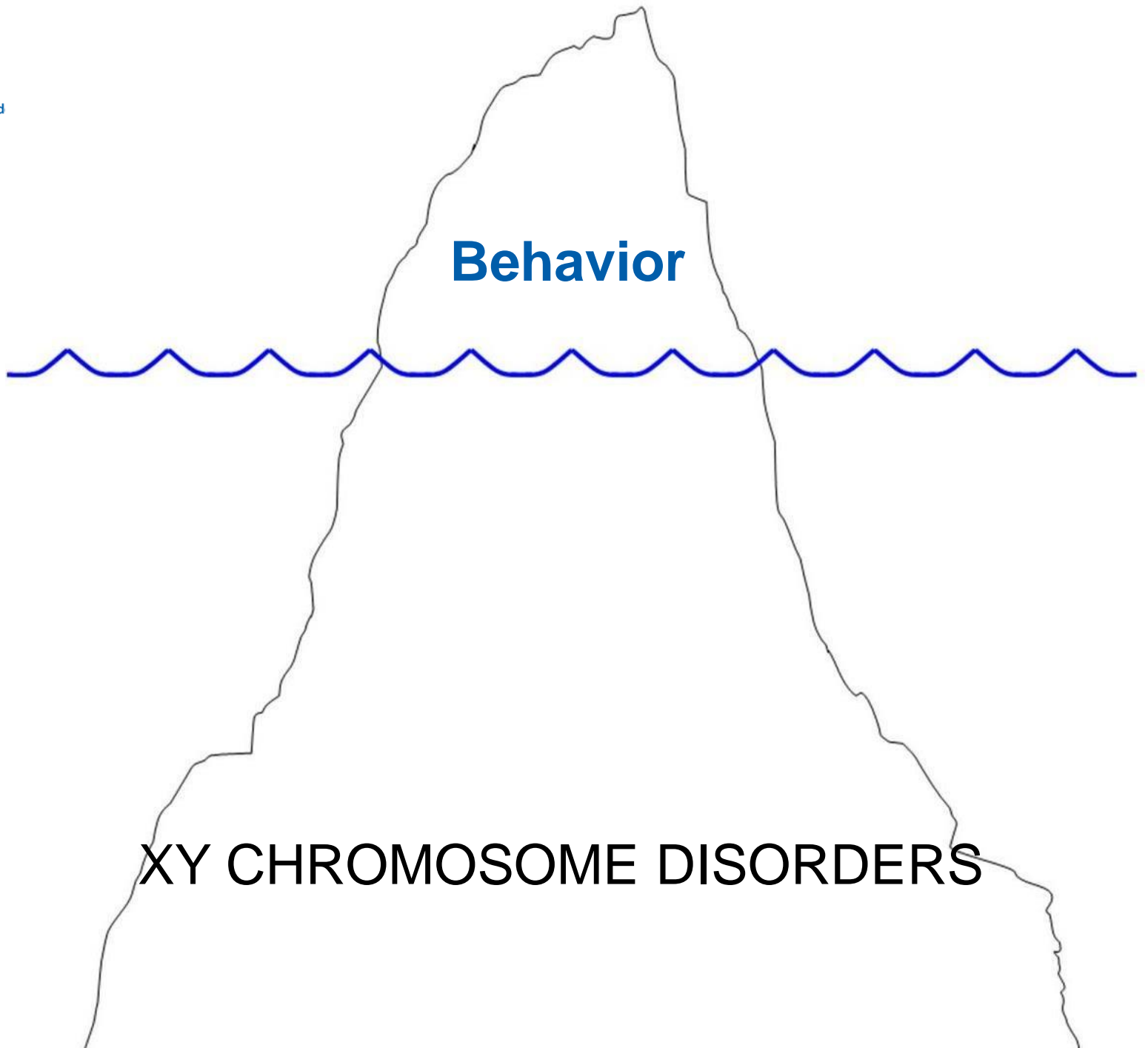
Medical: pain, illness, seizures, etc.

Mental health: depression, hallucinations, anxiety, ADHD, etc.

Time of day

Skill deficits: profile of strengths/weaknesses

Expectations



# Consequences

What are they?

- The responses/reactions that occur after a behavior/skill
- These determine whether a behavior/skill will occur again over time (in future)
- They relate directly to the goal or underlying *function* of the behavior

**What was gained?** What did the child get from the behavior/skill?

**What was avoided?** What did the child get out of?

# Consequences:

Punishment: prevents behavior/skill from meeting its goal

- Makes the behavior **LESS LIKELY** to occur
- Decreases/discourages behavior over time

Reinforcement: the goal of behavior has been met!

- Makes the behavior **MORE LIKELY** to occur
- Increases/encourages behavior over time

# Consequences:

Punishment: behavior is LESS LIKELY to occur

- NEGATIVE: Taking something prized away
- POSITIVE: Adding something aversive

Reinforcement: behavior is MORE LIKELY to occur

- NEGATIVE: Getting out of something aversive, escape
- POSITIVE: Adding something the child likes, reward

# Consequences:

Verbal: praise

Attention: eye contact, words, body language

Ignoring

Physical actions: hugs, high fives

Tokens: stickers, stars, coins

Time out

Objects: toys, money

Edibles: candy, treats, etc.

Alone time

Corporeal punishment

Chores



# Consequences



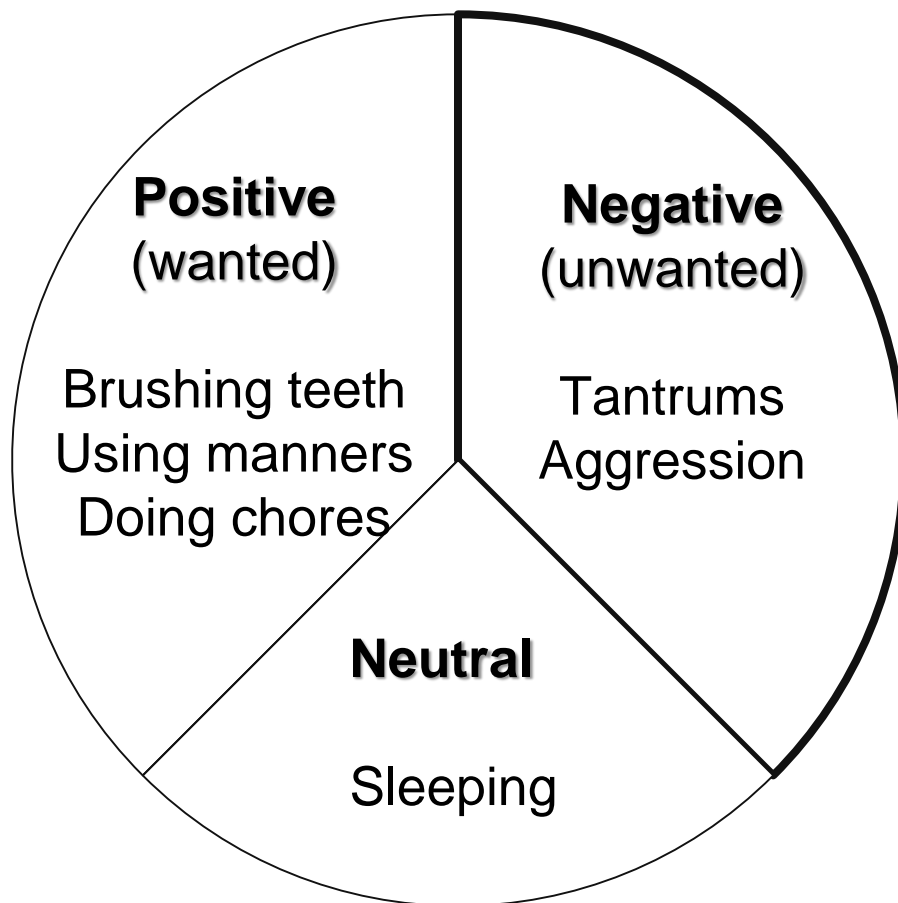
# Consequences

- The consequence we choose (how we respond) depends on the behavior's **FUNCTION**, not the behavior itself.

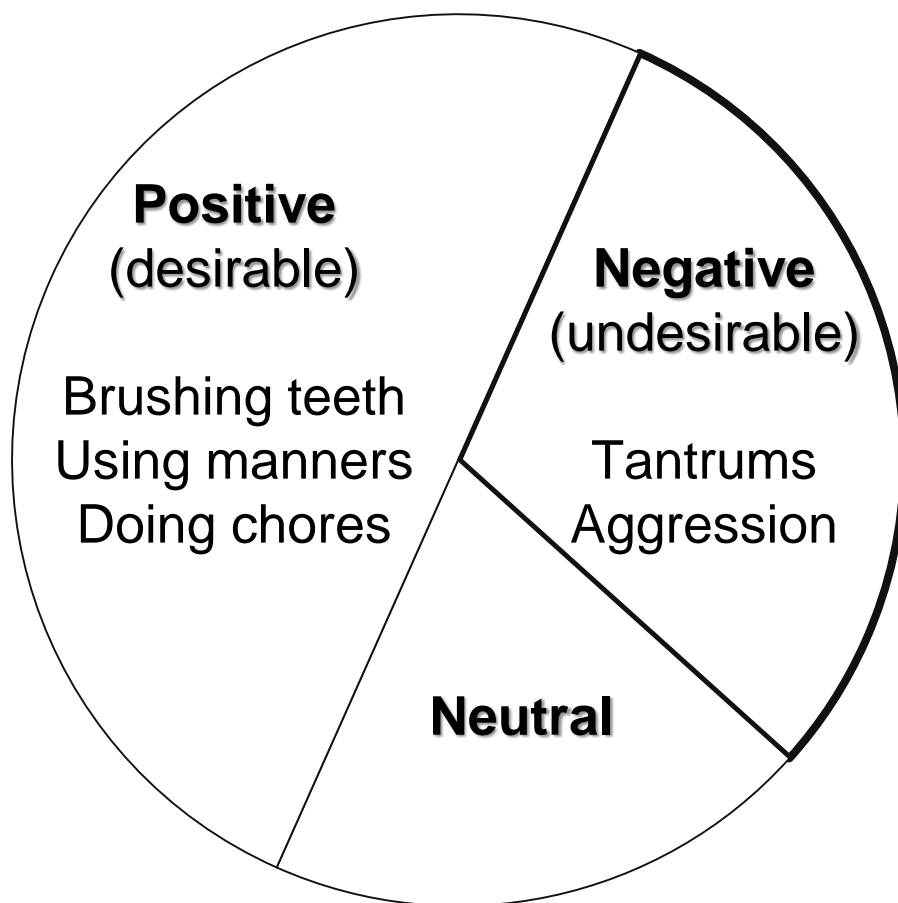
It's all fun and games until someone figures out the function of your behavior.



# Behaviors



# Behaviors



# Let's Review!

- Which parts of the ABC framework can we **DIRECTLY** change?  
*(the antecedents and consequences)*
- What is the most powerful form of behavior change?  
*(positive reinforcement)*
- What are the main functions of all behavior?  
*(attention, getting things you want, avoiding things you don't want, self-stimulatory)*
- What form of consequence makes behavior **LESS LIKELY** to occur in the future?  
*(punishment)*

**A**

ANTECEDENT

**B**

BEHAVIOR

**C**

CONSEQUENCE

WHAT IS THE FUNCTION OF THE BEHAVIOR?