

Supporting transitions away from preferred places

Executive summary

Transitioning away from preferred places and activities is a common barrier to learning for children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) (Sevin et al, 2015). The following case study focuses on a learner who frequently engages in high intensity behaviour that challenges when asked to transition away from highly preferred environments. This includes leaving school, a place the learner finds very motivating. This case study will outline the proactive strategies and crisis management plan put in place to support the learner with leaving school at the end of the day. It will also highlight how multiple interventions are sometimes needed to support learners with autism to reduce their barriers to learning.

Introduction

The pupil is a 10-year-old learner with multiple diagnoses including ASD, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) and epilepsy. He is a very talkative learner who communicates at sentence level with those around him. He displays strong motivation to engage with teaching staff and peers and particularly enjoys engaging with others in active games such as football, chase and 'duck, duck, goose.' He finds social interaction far more motivating than items such as toys/screens.

The primary focus of his programme since starting at Park House in September, has been to reduce his behaviours that challenge, which have historically been a barrier to him accessing education services. The transition from school to the car at the end of the day was an area of particular difficulty. At this time of day, he would engage in high intensity behaviour that challenges, and was of high risk to himself and those around him, for durations lasting 30-60 minutes. His parents reported that this had been a barrier for many years. Multiple proactive interventions were trialled, and a crisis management plan was required for when the pupil did engage in behaviour that challenges. This study will look at which of

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these strategies were ultimately successful in supporting him with transitioning from school to the car.

Method

Reactive strategies (crisis management): An immediate crisis management plan was needed to keep the pupil, his parents and school staff safe during his transition to the car each day. An area of the school was secured from 2:30pm, for the use solely of the pupil and staff supporting him. In addition to considerations of safety, staff hypothesised from observation and analysis that both physical intervention (blocking behaviour) and attention from others were maintaining his behaviours that challenge at this time. Securing an area of the school meant that staff could minimise physical intervention and attention from others while keeping him safe. His parents parked in an area in front of the school that could be safely secured to prevent him from running into the road (this would mean that he could be kept safe without physical intervention and attention from staff).

Proactive strategies: Multiple strategies were used to support the pupil with the transition to the car.

1. Firstly reinforcers (phoning Grandma/strawberry milkshake) were made available if he walked to the car without engaging in behaviour that challenges.
2. When this procedure had no significant effect on his behaviour, continuous reinforcement in the form of a preferred person walking with him to the car was used. This intervention resulted in successful transitions for 2 days; however, after this his engagement in behaviour that challenged returned to baseline levels.
3. Research suggests that giving warnings of the upcoming transition can be effective, as can using visual schedules to prepare for a transition (Sevin et al, 2015). These procedures were trialled but were not effective. He would engage in behaviours that challenge as soon as the visual of the car was presented/as soon as a vocal warning was given. These stimuli had become a CMOR; a warning stimulus (Carbone et al 2007).
4. The pupil would also escalate if he saw any other signals to indicate home time, such as his parents arriving. The next procedure trialled involved the pupil's parents coming into the school to take part in a fun activity with him before leaving (so their appearance did not signal the start of a transition). However, staff were unable to ever implement this properly as the pupil continued to engage in intense behaviours that challenged as soon as his parents arrived, even if access to the highly preferred activity (cake making) was presented simultaneously.

The final intervention trialled was:

- The pupil's parents briefly came in to say hello, then left quickly and waited in the car. Staff explained to him that his parents were here, then gave him the choice of whether to 'wait' or go immediately. They periodically asked him this during a 15-minute period, then at the end of this time explained that it was time to go.

It is worth highlighting that throughout this process, the pupil would not typically have significant behaviours that challenged once in the car, when being driven home or once at home. The trigger appeared to be the transition itself.

Results

Once the final intervention (combined with the crisis management plan) was implemented, the pupil's behaviour that challenged during his end of the day transition declined in duration (see figure 1) and intensity (see figure 2). It is probable that giving him the choice of whether to 'stay or go' during the transition had given him a functional way of avoiding or delaying it. His behaviour suggests he now finds this part of the day easier and less anxiety-provoking. Indeed, when given the opportunity to 'wait or go' he will now often choose to go immediately.

Eventually he was transitioning to the car each day with only 1 member of staff needed and without behaviour that challenged. School staff have then been able to fade parts of this intervention over time. Although he still waits in a room alone with his tutor 15 minutes before he leaves, other staff and pupils are now able to be in the same area and a secured area is no longer needed. At time of writing his parents had begun waiting in the playground with other parents at the end of the day, and he was leaving at the same time as other pupils.

The same transition plan was transferred to the pupil leaving an adventure playground (a weekly class trip). Although a few weeks were needed to implement the intervention, at time of writing the pupil had successfully transitioned away from the playground twice without engaging in behaviours that challenge.

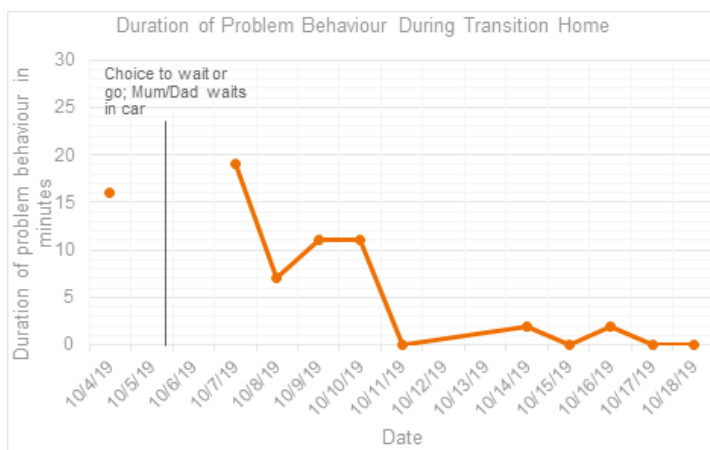


Figure 1: Duration in minutes of problem behaviour during transition home.

Discussion

This case study highlights how the science and research of ABA can support professionals to change intense, complex behaviours that challenge that has been occurring for many years.

There have been many studies investigating how to support individuals to transition away from activities/places. This case study demonstrates that there is not a 'one size fits all' approach to this issue (or many other difficulties that individuals with autism face). Not all the procedures trialled to support this pupil were effective, but each one gave staff more information about the learner's preferences, reinforcers, barriers and the functions of his behaviour; and ultimately led to the development of a successful intervention.

References

Sevin, J.A., Rieske, D.R., Matson, J.L. (2015). A Review of Behavioural Strategies and Support Considerations for Assisting Persons with Difficulties transitioning from Activity to Activity. *Rev J Autism Dev Disord*: (2): 329–342

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