



School Social Work Association of America Position Paper

Functional Behavioral Assessment and Behavior Intervention Plans

Introduction: The School Social Work Association of America believes that all students should have equal access to educational opportunities. Many teachers find themselves overwhelmed and unprepared to address the increased number of behavioral problems in their classrooms. Students whose behavior impedes their own ability to learn often interfere with the learning opportunities of others and with teachers' abilities to communicate increasingly demanding curricula. As a result, the learning environment for all students may be impacted. SSWAA understands that students who present the most difficult behavioral challenges in our nation's schools require a level of intervention that maintains a constant focus on problem-solving and ensuring positive educational results. School social workers have specific training and expertise critical to developing workable and effective Functional Behavioral Assessments (FBA) and Behavior Intervention Plans (BIP), and should work collaboratively within the interdisciplinary team to support this level of unbiased data-based decision-making.

The use of FBAs in general education is a research-based method to address target behaviors and can be applied to all tiers in a Multi-Tiered System of Support framework (Filter & Alvarez, 2011). The completion of a functional behavior assessment leads to developing an effective behavior intervention plan. The BIP includes strategies to help the student, with the help of their teachers, improve identified behaviors. School social workers should be proficient in conducting FBAs and BIPs. This approach to assessment facilitates an understanding of the function or purpose of behavior and provides data that are useful in designing interventions (Filter & Alvarez, 2011).

Practice Recommendations:

Provide evidence-based education, behavior and mental health services

- School social workers have skills to assist with facilitating the composition of functional assessment teams that include family members, the analysis of human behavior, the communication between multidisciplinary stakeholders, the gathering of multilayered information, the identification of student strengths, the development of comprehensive interventions, and the measurement of outcomes (Filter & Alvarez, 2011).
- With their substantial training and knowledge in systems theory, school social workers can promote team-based decision-making through purposeful communication across home, school, and community (Fynaardt & Richardson, 2010; Harrison & Harrison, 2009).
- School social workers are trained in strengths-based approaches to replace undesired behaviors, and these approaches play a significant role in the development of positive behavior intervention plans (Fynaardt & Richardson, 2010; Harrison & Harrison, 2009).
- School social workers should familiarize themselves with evidence-based, as well as evidence-informed rationales, samples, and forms associated with [Functional Behavioral](#)

[Assessments](#) and [Behavior Intervention Plans](#). Here are [additional forms and documents](#) as well.

Promote a school climate and culture conducive to student learning and teaching excellence

- School Social Workers ensure the process of collecting data and planning interventions in an FBA model is managed by a team rather than by an individual. This ensures input from multiple sources and shared responsibility for outcomes (Filter & Alvarez, 2011).
- Because of the nature of their work with students, school social workers are often aware of internal and external stakeholders, including school personnel who are not obvious candidates for the team (such as bus drivers and janitors) and community agencies that already provide services to particular students; these participants can play an integral role on the team (Harrison & Harrison, 2009).
- School social workers abide by the National Association of Social Workers Code of Ethics (2008), prompting them as team members to ensure ethical decision-making related to collecting and reporting information in a respectful manner that preserves the dignity of the student (Harrison & Harrison, 2009).

Maximize access to school-based and community-based resources

- School social workers are keenly aware of the resources available within the community. By leveraging these resources, the school and community work together to address barriers to learning identified in an FBA (Filter & Alvarez, 2011).
- Behavior should be assessed systemically. Assessment should take an ecological approach, focusing not only on the student, but on the student in interaction with his or her environment in school, home and community settings. This approach lends to identifying the appropriate resources and making vital connections within the community.

Conclusion:

The process of conducting an FBA at any tier requires the work of a team to ensure process fidelity and to conduct evaluation of the process and includes ongoing professional development in developing, maintaining, and improving practice (Filter & Alvarez, 2011). FBAs are relevant to all students, especially those being served in the general education setting. Although FBAs were first used with students with disabilities, the contextual understanding of behavior has significant implications for improving the behavior of students without disabilities (Filter & Alvarez, 2011). The FBA process provides an opportunity for school social workers, as members of the multidisciplinary intervention team, to contribute a strengths-based perspective in order to adequately support students who exhibit problematic behavior, and to promote a partnership with parents and other relevant experts throughout the process.

SSWAA is proud to offer school social workers and related professionals, training and tools to support their practice, as indicated in the recommendations above. Continue to access the SSWAA website, SSWAA professional development opportunities and SSWAA Board to meet your needs.

References:

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- Harrison, K. & Harrison, R.. (2009). The school social worker's role in the tertiary support of Functional Assessment. *Children & Schools*, 31(2), 119-127. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1093/cs/31.2.119>

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