

# What Are Children Trying to Tell Us: Assessing the Function of Their Behavior



Project funded by the Child Care and Head Start Bureaus in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services



## What Works Brief Training Kit #9

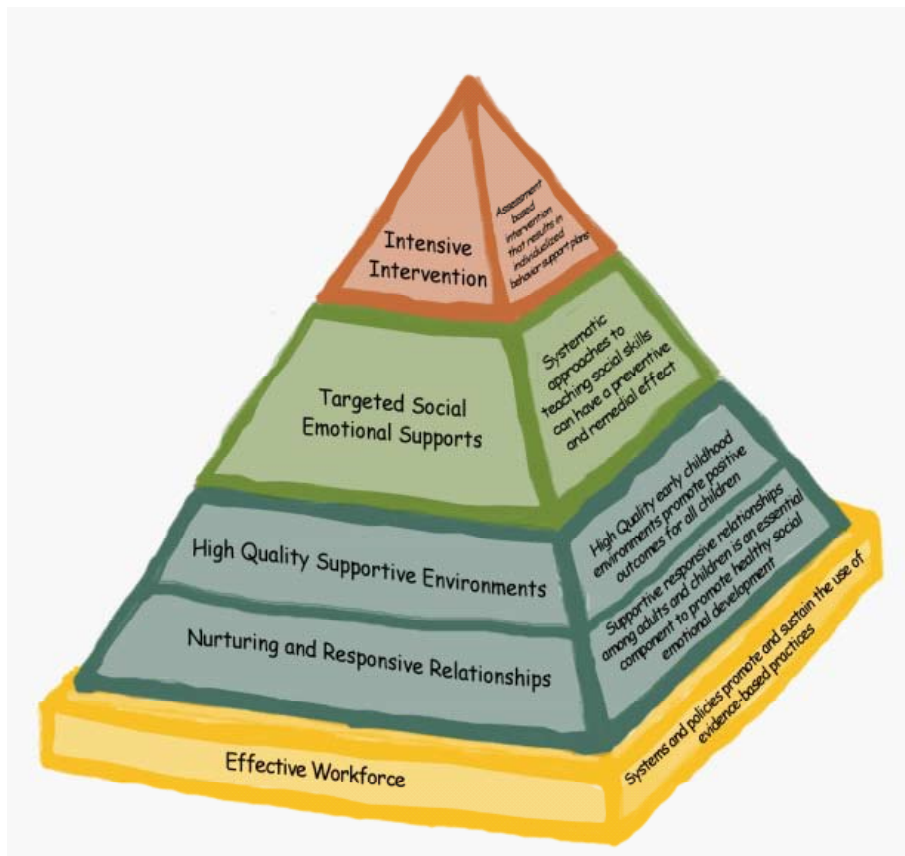


Center on the Social and Emotional  
Foundations for Early Learning  
[www.vanderbilt.edu/csefel/](http://www.vanderbilt.edu/csefel/)

May 2008

The **What Works Brief Training Kits** were developed to help in-service and pre-service providers conduct staff development activities. Each kit is based on one What Works Brief and contains the following items: presenter's PowerPoint note pages, participant handouts, activity ideas, pre-training survey, demographic form, training evaluation, and training certificate.

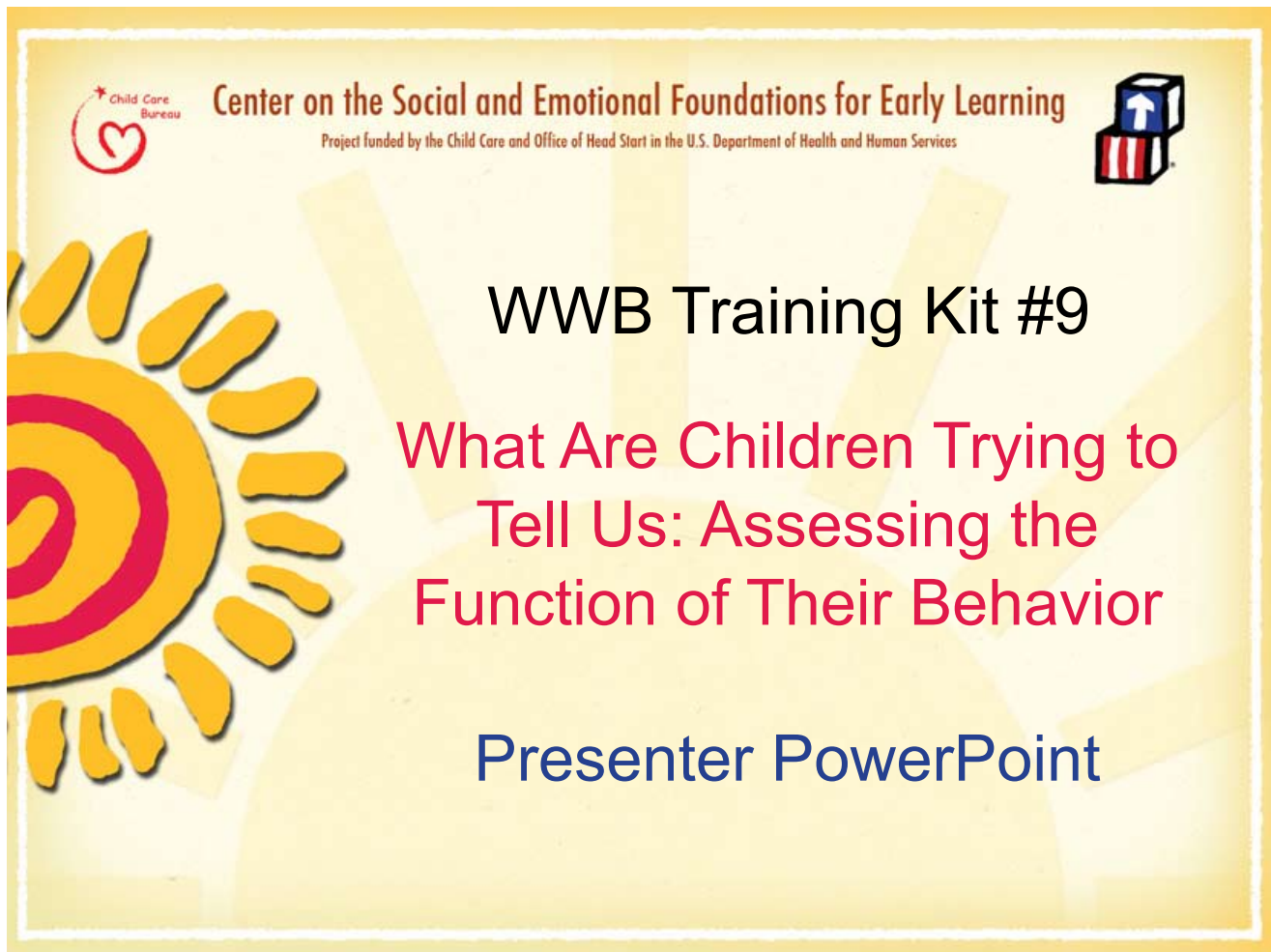
The What Works Brief Training Kits are grounded in the Pyramid model depicted below which provides a framework for describing the four interrelated levels of practice that address the social and emotional development of all children. The Pyramid is designed to guide practitioners in understanding the importance of children's social-emotional competence in terms of school readiness and the prevention of challenging behavior. This What Works Brief Training Kit relates to the "Individualized Interventions" level of the Pyramid.



We welcome your feedback as you provide professional development activities with these materials.

Special thanks to the Meginnis Endowment at UIUC for funding to help support this effort and to the following individuals who developed the What Works Brief Training Kits materials: Micki Ostrosky, Hedda Meadan, Greg Cheatham, Monique Mills, Sallee Beneke, Nancy Gaumer, Amy Hayden, Elenor Rentschler, and Angel Fettig.

## Presenter Notes



### ***Speaker Notes:***

- Presenter should be familiar with the content in *What Works Brief #9 and Module 3a, Sections VIII to XV* (available at <http://www.vanderbilt.edu/csefel>).
- Consider using the *What Works Brief #9* handout as a supplemental resource.
- Welcome participants.
- Take care of any logistics (e.g, length of time for session, break, handouts, etc.).
- Pass out pre-training survey for all participants to complete and turn in, if desired.
- As you present the workshop:
  - Remind participants to take the culture and background of children into consideration and to work hand-in-hand with parents when they select target behaviors, since some behaviors may be part of the child's culture.

## What Is Functional Behavior Assessment?

- Functional Behavioral Assessment (FBA) is used to understand the purpose or function of a specific challenging behavior exhibited by a child.
- FBA is a process for developing an understanding of a child's challenging behavior, and, in particular, how the behavior is influenced by environmental events.
- FBA identifies the environmental factors or events that consistently predict or result from a children's challenging behavior.



Center on the Social and Emotional  
Foundations for Early Learning

### ***Speaker Notes:***

FBA is an essential component of the process of positive behavior support.

## How Does FBA Fit within Positive Behavior Support?

Step 1: Bring together a team of individuals who are concerned and knowledgeable about the child.

Step 2: Gather information about the child's behavior (FBA).

Step 3: Develop the behavior support plan.

Step 4: Implement and evaluate the success of the plan.



Center on the Social and Emotional  
Foundations for Early Learning

### ***Speaker Notes:***

This slide outlines the basic steps involved in positive behavior support, including Functional Behavioral Assessment. All of these basic steps are crucial for successful outcomes for the child. This training focuses on Step 2.

## Why Is Understanding the Function of Children's Behavior Important?

- FBA should be considered when the behavior is thought to inhibit a child's performance and participation in daily activities and routines.
- Once the purpose or function of the challenging behavior is understood, support teams can design and use effective interventions that promote the success and participation of the child in daily activities and routines.



Center on the Social and Emotional  
Foundations for Early Learning

### ***Speaker Notes:***

Explain to participants the reasons why the function of children's challenging behavior is important if we are to effectively work with the child.

- Positive Behavior Support is based on the assumption that children's challenging behavior has meaning.
- Challenging behavior is communicative; children engage in these behaviors to tell us something.
- We need to find out what children are trying to tell us in order to effectively address the behaviors.

## Functions of Challenging Behaviors

- The reason or purpose of the communicative behavior.
- Functions of Communication:
  - Request object, activity, person
  - Escape demands/activity
  - Escape a person
  - Request help
  - Request social interaction
  - Comment
  - Request information
  - Request sensory stimulation
  - Escape sensory stimulation



Center on the Social and Emotional  
Foundations for Early Learning

### ***Speaker Notes:***

- Challenging behavior is communicative. The child is trying to tell us something using challenging behaviors (i.e., “I need a break,” “I need help,” “I am tired,” “This is too hard”).
- Point out that the two major functions of children’s challenging behaviors are to ESCAPE from someone or something and to OBTAIN someone or something.

## How Does Functional Behavior Assessment Work?

- FBA can be conducted individually or by a team (e.g., parent, teacher, behavior resource person).
- The process involves collecting information through the use of observation, interviews, and record reviews (e.g., school records, medical records, diagnostic reports).
- The information gathered is used to understand what happens before the challenging behavior, what the challenging behavior looks like, and what happens after the challenging behavior.

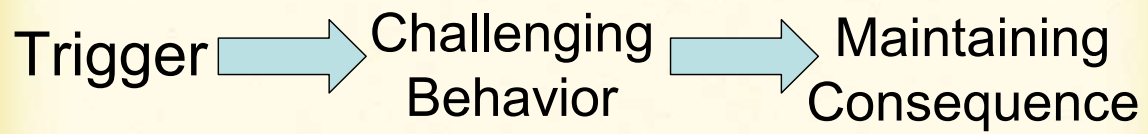


Center on the Social and Emotional  
Foundations for Early Learning

### ***Speaker Notes:***

- Here are more characteristics of functional behavior assessment.
- Although FBA can be conducted by an individual educator, specialist, or caregiver, a team approach is likely to be more effective.





Center on the Social and Emotional  
Foundations for Early Learning

### ***Speaker Notes:***

FBA is designed to determine the three components listed above.

- The trigger is what occurs before the challenging behavior that causes the challenging behavior to occur.
- The maintaining consequence is what occurs after the behavior that makes the behavior likely to keep occurring.

## FBA Interviews

Interviews can be conducted to find information about:

- The nature of the behavior
- Events that may predict the behavior
- What the child may gain or avoid by engaging in challenging behavior
- How well challenging behavior works for the child
- Circumstances that are not associated with the behavior



Center on the Social and Emotional  
Foundations for Early Learning

### ***Speaker Notes:***

- Interviews are helpful in FBA because they enable you to gather information about the child in multiple settings and from the perspectives of multiple people.
- Interviews can be conducted to find information about:
  - The nature of the behavior—What the challenging behavior looks like, how often, and when it occurs.
  - Events that may predict the behavior—What occurs that seems to set the child up to engage in the challenging behavior.
  - What the child may gain or avoid through challenging behavior—What does the child get (e.g., a favorite toy, quiet time) or avoid (e.g., peer interaction, a class activity)?
  - How well challenging behavior works for the child—To what extent the challenging behavior helps the child get something or avoid something.
  - Circumstances that are not associated with the behavior—What appears to NOT be an influence on the challenging behavior (e.g., while the child may engage in challenging behavior during center time, you notice that he/she does not engage in challenging behavior during standard activities like large group, story time, and small group).
- Refer to Module 3a for a sample FBA interview form: <http://www.vanderbilt.edu/csefel/modules/module3a/handout5.pdf>

## FBA Observations

- Used with interviews to provide more information about factors that predict and maintain challenging behaviors
- Observers can watch the child and note:
  - The events that immediately precede a challenging behavior
  - A specific description of the challenging behavior
  - The events that follow the challenging behavior



Center on the Social and Emotional  
Foundations for Early Learning

### ***Speaker Notes:***

- Observation can be written on index cards.
- Refer to Module 3a for a sample observation card:  
<http://www.vanderbilt.edu/csefel/modules/module3a/handout3.pdf>

## Pair-Think-Share

- **Pair** with a partner.
- **Think** and write a description of a “tantrum” on a piece of paper. Determine exactly what a tantrum looks like.
- **Share** your description with the group.



Center on the Social and Emotional  
Foundations for Early Learning

### ***Speaker Notes:***

- First, ask participants to select a partner and describe a child’s “tantrum.”
- Remind participants that they need to be as specific as possible. Ask them to answer the question, “What specifically does the tantrum look like?”
- Next, have each pair read aloud their definition of a “tantrum.”
- After all of the pairs have shared their descriptions of a “tantrum,” point out the differences and similarities between the descriptions. Tell participants that without clearly describing or defining challenging behaviors, FBA will not be effective.

## Developing a Hypothesis Statement

- What events consistently predict the challenging behavior?
- In what environments and with whom does the challenging behavior occur consistently?
- What events consistently occur after the challenging behavior?
- Does the behavior occur to obtain something or escape/avoid something?



Center on the Social and Emotional  
Foundations for Early Learning

### ***Speaker Notes:***

After all information is collected, it is analyzed by the team or individual to make a "Hypothesis Statement," which will answer the questions listed on the slide.

## Developing a Hypothesis Statement

Trigger	Challenging Behavior	Maintaining Consequence



Center on the Social and Emotional  
Foundations for Early Learning

### ***Speaker Notes:***

- Show participants the table, on which the different components of the challenging behavior can be written.
- Identify the “trigger” as events that occur before the challenging behavior.
- State that “challenging behavior” means a concrete description of the challenging behavior.
- Explain that the “maintaining consequence” means the events that occur after the challenging behavior that make the challenging behavior effective for the child. That is, what does the child obtain or escape/avoid?

## Identifying Hypothesis Statement Components

In the block area when other children try to play with her, Mary hits peers on the arm or face. After Mary hits the other children, the teacher scolds her and directs the peers to another center.



Center on the Social and Emotional  
Foundations for Early Learning

### ***Speaker Notes:***

Have participants identify the following Hypothesis Statement components:

- 1—What predicts the challenging behavior? [Suggested response: As Mary plays with blocks, another child attempts to play in the same center.]
- 2—What does the challenging behavior look like? [Suggested response: Mary hits peers on the arm and face.]
- 3—What occurs after the challenging behavior? What does the child try to obtain or escape/avoid? [Suggested response: The teacher scolds Mary and moves the child to another center. Mary OBTAINS sole access to the blocks.]

# Activity 1

## Developing a Hypothesis Statement

- In pairs, read the given scenario.
- Based on the information presented, develop a hypothesis statement.
- Share the hypothesis statement with the group.



Center on the Social and Emotional  
Foundations for Early Learning

### ***Speaker Notes:***

#### Suggested Response:

- Trigger—Timer went off for Derek to transition from block area to the art center
- Challenging Behavior—Said “no” and kicked peer .
- Maintaining Consequence—Negative attention from teacher and was then placed in timeout.

#### Hypothesis Statement:

- When Derek is asked to transition from one center to the next, he refuses by saying “no” and by hitting his peers. When this occurs, Derek gains adults’ negative attention through verbal scolding and being placed in timeout to the other side of the room.



## The Next Step...

- Step 1: Bring together a team of individuals who are concerned and knowledgeable about the child.
- Step 2: Gather information about the child's behavior (FBA).
- Step 3: Develop the behavior support plan.
- Step 4: Implement and evaluate the success of the plan.



Center on the Social and Emotional  
Foundations for Early Learning

### ***Speaker Notes:***

- Tell participants that with the information that they gather using Functional Behavior Assessment, they can write a behavior support plan. Refer participants to *What Works Brief #10, Positive Behavior Support*: <http://www.vanderbilt.edu/csefel/briefs/wwb10.pdf>
- See if there are any concerns or general questions about the topic of FBA.
- Thank the participants for participating and have them complete the evaluation form, if appropriate.
- Distribute the certificate of attendance if appropriate.

# Pre-training Survey

WWBTK #9: What Are Children Trying to Tell Us: Assessing the Function of Their Behavior

☀️ **What are two ways to gather data about a child's challenging behavior?**

---

---

---

---

---

**CSEFEL**



☀️ **What are two possible functions of children's challenging behavior?**

---

---

---

---

---

☀️ **Why is it important to determine the function of a child's challenging behavior?**

---

---

---

---

---

☀️ **What are the three most pressing issues you face as an early childhood professional?**

1. 

---

---

2. 

---

---

3. 

---

---

# Pre-training Survey

WWBTK #9: What Are Children Trying to Tell Us: Assessing the Function of Their Behavior

## Demographic Information

CSEFEL



Describe yourself (check the boxes that best describe you):

Your gender:  Female  Male

Your age:  under 30  31 to 40  41 to 50  
 51-60  61 and above

Your ethnicity:  European American  Asian-Pacific  Hispanic  
 African-American  American Indian  Other (specify) \_\_\_\_\_

Check your current teaching certificates:

- Early Childhood Education
- Elementary Education
- Special Education
- Other (Specify) \_\_\_\_\_

Check the one that best describes your education:

- High school or GED
- Some college
- Associate's degree
- Bachelor's degree
- Master's degree
- Other (Specify) \_\_\_\_\_


Your teaching experience:

How many year(s) have you taught preschoolers? \_\_\_\_\_


How many year(s) have you taught preschoolers with IEPs? \_\_\_\_\_

Thank you for completing this survey.

# Participant Notes



Center on the Social and Emotional Foundations for Early Learning  
Project funded by the Child Care and Office of Head Start in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services



## WWB Training Kit #9


### What Are Children Trying to Tell Us: Assessing the Function of Their Behavior

Participant PowerPoint

## Notes

### What Is Functional Behavior Assessment?

- Functional Behavioral Assessment (FBA) is used to understand the purpose or function of a specific challenging behavior exhibited by a child.
- FBA is a process for developing an understanding of a child's challenging behavior, and, in particular, how the behavior is influenced by environmental events.
- FBA identifies the environmental factors or events that consistently predict or result from a children's challenging behavior.



Center on the Social and Emotional Foundations for Early Learning


### How Does FBA Fit within Positive Behavior Support?

**Step 1:** Bring together a team of individuals who are concerned and knowledgeable about the child.

**Step 2:** Gather information about the child's behavior (FBA).

**Step 3:** Develop the behavior support plan.

**Step 4:** Implement and evaluate the success of the plan.



Center on the Social and Emotional Foundations for Early Learning

## Why Is Understanding the Function of Children's Behavior Important?

- FBA should be considered when the behavior is thought to inhibit a child's performance and participation in daily activities and routines.
- Once the purpose or function of the challenging behavior is understood, support teams can design and use effective interventions that promote the success and participation of the child in daily activities and routines.



Center on the Social and Emotional  
Foundations for Early Learning

## Functions of Challenging Behaviors

- The reason or purpose of the communicative behavior.
- Functions of Communication:
  - Request object, activity, person
  - Escape demands/activity
  - Escape a person
  - Request help
  - Request social interaction
  - Comment
  - Request information
  - Request sensory stimulation
  - Escape sensory stimulation



Center on the Social and Emotional  
Foundations for Early Learning

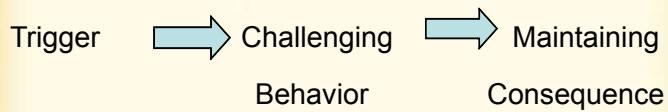
## How Does Functional Behavior Assessment Work?

- FBA can be conducted individually or by a team (e.g., parent, teacher, behavior resource person).
- The process involves collecting information through the use of observation, interviews, and record reviews (e.g., school records, medical records, diagnostic reports).
- The information gathered is used to understand what happens before the challenging behavior, what the challenging behavior looks like, and what happens after the challenging behavior.



Center on the Social and Emotional  
Foundations for Early Learning

## Notes



Center on the Social and Emotional Foundations for Early Learning

## FBA Interviews

Interviews can be conducted to find information about:

- The nature of the behavior
- Events that may predict the behavior
- What the child may gain or avoid by engaging in challenging behavior
- How well challenging behavior works for the child
- Circumstances that are not associated with the behavior



Center on the Social and Emotional Foundations for Early Learning

## FBA Observations

- Used with interviews to provide more information about factors that predict and maintain challenging behaviors
- Observers can watch the child and note:
  - The events that immediately precede a challenging behavior
  - A specific description of the challenging behavior
  - The events that follow the challenging behavior



Center on the Social and Emotional Foundations for Early Learning

# Notes

## Developing a Hypothesis Statement

- What events consistently predict the challenging behavior?
- In what environments and with whom does the challenging behavior occur consistently?
- What events consistently occur after the challenging behavior?
- Does the behavior occur to obtain something or escape/avoid something?



Center on the Social and Emotional  
Foundations for Early Learning

## Developing a Hypothesis Statement

Trigger	Challenging Behavior	Maintaining Consequence



Center on the Social and Emotional  
Foundations for Early Learning

## The Next Step...

- Step 1: Bring together a team of individuals who are concerned and knowledgeable about the child.
- Step 2: Gather information about the child's behavior (FBA).
- Step 3: **Develop the behavior support plan.**
- Step 4: Implement and evaluate the success of the plan.



Center on the Social and Emotional  
Foundations for Early Learning

## Notes

# Activity 1

## Developing a Hypothesis Statement

WWBTK #9: What Are Children Trying to Tell Us: Assessing the Function of Their Behavior

### Scenario

*Derek was playing in the block area when the timer went off. Most of the children began to leave their centers and rotate to a new station. Derek stayed in the block area as four children arrived there to play. Ms. Morden, the teacher, redirected Derek: "Derek, it's time to go to the art center." "No, I don't want to go!" said Derek, who turned and kicked Amanda in the leg, causing her to cry. "Derek! That's not OK; kicking hurts," said Ms. Morden. "You've hurt your friend. You have a timeout." Ms. Eacott took Derek to the other side of the room, where he sat in the timeout chair for four minutes.*

CSEFEL



Ms. Morden worked with Derek's grandmother and Ms. Eacott to conduct an FBA. All three caregivers used observation cards to gather information about the events surrounding Derek's challenging behavior. Additionally, Ms. Morden interviewed Derek's grandmother. After gathering data over two weeks in several different environments, the team met again and shared the information they had gathered. The team members noticed that Derek appeared to have the most difficulty during center time and circle time. Every day he was asked to go to the art center, he hit or kicked a peer and was given a timeout. When he spent time in the block center, Derek's behavior was better—he wasn't aggressive at all. Derek loves building with blocks, but he doesn't like writing or coloring. Derek also exhibits challenging behavior during circle time; he seems to engage in challenging behavior so that he can leave and go to timeout. In addition, Derek engages in less challenging behavior during activities in which he has many choices, like blocks or dramatic play.

Trigger	Challenging Behavior	Maintaining Consequence



# CSEFEL Training Workshop Evaluation

WWBTK #9: What Are Children Trying to Tell Us: Assessing the Function of Their Behavior

Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Location: \_\_\_\_\_

Topic: \_\_\_\_\_

Speaker(s): \_\_\_\_\_

Your position: \_\_\_\_\_

CSEFEL



☀ Circle the number that best expresses your reaction to each of the following items:

- |  |                       |   |   |   |   |                        |
|--|-----------------------|---|---|---|---|------------------------|
| 1. This topic is important to me.            | (Extremely Important) | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 | (Not Important at All) |
| 2. The amount of information covered was     | (Just Right)          | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 | (Inadequate)           |
| 3. The information covered was clear.        | (Very Clear)          | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 | (Vague)                |
| 4. The activities conducted were beneficial. | (Very)                | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 | (Not at All)           |
| 5. The handouts provided were useful.        | (Very)                | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 | (Not at All)           |
| 6. Overall, this presentation was            | (Very Useful)         | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 | (Not Useful)           |

☀ Things I liked about this presentation:

☀ Things I would change about this presentation:

☀ Additional information I would like on this topic:

☀ New things I am going to try as a result of this workshop:

☀ Additional comments:

# Center on the Social and Emotional Foundations for Early Learning

## *Certificate of Training*

What Are Children Trying to Tell Us: Assessing the Function of  
Their Behavior

---

successfully completed the above training

---

*Trainer*

---

*Trainer*



---

*Participant*

---

*Date and Location*