



Evolve & Effect_{LLC}

BEHAVIORAL CONSULTATION

Michael McSheehan
Michael@evolveandeffect.com
(603) 534-1620

Behavior is communication. If someone is using concerning behaviors like yelling, hitting, or running away, there are probably good reasons for it. Designing effective supports, therefore, must begin with recognizing and understanding the underlying reasons for their use of those behaviors.

Too often when seeking behavioral support, teams rely on one person, a behaviorist, to conduct Functional Behavior Assessments (FBAs) through their single frame, behaviorism. This approach — one person/one frame — often fails to recognize other reasons for concerning behavior, like medical, sensory, or communication issues. Worse, employing a single frame approach can risk placing the focus on control and compliance instead of on understanding and collaboration.

Clinical psychologist and disability rights advocate Herb Lovett, who coined the term “positive approaches” to behavior, used to say, “Serious behavior has serious meaning.” To discover that serious meaning, teams must collaborate, applying multiple frames to increase their understanding. Once they better understand the person and the meaning behind the behavior, they can begin to identify respectful approaches that support everyone involved.

If you’re noticing that your Behavior Support Plans are derived from a single-lens FBA and are not effective or respectful, let’s try another way. My consultation takes a collaborative and holistic approach, providing the kind of comprehensive assessment that is needed to address complex and concerning behavior. It helps teams capture the array of interconnected factors that influence behavior, using the basic elements of the FBA and expanding on them to better understand the person and to view their use of behavior through additional lenses. As a team, we may:

- **Ask the Person** — Ask questions of the person who is using concerning behaviors and listen carefully to their answers. If the person has limited speech or is non-speaking, reflect on what they may be experiencing by asking, “If I was this person, with this bio-neuro-social-sensory-cognitive profile, in this situation, what might I be communicating?” Observe carefully and combine science with common sense to develop “respectful guesses,” understanding that in many cases, extreme behavior is a last resort for an individual who is not being heard.
- **Apply Disability-Specific Knowledge** — Access and apply the most up-to-date disability-specific knowledge. What is the current practical and conceptual knowledge about this person’s disabilities? How might it help us better understand this person and their needs? What do self-advocates with the same disabilities say and how might their insights inform new avenues of support for this person?



Evolve & Effect^{LLC}

BEHAVIORAL CONSULTATION

Michael McSheehan
Michael@evolveandeffect.com
(603) 534-1620

- **Incorporate Medical Information** — Review the individual’s medical history thoroughly. What medical conditions are known and what might need to be ruled out? What medications is the person on and have those changed recently?
- **Consider Sensory Systems** — Complete a thorough inventory of sensory issues that the person may be experiencing. Are there differences involving how they sense the outside world (e.g., sight, touch, sound), how they process their internal states (e.g., hunger, pain, bowels), and/or how they perceive their body and positioning in space? How might these differences inform interpretation of concerning behavior? How is the person regulating their energy, emotions, or attention among these sensory differences?
- **Explore Communication** — Identify and describe the person’s communication differences. How are communication partners interpreting what this person is communicating? If the person’s speech is limited in some way, what augmentative or alternative communication has been tried? How might different communication supports influence their need to use concerning behaviors?
- **Acknowledge Relationships** — Identify the people who play a critical role in the individual’s life. Who loves this person and who do they love? Where and how do they feel safe and connected with others? How do they experience a sense of belonging in their community (e.g., school, home, work, recreation)?
- **Pursue Quality of Life** — Build a plan around the individual’s personal goals. What is this person’s purpose in life or at this time in their life? What’s the overall quality of their life? How are they determining and directing their life?
- **Address Curricular Design and Delivery** — Consider the design and delivery of curricula and opportunities for learning for those who are in school. How might the design and delivery of learning opportunities influence their participation? Are the accessibility features of the curriculum well matched to this person’s needs? Would adjustments in the environment, goals, teaching methods, or materials better address their unique needs?

Let’s work together to identify which factors might be most useful to get you closer to a holistic understanding of your student or loved one. Together we will ask questions, compile data, look for patterns, and *listen* so that we may identify well-matched supports to create a positive effect in their life.