

STEP-BY-STEP GUIDE

This step-by-step practice guide outlines how to plan for, use, and monitor Cognitive Behavioral/Instructional Strategies.

BEFORE YOU BEGIN...

Each of the following points is important to address so that you can be sure Cognitive Behavioral/Instructional Strategies is likely to address the target goal/behavior/skill of your learner on the spectrum.



HAVE YOU FOUND OUT MORE INFORMATION ABOUT...?

- ☐ Identifying the behavior...?
- ☐ Collecting baseline data through direct observation...?
- ☐ Establishing a target goal or outcome that clearly states when the behavior will occur, what the target goal or outcome is, and how team members and/or observers will know when the skill is mastered...?

If the answer to any of the above questions is 'No,' review the process of how to select an appropriate EBP (<https://afirm.fpg.unc.edu/selecting-EBP>).

For more information about Cognitive Behavioral/Instructional Strategies, please visit <https://afirm.fpg.unc.edu/>.

STEP 1: PLANNING FOR CBIS

The planning step details the initial steps and considerations involved to prepare for using Cognitive Behavioral/Instructional Strategies with a learner on the spectrum.

1. Determine if learner has prerequisite skills

Due to the cognitive and linguistic skills needed to engage in CBIS, autistic learners with whom CBIS techniques have often been utilized have typically have intact intellectual and academic skills that are largely within the average range of functioning. Often, necessary skills may include cognitive developmental level above approximately 6 years, expressive and receptive language skills above approximately 6 years, reading level consistent with the level of written materials used, and if doing CBIS in a group, being group ready (ability to learn information in a group format, demonstrate appropriate behavior in a group, etc.).

Keep in mind that **Cognitive Behavioral/Instructional Strategies** can be used to increase desired/appropriate behaviors/skills and to decrease inappropriate behaviors.

2. Conduct a functional behavior assessment

A Functional Behavior Assessment (FBA) should be conducted to aid in identifying the most likely function of the interfering behavior.

- Note: Check out the module on FBA for more information about this specific process.

 Use the **FBA** to gather information on an interfering behavior.

3. Conduct an assessment of needs and skills

To address the behavioral piece of CBIS, conducting a functional behavior assessment can often be helpful to gather information regarding the concerning or interfering behavior including the antecedents and consequences of that behavior. To address the cognitive piece of CBIS, assessing the learners learning style from a perspective of autism can often be helpful in giving additional information as to why a behavior is occurring and the learner's cognitive strengths and weaknesses in order to help develop the intervention strategies to be used or modify them as necessary.

 Use the **Needs & Skills Assessment** to gather data about a learner's needs and skills.

 Use the **CBIS Planning Checklist** as a companion for completing the planning step.

4. Choose or create a CBIS intervention

There are a variety of cognitive behavioral intervention models and evidence-based treatment programs, including those that have been manualized or published, for children, adolescents, and adults to address a variety of issues. These may need to be individualized to the specific learner on the spectrum that you are working with.

5. Obtain training and/or supervision for chosen CBIS intervention

An understanding of the fundamental tenets of CBIS and its application in general is critical to accurate implementation of CBIS strategies and techniques. Thus, this understanding is essential before using CBIS in practice. Some states, professional organizations, or licensing boards may have guidelines and regulations on training requirements and practice considerations. A professional's training, background, and field of study may influence how much time is required to learn these skills.

6. Develop a session plan

a) Determine delivery format:

- CBIS can be carried out in a 1-on-1 or group format, so instructors/interventionists must decide whether to individually train one learner or to create a group for instruction. The decision will likely be based on various factors, including the skills and developmental level of the learner, the availability of the trainer, availability of space, and scheduling constraints.
- Select peer(s) for participation: If a group format is selected, the next decision involves what type of learners will be included in the group. Consider:
 - Will all learners be in the same grade level or will participants be chosen across several grade levels?
 - Will all learners have ASD or will children or adolescents with a variety of needs be included?
 - Will peer models be included in the group?

- Prepare instructors and adults to assist with training: Consider who will provide the intervention. Someone trained in CBIS techniques is often the main provider preparing and leading the intervention. In a school setting, professionals may be included, such as general education teachers, special education teachers, guidance counselors, speech language pathologists, school psychologists, paraprofessionals, or even parent(s) if family involvement is part of the intervention. Community-based providers may include psychologists, social workers, or therapists. Make sure all adults who will be leaders are familiar with the principles of CBIS as well as specific lesson plans.

 Use the **Planning Checklist** as a companion for completing the planning for sessions.

b) Determine meeting place and schedule

- A meeting time and place for the CBIS needs to be selected that is convenient for both the learners on the spectrum, other members, and the leader. The length of a session can vary greatly from 10 minutes to 90 minutes.
- Individual sessions are often 45-60 minutes while group sessions are often closer to 90 minutes.

c) Determine format structure

To ensure the most effective use of time, CBIS may involve a common format for each session, depending on the goal and the type of session planned. At a minimum, a session often includes:

- a check in,
- review of that session's agenda,
- review current status and events during the time since the last session,
- review of any homework given,
- focus on the main agenda items/session content,
- assigning new homework (based on the main session content for continuity between sessions), and
- review of the session.

 Use the **Planning Checklist** as a companion for completing the planning for sessions.

 Use the **Session Plan** to guide a CBIS session.

d) Design individualized program

- Select content of lessons: Team members should consider the needs of the autistic learners and group members (if a group format was selected) to determine what will be taught in session. Keep in mind that large topics of instruction might include underlying components to the skill that will need to be addressed as well.
- Select CBIS techniques: CBIS techniques and common adaptations based on the learner styles of individuals on the spectrum include psychoeducation, affect recognition, cognitive restructuring, graded exposure, practice of strategies.
- Practice of strategies: Modeling, role-play, and use of strategies and skills in real situations can be helpful in developing, reinforcing, and generalization of skills.
- Other adaptations: There are a variety of other adaptations for the learning style of individuals on the spectrum, including schedules, chill outs/reunion, incorporating interests to increase motivation, and visual countdowns.

7. Prepare materials

Before you begin CBIS, you will need to prepare the materials. If you have selected any curriculum to support instruction, you will need to obtain those materials. Whether you have planned your own lessons or are using already created lessons, you will need to look ahead to see what materials are involved in the lessons and make sure you have those materials ready. Copies may need to be made, pictures collected, books checked out, etc.

8. Determine reinforcers

When teaching a learner new skills, it is important to reinforce the use of those skills. This may be a part of a systematic reinforcement system utilized during the course of the intervention. This could include stickers, tokens, points, or some other symbolic system; other options may include tangible items, edibles, or access to special items or activities.

 Use the **Reinforcer Sampling & Checklist** to identify reinforcers.

STEP 2: USING CBIS

This step details the process of implementing Cognitive Behavioral/Instructional Strategies with a learner on the spectrum.

1. Implement the intervention as planned

Refer back to the plan for instruction you made during the planning step. To plan for each session, use a session guide. The session guide can include information about the topic, skill addressed, content, structure, behavior management, instructional strategies, and materials needed.

 Use the **Session Plan** to guide a CBIS session.

2. Support generalization of target skills

Reinforcement of skills begins in the CBIS session, but it should not end there. It is important to plan to support learners in generalizing those skills to other settings, people, and activities.

 Use the **Session Homework - Example** as a guide for assigning CBIS homework.

STEP 3: MONITORING CBIS

The following step details how to monitor the use of Cognitive Behavioral/Instructional Strategies with a learner on the spectrum and how to determine next steps based on the data.

1. Collect and analyze data

Team members should collect data on target skills and behaviors. A variety of formats can be used to collect data depending on the behaviors or skills targeted for instruction and the features of the training.

 Use the **Data Collection: Event Recording** to collect data.

2. Determine next steps based on learner progress

Collecting data will help team members decide about the effectiveness of using Cognitive Behavioral/Instructional Strategies and whether the learner on the spectrum is making progress. If a learner is making progress based upon data collected, team members should continue to use the selected strategies.

If team members determine that the learner is not making progress, consider the following:

- Is the target skill or behavior well defined?
- Is the target skill or behavior measurable and observable?
- Has the correct target behavior been identified?
- Are there skills that need to be taught before addressing the target behavior (e.g., expressive social- communication goal, teach a new coping strategy)?
- Do the intervention strategies match the student's learning style and developmental level?
- Has enough time been devoted to using CBIS?
- Was CBIS used with fidelity? (Use the CBIS Implementation Checklist to determine fidelity.)
- Are the visuals and activities appropriate to the student's developmental level and level of receptive language?
- Is the skill or target behavior too difficult for the learner or not developmentally appropriate for the learner based on their developmental level?
- Is a consistent format used for each session?
- Are instructional strategies being used consistently?
- Are reinforcers used that are motivating to the learner?
- Was the reinforcer applied with fidelity?

If these issues have been addressed and the learner on the spectrum continues not to show progress, consider selecting a different evidence-based practice to use with the learner on the spectrum.