



Autism Focused Intervention  
Resources & Modules

FCT

## EBP BRIEF PACKET: FUNCTIONAL COMMUNICATION TRAINING

UNC Frank Porter Graham Child Development Institute  
Autism Focused Intervention Resources & Modules  
Griffin, W., & AFIRM Team, Updated 2025



The National Professional  
Development Center on Autism



FRANK PORTER GRAHAM  
CHILD DEVELOPMENT INSTITUTE

# OVERVIEW OF CONTENT

1. **Table of FCT Contents:** This list details the specific FCT resources that apply to Functional Communication Training.
2. **What is FCT:** A quick summary of salient features of Functional Communication Training, including what it is, who it can be used with, what skills it has been used with, and settings for instruction.
3. **Evidence-base:** The evidence-base details the National Clearinghouse on Autism Evidence and Practice (NCAEP) criteria for inclusion as an evidence-based practice and the specific studies that meet the criteria for Functional Communication Training.
4. **Planning Checklist:** This checklist details the steps for planning for Functional Communication Training, including what prerequisite learning of practices are needed, collecting baseline data of the interfering behavior if needed, and what materials/resources are needed.
5. **Other Resources:** Other resources may include decision trees, checklists, and/or template forms that will support the use of Functional Communication Training.
6. **Step-by-Step Guide:** Use this guide as an outline for how to plan for, use, and monitor Functional Communication Training. Each step includes a brief description as a helpful reminder while learning the process.
7. **Implementation Checklist:** Use this checklist to determine if Functional Communication Training are being implemented as intended.
8. **Monitoring Progress Checklist:** Use this form as a method for collecting and analyzing data to determine if the learner on the spectrum is making progress towards the interfering behavior.
9. **Tip Sheet for Professionals:** Use this tip sheet, intended for professionals working with learners on the spectrum, as a supplemental resource to help provide basic information about Functional Communication Training.
10. **Parent Guide:** Use this guide intended for parents or family members of learners on the spectrum to help them understand basic information about Functional Communication Training and how it is being used with their child.
11. **Additional Resources:** This list provides additional information for learning more about Functional Communication Training as well as resources.
12. **CEC Standards:** This list details the specific CEC standards that apply to Functional Communication Training.
13. **Glossary:** This glossary contains key terms that apply specifically to Functional Communication Training.
14. **References:** This list details the specific references used for developing this FCT module in numerical order.



# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b><u>Functional Communication Training</u></b> .....	<b>4</b>
<b><u>Evidence-base</u></b> .....	<b>5</b>
<b><u>Functional Communication Training</u></b> .....	<b>9</b>
<b><u>Functional Behavior Assessment</u></b> .....	<b>10</b>
<b><u>Data Collection: ABC</u></b> .....	<b>12</b>
<b><u>Prompting Hierarchy</u></b> .....	<b>13</b>
<b><u>Reinforcer Sampling &amp; Checklist</u></b> .....	<b>14</b>
<b><u>Picture Cards</u></b> .....	<b>17</b>
<b><u>Planning Checklist</u></b> .....	<b>18</b>
<b><u>Generalization Plan</u></b> .....	<b>20</b>
<b><u>Data Collection: Replacement Behavior</u></b> .....	<b>21</b>
<b><u>Data Collection: Frequency (Intervals)</u></b> .....	<b>22</b>
<b><u>Monitoring Progress Checklist</u></b> .....	<b>23</b>
<b><u>Step-by-Step Guide</u></b> .....	<b>24</b>
<b><u>Implementation Checklist</u></b> .....	<b>28</b>
<b><u>Tip Sheet for Professionals</u></b> .....	<b>29</b>
<b><u>Parent's Guide</u></b> .....	<b>31</b>
<b><u>Additional Resources</u></b> .....	<b>32</b>
<b><u>CEC Standards</u></b> .....	<b>33</b>
<b><u>Glossary</u></b> .....	<b>34</b>
<b><u>References</u></b> .....	<b>36</b>



# FUNCTIONAL COMMUNICATION TRAINING

## WHAT IS FCT?

Many learners on the spectrum display inappropriate, maladaptive, and even aggressive behaviors towards others and themselves. Often, these behaviors stem from difficulties with communication, leading to unexpected and often undesirable methods to obtain certain wants, needs, and interests. Functional communication training addresses these interfering behaviors by systematically identifying the function of the behavior and providing a replacement behavior in the form of appropriate communication that will enable the learner to get their needs met in a more acceptable way.

## EVIDENCE-BASE:

Based upon the 2020 systematic review conducted by the National Clearinghouse on Autism Evidence and Practice (NCAEP), Functional Communication Training is a focused intervention that meets the evidence-based practice criteria with 31 single case design studies. Functional Communication Training has been effective for preschoolers (3-5 years), elementary school learners (6-11 years), middle school learners (12-14 years), and high schoolers (15-18 years) with autism. Studies included the 2020 EBP report (Steinbrenner et al., 2020) detail how Functional Communication Training can be used to effectively address the following outcomes for a target goal/behavior/skill: adaptive/self-help, behavior, communication, play, school readiness, and social.

## HOW IS FCT BEING USED?

Functional Communication Training can be used by a variety of professionals, including teachers, special educators, therapists, paraprofessionals, and early interventionists in educational and community-based environments. Parents and family members also can use Functional Communication Training in the home.

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## EVIDENCE-BASE

The National Clearinghouse on Autism Evidence and Practice has adopted the following criteria to determine if a practice is evidence-based. The 2020 EBP report (Steinbrenner et al., 2020) provides more information about the systematic review process.

Efficacy must be established through high-quality, peer-reviewed research in scientific journals using:

- At least 2 randomized or quasi-experimental group design studies, or
- At least 5 single subject/case design studies, or a
- Combination of evidence of 1 randomized or quasi-experimental group design study and 3 single subject/case design studies

### OVERVIEW:

Based upon the 2020 systematic review conducted by the National Clearinghouse on Autism Evidence and Practice (NCAEP), Functional Communication Training is a focused intervention that meets the evidence-based practice criteria with 31 single case design studies. Functional Communication Training has been effective for preschoolers (3-5 years), elementary school learners (6-11 years), middle school learners (12-14 years), and high schoolers (15-18 years) with autism. Studies included the 2020 EBP report (Steinbrenner et al., 2020) detail how Functional Communication Training can be used to effectively address the following outcomes for a target goal/behavior/skill: adaptive/self-help, behavior, communication, play, school readiness, and social.

In the table below, the instructional outcomes identified by the evidence base are shown by age of participants.

Age	Adaptive	Behavior	Communication	Play	School Readiness	Social
3-5	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
6-11	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
12-14		Yes	Yes			
15-18	Yes	Yes	Yes			

## PRESCHOOL (3-5 YEARS):

- Artman-Meeker, K., Rosenberg, N., Badgett, N., Yang, X. Y., & Penney, A. (2017). The effects of bug-in-ear coaching on pre-service behavior analysts' use of functional communication training. *Behavior Analysis in Practice*, 10(3), 228-241. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s40617-016-0166-4>
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- Falcomata, T. S., Roane, H. S., Feeney, B. J., & Stephenson, K. M. (2010). Assessment and treatment of elopement maintained by access to stereotypy. *Journal of Applied Behavior Analysis*, 43(3), 513-517. <https://doi.org/10.1901/jaba.2010.43-513>
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- Olive, M. L., Lang, R. B., & Davis, T. N. (2008). An analysis of the effects of functional communication and a voice output communication aid for a child with autism spectrum disorder. *Research in Autism Spectrum Disorders*, 2(2), 223-236. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.rasd.2007.06.002>
- Rispoli, M., Camargo, S., Machalicek, W., Lang, R., & Sigafos, J. (2014). Functional communication training in the treatment of problem behavior maintained by access to rituals. *Journal of Applied Behavior Analysis*, 47(3), 580-593. <https://doi.org/10.1002/jaba.130>
- Schindler, H. R., & Horner, R. H. (2005). Generalized reduction of problem behavior of young children with autism: Building trans-situational interventions. *American Journal on Mental Retardation*, 110(1), 36-47. [https://doi.org/10.1352/0895-8017\(2005\)110<36:GROPBO>2.0.CO;2](https://doi.org/10.1352/0895-8017(2005)110<36:GROPBO>2.0.CO;2)
- \*Shamlian, K. D., Fisher, W. W., Steege, M. W., Cavanaugh, B. M., Samour, K., & Querim, A. C. (2016). Evaluation of multiple schedules with naturally occurring and therapist-arranged discriminative stimuli following functional communication training. *Journal of Applied Behavior Analysis*, 49(2), 228-50. <https://doi.org/10.1002/jaba.293>
- \*Volkert, V. M., Lerman, D. C., Call, N. A., & Trosclair-Lasserre, N. (2009). An evaluation of resurgence during treatment with functional communication training. *Journal of Applied Behavior Analysis*, 42(1), 145-160. <https://doi.org/10.1901/jaba.2009.42-145>

## ELEMENTARY SCHOOL (6-11 YEARS):

- \*Brown, K. A., Wacker, D. P., Derby, K. M., Peck, S. M., Richman, D. M., Sasso, G. M., Knutson, C.L., & Harding, J. W. (2000). Evaluating the effects of functional communication training in the presence and absence of establishing operations. *Journal of Applied Behavior Analysis*, 33(1), 53-71. <https://doi.org/10.1901/jaba.2000.33-53>

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- \*Guzinski, E. M., Cihon, T. M., & Eshleman, J. (2012). The effects of tact training on stereotypic vocalizations in children with autism. *The Analysis of Verbal Behavior*, 28(1), 101-10. <https://doi.org/10.1007/bf03393110>**
- Haq, S. S., Machalicek, W., Garbacz, S. A., & Drew, C. (2017). Employing a fixed-lean multiple schedule in the treatment of challenging behavior for children with autism spectrum disorder. *Behavior Modification*, 42(4), 610-633. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0145445517743206>**
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- \*Schmidt, J. D., Drasgow, E., Halle, J. W., Martin, C. A., & Bliss, S. A. (2014). Discrete-trial functional analysis and functional communication training with three individuals with autism and severe problem behavior. *Journal of Positive Behavior Interventions*, 16(1), 44-55. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1098300712470519>**
- \*Shamlian, K. D., Fisher, W. W., Steege, M. W., Cavanaugh, B. M., Samour, K., & Querim, A. C. (2016). Evaluation of multiple schedules with naturally occurring and therapist-arranged discriminative stimuli following functional communication training. *Journal of Applied Behavior Analysis*, 49(2), 228-50. <https://doi.org/10.1002/jaba.293>**
- \*Volkert, V. M., Lerman, D. C., Call, N. A., & Trosclair-Lasserre, N. (2009). An evaluation of resurgence during treatment with functional communication training. *Journal of Applied Behavior Analysis*, 42(1), 145-160. <https://doi.org/10.1901/jaba.2009.42-145>**

## MIDDLE SCHOOL (12-14 YEARS):

- Boesch, M. C., Taber-Doughty, T., Wendt, O., & Smalts, S. S. (2015). Using a behavioral approach to decrease self-injurious behavior in an adolescent with severe autism: A data-based case study. *Education & Treatment of Children, 38*(3), 305-328.
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- \*Falcomata, T. S., Muething, C. S., Gainey, S., Hoffman, K., & Fragale, C. (2013). Further evaluations of functional communication training and chained schedules of reinforcement to treat multiple functions of challenging behavior. *Behavior Modification, 37*(6), 723-46. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0145445513500785>
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- \*Matter, A. L., & Zarcone, J. R. (2017). A comparison of existing and novel communication responses used during functional communication training. *Behavioral Interventions, 32*(3), 217-224. <https://doi.org/10.1002/bin.1481>
- \*Tiger, J. H., Fisher, W. W., Toussaint, K. A., & Kodak, T. (2009). Progressing from initially ambiguous functional analyses: Three case examples. *Research in Developmental Disabilities, 30*(5), 910-926. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ridd.2009.01.005>

## HIGH SCHOOL (15-18 YEARS):

- \*Guzinski, E. M., Cihon, T. M., & Eshleman, J. (2012). The effects of tact training on stereotypic vocalizations in children with autism. *The Analysis of Verbal Behavior, 28*(1), 101-10. <https://doi.org/10.1007/bf03393110>
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Notes: \* denotes the study has participants in at least two age ranges  
**Bold denotes new studies since 2011 (2012 till 2017)**

# FUNCTIONAL COMMUNICATION TRAINING

## INTERFERING BEHAVIORS:

- **Aggression:** Aggressive behaviors refer to actions where a learner physically harms others or themselves, such as hitting, kicking, biting, or pushing.
  - Function: Aggression can serve various functions, such as escaping a demand or situation, gaining access to a preferred item or activity, seeking attention, or communicating discomfort or distress.
  - Replacement Communicative Behavior: Use sign language or an augmentative communication device to express frustration or discomfort. Teach functional communication, such as communicating "help" or "I need a break," to replace physical aggression.
- **Elopement:** Elopement refers to when a learner runs away or leaves a designated area without permission, often in search of something preferred.
  - Function: Elopement often serves as a means to escape an unpleasant situation, seek access to a preferred activity or item, or gain attention.
  - Replacement Communicative Behavior: Teach the learner to use functional communication like "I want to go to [activity]" or use a requesting system (e.g., PECS or a communication device).
- **Property Destruction:** Property destruction involves damaging or destroying items, such as breaking objects, throwing things, or ripping materials.
  - Function: This behavior may serve to escape or avoid a situation, express frustration, or seek attention.
  - Replacement Communicative Behavior: Teach the learner to use a specific phrase like "I'm upset" when they feel frustrated. Implement a requesting system (PECS or communication device) to request a break or specific activity when feeling overwhelmed.
- **Self-Injurious Behaviors:** Self-injurious behaviors involve actions that cause harm to the learner's own body, such as hitting oneself, biting, scratching, head-banging, or pulling hair.
  - Function: Self-injury can serve various functions, including seeking sensory input, escaping an unpleasant situation, seeking attention, or expressing frustration. It may also occur when the learner struggles to communicate a need or emotion.
  - Replacement Communicative Behavior: Teach functional communication such as using words or a communication device to express needs or emotions (e.g., "I'm upset" or "I need help").
- **Tantrums/Screaming:** Tantrums are emotional outbursts that often involve crying, screaming, falling to the ground, or flailing. They can occur when a learner is frustrated or unable to communicate their needs.
  - Function: Tantrums/Screaming typically occur to gain attention, escape an undesired task, or communicate frustration.
  - Replacement Communicative Behavior: Teach functional communication using words, gestures, or a communication device, such as communicating "I'm mad" or "I need a break."



# FUNCTIONAL BEHAVIOR ASSESSMENT

**Learner's Name:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date/Time:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Observer(s):** \_\_\_\_\_

**Interfering Behavior:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Directions:** Complete this checklist to determine the function of the interfering behavior.

## DEFINE THE INTERFERING BEHAVIOR:

1. Where does the behavior occur?
2. With whom does the behavior occur?
3. When does the behavior occur?
4. What activity is the learner participating in when the behavior occurs?
5. How long has the behavior been interfering with the learner's development and learning?
6. Does the behavior involve aggression or damage to property?
7. What are other students and adults doing when the behavior occurs?
8. What is the proximity of other students and adults when the behavior occurs?
9. What is the noise level of in the environment when the behavior occurs?
10. Number of individuals in the area:
11. Other environmental conditions:
12. Does the behavior occur because the learner is being asked to demonstrate a skill that he/she cannot perform (e.g., talking with peer, completing a difficult math assignment
13. Does the learner exhibit other behaviors immediately before the behavior occurs (antecedents)?
14. What happens immediately after the interfering behavior occurs (consequences)?



## DETERMINE THE FUNCTION OF THE BEHAVIOR:

15. To get or obtain:

- ☐ Attention
- ☐ Food
- ☐ Toys
- ☐ Hugs
- ☐ Sensory stimulation
- ☐ Other: \_\_\_\_\_

To escape or avoid:

- ☐ Attention
- ☐ Difficult task/activity
- ☐ Undesirable activity
- ☐ Social stimulation
- ☐ Sensory stimulation
- ☐ Other: \_\_\_\_\_

## DEVELOP HYPOTHESIS STATEMENT:

16. Antecedents & Consequences:

17. Interfering behavior:

18. Function of behavior:

## HYPOTHESIS STATEMENT:



# DATA COLLECTION: A-B-C

**Learner's Name:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date/Time:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Observer(s):** \_\_\_\_\_

**Target Skill/Goal/Behavior:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Directions:** Collect data what happens directly before the activity (antecedent), describe the activity (behavior), and determine what happens directly after the activity (consequence). Note approximately how many minutes the learner participated in the activity.

Date/Time/ Setting	Antecedent	Behavior	Consequence	Approximation duration (minutes)

**Prompt Key:** VB = Verbal; VSP = Prompt to use Visual Support; G = Gestural; M = Model; FP = Full Physical; PP = Partial Physical; I = No prompts needed/Independent; IS = Independent with support (VS = Visual Support; VM = Video Modeling; SN = Social Narratives)



# PROMPTING HIERARCHY

**Learner's Name:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date/Time:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Observer(s):** \_\_\_\_\_

**Target Goal/Behavior/Skill:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Directions:** Use this checklist to determine order of prompts based on the learner's needs and the target skill.

## PROMPTS:

- **Gestural** – a physical movement that provides the learner with information about how to perform the target skill/behavior
- **Independent** – the learner can perform the target skill/behavior without assistance or support from others
- **Model** – demonstrating the correct way to perform the target skill/behavior for the learner
- **Physical** – hands-on assistance given to the learner to support them to perform the target skill/behavior
- **Verbal** – any spoken words direct to the learner to help them perform the target skill/behavior
- **Visual** – a picture, icon, or physical object used to provide the learner with information on how to perform the target skill/behavior

Level	Prompt	Instructions
Level 1	Independent	
Level 2		
Level 3		
Level 4		
Level 5		
Level 6		



# REINFORCER SAMPLING & CHECKLIST

Learner's Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date/Time: \_\_\_\_\_

Observer(s): \_\_\_\_\_

Target Goal/Behavior/Skill: \_\_\_\_\_

**Directions:** Use this worksheet and checklist to identify and select reinforcers/rewards based on the learner's preferred items, interests, and activities for **Positive Reinforcement** and **Token Economy**.

## CONDUCT A REINFORCER SAMPLING:

1. Sit in front of the learner and hold up two items. Ask the learner to "Pick one."
2. Wait 10 seconds for the learner to indicate selection in manner that is appropriate for the learner (e.g., verbalization, pointing, using an augmentative communication device).
3. Place the selected object in a container for learner's selection and non-selected item in the not selected container.
4. Repeat steps 1 through 3 until half of the objects presented are selected.

Item 1	Selected?	Item 2	Selected?
	Yes No		Yes No
	Yes No		Yes No
	Yes No		Yes No
	Yes No		Yes No
	Yes No		Yes No
	Yes No		Yes No
	Yes No		Yes No

## LIST SELECTED REINFORCERS:



## LIST POTENTIAL REINFORCERS:

	AGE APPROPRIATE?	
1. What natural reinforcers could be used?	Yes	No
2. What activities, objects, and/or foods does the learner select independently?	Yes	No
3. What phrases or gestures seem to produce a pleasant response from the learner?	Yes	No
4. What does the learner say they would like to work for (if appropriate)?	Yes	No
5. What reinforcers were identified by parents/family members and/or team members as being successful in the past?	Yes	No
6. Does the learner require additional adaptations/modifications/supports? Such as visual supports or a communication device?	Yes	No
7. Have reinforcers/rewards for the learner been identified based on the learner's interests/preferred items and/or activities?	Yes	No
8. Are additional materials and/or resources for using Functional Behavior Assessment ready and available?	Yes	No



## FOODS FOR SNACKS/MEALTIME ROUTINES:

- |  |                                    |                                   |
|--|------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Cheese          | <input type="checkbox"/> Fruit     | <input type="checkbox"/> Pretzels |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Chicken Nuggets | <input type="checkbox"/> Goldfish  | <input type="checkbox"/> Other:   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Chips           | <input type="checkbox"/> Ice Cream | <input type="checkbox"/> Other:   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> French Fries    | <input type="checkbox"/> Pizza     | <input type="checkbox"/> Other:   |

## GAMES FOR PLAY/RECESS ROUTINES:

- |   |                                     |                                 |
|---|-------------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Burrito games with a blanket | <input type="checkbox"/> Peek-a-Boo | <input type="checkbox"/> Other: |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Chase                        | <input type="checkbox"/> Tickle     | <input type="checkbox"/> Other: |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Pat-a-Cake                   | <input type="checkbox"/> Other:     | <input type="checkbox"/> Other: |

## TOYS FOR PLAY/RECESS ROUTINES:

- |   |                                     |   |
|---|-------------------------------------|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Books              | <input type="checkbox"/> Legos      | <input type="checkbox"/> Remote controlled toys |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Cars/Trains/Trucks | <input type="checkbox"/> Noisy toys | <input type="checkbox"/> Other:                 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Computer           | <input type="checkbox"/> Phones     | <input type="checkbox"/> Other:                 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Doll house         | <input type="checkbox"/> Puzzles    | <input type="checkbox"/> Other:                 |

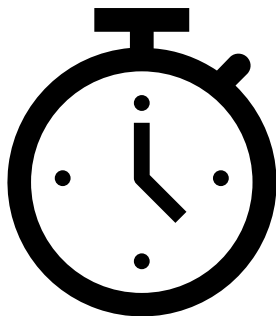
## SPECIAL INTERESTS FOR ACTIVITIES/ROUTINES:

- |   |   |                                      |
|---|---|--------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Book Character:      | <input type="checkbox"/> Movie Character:   | <input type="checkbox"/> TV Show:    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Book:                | <input type="checkbox"/> Movie:             | <input type="checkbox"/> Video Game: |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Cars, Trains, Trucks | <input type="checkbox"/> Music              | <input type="checkbox"/> Other:      |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Computers/Technology | <input type="checkbox"/> Numbers            | <input type="checkbox"/> Other:      |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Dinosaurs            | <input type="checkbox"/> Real-Life Person:  | <input type="checkbox"/> Other:      |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Letters              | <input type="checkbox"/> TV Show Character: | <input type="checkbox"/> Other:      |

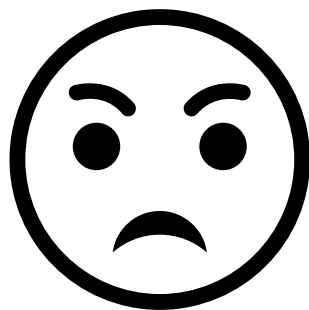
## PICTURE CARDS



**I need  
help.**



**I need a  
break.**



**I am  
upset.**



# PLANNING CHECKLIST

**Learner's Name:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date/Time:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Observer(s):** \_\_\_\_\_

**Target Skill/Goal/Behavior:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Directions:** Complete this checklist to determine which type of Functional Communication Training to use with the learner on the spectrum as well as if FCT is ready to be implemented.

## IDENTIFY FEATURES OF THE BEHAVIOR:

1. Where does the behavior occur?
  
  
  
  
2. With whom does the behavior occur?
  
  
  
  
3. When does the behavior occur?
  
  
  
  
4. During what activities does the behavior occur?

## DETERMINE THE FUNCTION OF THE BEHAVIOR:

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| <p>5. To get or obtain:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Attention</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Food</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Toys</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Hugs</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Sensory stimulation</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____</li> </ul> | <p>To escape or avoid:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Attention</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Difficult task/activity</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Undesirable activity</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Social stimulation</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Sensory stimulation</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____</li> </ul> |
|--|--|

## IDENTIFY REPLACEMENT COMMUNICATIVE BEHAVIOR:



## SELECT REPLACEMENT COMMUNICATIVE BEHAVIOR FORM:

- ☐ AAC device (i.e., PECS, voice output device)
- ☐ Sign language
- ☐ Visual support (picture card)
- ☐ Verbal (script)
- ☐ Other:

## SELECT ADDITIONAL EBPS:

- ☐ Modeling
- ☐ Prompting
- ☐ Reinforcement
- ☐ Social Narratives
- ☐ Visual Supports
- ☐ Other:

## PLANNING:

- ☐ Has baseline data and/or a functional behavior assessment been collected through direct observation of the learner?
- ☐ Is the target goal/behavior/skill measurable and observable? Does it clearly state **what** the target goal/behavior/skill is, **when** it will occur, and **how** team members/observers will know it has been mastered?
- ☐ Is Functional Communication Training appropriate for the learner's target goal/behavior/skill?
- ☐ Does the learner have needed prerequisite skills/abilities?
- ☐ Does the learner require additional adaptations/modifications/supports? Such as visual supports or a communication device?
- ☐ Have reinforcers/rewards for the learner been identified based on the learner's interests/preferred items and/or activities?
- ☐ Are additional materials and/or resources for using Functional Communication Training ready and available?



# GENERALIZATION PLAN

**Learner's Name:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date/Time:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Observer(s):** \_\_\_\_\_

**Target Skill/Goal/Behavior:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Directions:** Use this form to support the learner's use of the replacement communicative behavior across settings and activities.

Time	Activity	Setting	Notes



# DATA COLLECTION: REPLACEMENT BEHAVIOR

**Learner's Name:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date/Time:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Observer(s):** \_\_\_\_\_

**Interfering Behavior:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Replacement Communicative Behavior:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Directions:** Collect data what happens directly before (antecedent) and after (consequence) the learner's use of the replacement communicative behavior (RCB) or interfering behavior (IB).

Date/Time/ Setting	Antecedent	IB or RCB	Prompt(s) Needed	Consequence	Notes

**Prompt Key:** VB = Verbal; VSP = Prompt to use Visual Support; G = Gestural; M = Model; FP = Full Physical; PP = Partial Physical; I = No prompts needed/Independent; IS = Independent with support (VS = Visual Support; VM = Video Modeling; SN = Social Narratives)



# DATA COLLECTION: FREQUENCY (INTERVALS)

Learner's Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date/Time: \_\_\_\_\_

Observer(s): \_\_\_\_\_

Interfering Behavior: \_\_\_\_\_

Replacement Communicative Behavior: \_\_\_\_\_

**Directions:** Collect data the learner's use of the target communicative behavior when multiple opportunities for use of the replacement communicative behavior are provided or in situations where the behaviors are frequently occurring.

Interval Duration: \_\_\_\_\_ Observation Period: \_\_\_\_\_

Date	Start Time	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Stop Time

**Prompt Key:** IB = Interfering Behavior; VB = Verbal; VSP = Prompt to use Visual Support; G = Gestural; M = Model; FP = Full Physical; PP = Partial Physical; I = No prompts needed/Independent; IS = Independent with support (VS = Visual Support; VM = Video Modeling; SN = Social Narratives)



# MONITORING PROGRESS CHECKLIST

**Learner's Name:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date/Time:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Observer(s):** \_\_\_\_\_

**Target Skill/Goal/Behavior:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Directions:** Complete this checklist to determine if the learner is making progress with using Functional Communication Training.

## MONITORING PROGRESS:

- ☐ Is the identified interfering behavior well defined?
- ☐ Is the identified interfering behavior measurable and observable?
- ☐ Was a functional behavior assessment conducted?
- ☐ Did the functional behavior assessment indicate the function of the identified interfering behavior?
- ☐ Is the replacement communicative behavior addressing the function of the identified interfering behavior?
- ☐ Are team members ignoring the identified interfering behavior?
- ☐ Has enough time been devoted to using FCT?
- ☐ Were FCT implemented with fidelity (see Implementation Checklist)?
- ☐ Does the learner need additional supports?
- ☐ Are team members providing the learner with reinforcement for using the replacement communicative behavior?
- ☐ Are the selected reinforcers preferred items/activities for the learner?

# STEP-BY-STEP GUIDE

This step-by-step practice guide outlines how to plan for, use, and monitor Functional Communication Training.

## BEFORE YOU BEGIN...

Each of the following points is important to address so that you can be sure Functional Communication Training 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 Functional Communication Training, please visit <https://afirm.fpg.unc.edu/>.

## STEP 1: PLANNING FOR FCT

The planning step details the initial steps and considerations involved to prepare for using Functional Communication Training with a learner on the spectrum.

### 1. Identify an interfering behavior appropriate for FCT

FCT can be used to address a variety of problematic behaviors, including aggression, tantrums, destructive behaviors, self-injurious behaviors, and elopement. The types of behavior that might not necessarily be targeted by FCT are stereotypic or repetitive behaviors, which may not serve a clear communicative function. However, problematic behaviors associated with stereotypic or repetitive behaviors can still be addressed using FCT.

Keep in mind that **Functional Communication Training** can be used to decrease inappropriate behaviors by replacing the interfering behavior with an appropriate communicative behavior.

## 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. Choose a replacement communicative behavior

Understanding the function of the interfering behavior will aid in selecting a replacement communicative behavior. Important considerations for the communicative behavior that is selected include:

- the function of the replacement communicative behavior (which should be the same as the function of the interfering behavior),
- the form of communication that the learner will use (which should be based on the learner's current communication skills, abilities, and needs), and
- the effort it will require for the learner to produce (which should initially be relatively low).

📄 Use the **FCT Planning Checklist** as a companion for completing the planning step

## 4. Ensure all team members are familiar with the replacement communicative behavior

It is important for people who may be interacting with the learner to understand what the learner is trying to communicate and to be able to respond accordingly; if the learner's use of the replacement communicative behavior is unsuccessful, the learner may return to the use of maladaptive behaviors.

## 5. Gather and organize supporting materials

Gather materials such as picture cards or communication cards; program devices for some learners. When the replacement communicative behavior will involve requesting preferred items, make sure to obtain preferred items that the learner might request (as appropriate), such as toys, books, games, food, etc.

# STEP 2: USING FCT

This step details the process of implementing Functional Communication Training with a learner on the spectrum.

## 1. Teach use of the replacement communicative behavior using a most to least prompt hierarchy

The teaching process may vary based on the skills of the learner and the form of the replacement communicative behavior but will generally involve prompting and guidance to use the replacement communicative behavior, starting at the highest level of prompting needed and gradually fading prompts (i.e., most-to-least prompt hierarchy).

📄 Use the **Prompting Hierarchy** to determine order of prompts based on the learner's needs and the target skill.

- Note: Another instructional strategy that may be useful is time delay; more information about this specific teaching procedure can be found in the module on Time Delay.

## 2. Reinforce the replacement communicative behavior

The instructor should reinforce the replacement communicative behavior by providing the relevant response that yields the desired outcome (such as providing a break from a task when escape was desired). Early in the teaching process, it is important to reinforce the replacement communicative behavior consistently and frequently; thus, the teaching environment may need to be structured in a way that provides frequent opportunities for the learner to practice use of the skill.

## 3. Remove reinforcement for the interfering behavior

An additional strategy relevant to responding to the learner is to ignore the interfering behavior and/or block access to the desired outcome so the interfering behavior is not reinforced (i.e., it no longer enables the learner to gain access to the desired outcome).

## 4. Support the learner's generalization of the replacement communicative behavior across people and settings

Set up multiple, structured opportunities for the learner to practice using the replacement communicative behavior with different people and in different settings in order to support generalization.

## 5. Consider shaping the replacement communicative behavior

For some learners, the initially acceptable form of the replacement communicative behavior may consist of a single word, picture, or some approximation that is not at the level at which the learner can communicate. The shaping process involves gradually reinforcing closer approximations of the desired form of communicative behavior.

## 6. Thin reinforcement for replacement communicative behavior


Thinning reinforcement involves gradually increasing the interval of time between the learner's use of the replacement communicative behavior and the reinforcing response (such as providing a preferred item or removing demands). This step teaches the learner to wait for the reinforcer. The time interval selected will be individualized for each learner, but may be as short as 5-10 seconds initially.

## STEP 3: MONITORING FCT

The following step details how to monitor the use of Functional Communication Training with a learner on the spectrum and how to determine next steps based on the data.

### 1. Collect and analyze data

Data collection should focus on the interfering behavior targeted by the intervention as well as the replacement communicative behavior being taught. The form of data collection will vary based on the type of interfering behavior, but should include information such as setting, time, antecedents, and consequences as well as frequency, intensity, and/or duration of the behavior. Data collection on the replacement communicative behavior might include the level of support and prompting the learner needs as well as relevant details such as the setting, time, antecedents, and/or consequences.

 Use the **Data Collection: Replacement Behaviors** and/or **Frequency (Intervals)** to collect data.

## 2. Determine next steps based on learner progress

The data that is collected about the learner's interfering behaviors and use of the replacement communicative behavior can be used to determine next steps based on whether the learner is making progress. Other considerations might include data relevant to communication partners, settings, and prompting. In addition, the learner may also have skill deficits related to the interfering behavior that need to be addressed (such as academic weaknesses related to the academic tasks that the learner is avoiding).

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

- Has baseline data and/or a functional behavior assessment been collected through direct observation of the learner?
- Has the correct replacement communicative behavior been identified? Does the RBC address the function of the interfering behavior?
- Are there skills that need to be taught before addressing the target behavior (e.g., expressive social- communication goal, teach a new coping strategy)?
- Has enough time been devoted to using FCT?
- Was FCT used with fidelity? (Use the FCT Implementation Checklist to determine fidelity.)
- Are the visuals 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?
- 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.



# IMPLEMENTATION CHECKLIST

## BEFORE YOU START, HAVE YOU...?

- ☐ Identifying the target goal/behavior/skill...?
- ☐ 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>).

Observation:		1	2	3	4	5
Date:						
Observer's Initials:						
<b>STEP 1: PLANNING</b>						
1.1	Identify an interfering behavior appropriate for FCT					
1.2	Conduct a functional behavior assessment					
1.3	Choose a replacement communicative behavior					
1.4	Ensure all team members are familiar with the replacement communicative behavior					
1.5	Gather and organize supporting materials					
<b>STEP 2: USING</b>						
2.1	Teach use of the replacement communicative behavior using a most to least prompt hierarchy					
2.2	Reinforce the replacement communicative behavior					
2.3	Remove reinforcement for the interfering behavior					
2.4	Support the learner's generalization of the replacement communicative behavior across people and settings					
2.5	Consider shaping the replacement communicative behavior					
2.6	Thin reinforcement for replacement communicative behavior					
<b>STEP 3: MONITORING</b>						
3.1	Collect data on target behaviors					
3.2	Determine next steps based on learner progress					

# TIP SHEET FOR PROFESSIONALS

## FUNCTIONAL COMMUNICATION TRAINING ...

- Is a focused evidence-based practice for children and youth on the spectrum from 3-18 years old that can be implemented in multiple settings.
- A systematic practice to replace interfering behaviors with more appropriate and effective communicative behaviors.
- Is specifically employed after a FBA or functional analysis has been conducted to identify the function of an interfering behavior.



## WHY USE WITH LEARNERS ON THE SPECTRUM?

- FCT serves to reduce problematic behaviors that might be detrimental to the learner and others as well as to improve the communication skills of the learner.
- FCT can also be a low-cost intervention that does not take long to create.
- Some of the problematic behaviors that can be addressed by FCT include: aggression and self-injurious behaviors, property destruction, tantrums, elopement, and/or disruption.

### TIPS:

- Problematic behaviors associated can be addressed using FCT.
- Use a FBA to guide the selection of an appropriate replacement communicative behavior. The first form of the replacement communicative behavior should be as simple and low effort as possible for the learner to use effectively.

## INSTRUCTIONAL OUTCOMES:

The evidence-base for Functional Communication Training supports its use to address the following outcomes, according to age range, in the table below:

Age	Adaptive	Behavior	Communication	Play	School Readiness	Social
3-5	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
6-11	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
12-14		Yes	Yes			
15-18	Yes	Yes	Yes			

## STEPS FOR IMPLEMENTING:

### 1. PLAN

- Identify an interfering behavior appropriate for FCT
- Determine function of interfering behavior through Functional Behavior Assessment
- Choose a replacement communicative behavior
- Ensure all team members are familiar with the replacement communicative behavior
- Gather and organize supporting materials

### 2. USE

- Teach use of the replacement communicative behavior using a most to least prompt hierarchy
- Reinforce the replacement communicative behavior
- Remove reinforcement for the interfering behavior
- Support the learner's generalization of the replacement communicative behavior across people and settings
- Consider shaping the replacement communicative behavior
- Thin reinforcement for replacement communicative behavior

### 3. MONITOR

- Collect and analyze data on target behaviors
- Determine next steps based on learner progress



### Functional Communication Training FCT

This sheet was designed as a supplemental resource to provide basic information about Functional Communication Training for professionals working with learners on the spectrum.

For more information about this selected evidence-based practice, please visit <https://afirm.fpg.unc.edu/>.

# PARENT'S GUIDE

## WHAT IS FCT?

- A focused evidence-based practice for children and youth on the spectrum from 3-18 years old that can be implemented in multiple settings.
- The FCT process involves:
  - identifying an interfering behavior
  - determining what the learner is trying to communicate with that behavior (such as needing help, wanting a break, wanting attention, etc.), and
  - teaching the learner a more acceptable way to communicate that need.



## WHY USE THIS FCT WITH MY CHILD?

- FCT is helpful for learners with social communication deficits and challenging behaviors because it provides a more acceptable form of communication that enables the learner to achieve the same desired outcome.
- Some of the problematic behaviors that can be addressed by FCT include: aggression and self-injurious behaviors, tantrums, running away, and/or disruption.

## WHAT ACTIVITIES CAN I DO AT HOME?

- Think about behaviors your child exhibits as a form of communication and try to identify other ways your child might be able to communicate that need.
- When trying to develop an alternative way for your child to communicate a need (such as asking for a break or requesting a favorite toy), think of the simplest and easiest way for your child to communicate that need at the beginning.
- Remember to praise your child or provide reinforcement when your child uses a more appropriate form of communication to get his or her needs met (such as asking for a preferred activity instead of screaming).

### Functional Communication Training FCT



This parent introduction to FCT was designed as a supplemental resource to help answer questions about Functional Communication Training.

To find out more about how this FCT is being used with your child, please talk with:

For more information about this selected evidence-based practice, please visit <https://afirm.fpg.unc.edu/>.

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

### APPS:

Icon	Developer	Name	Available	Pricing
	TippyTalk	<i>TippyTalk Mobile</i>	App Store Google Play	Free (in-app purchases)
	Het is Simpel	<i>image2talk</i>	App Store	24.99

### BOOKS:

- Durand, V. M. (1990). Severe behavior problems: A functional communication training approach (Treatment manuals for practitioners). The Guilford Press.
- Reichle, J., & Wacker, D. (2017). Functional communication training for problem behavior. The Guilford Press.
- Steward, K., & Huer, M. (2005). Functional Augmentative Communication Training Strategies (FACTS): Daily routines. Academic Communication Associates

### WEBSITES:

- Clark, C., (2016). What is Functional Communication?  
<https://www.speechandlanguagekids.com/functional-communication/>
- Raising Children Network. (2017). At a glance: Functional Communication Training (FCT)  
<https://raisingchildren.net.au/autism/therapies-guide/fct>
- Reeve Autism Consulting. (2017). Functional Communication Training: Why It's More Than Just "Use Your Words" <https://autismclassroomresources.com/functional-communication-training-why/>

# CEC STANDARDS

## INITIAL PRACTICE-BASED STANDARDS FOR EARLY INTERVENTIONISTS/EARLY CHILDHOOD (0-5 YEARS; CEC, 2020)

### Standard 4: Assessment Processes

- 4.1 Understand the purposes of formal and informal assessment, including ethical and legal considerations, and use this information to choose developmentally, culturally and linguistically appropriate, valid, reliable tools and methods that are responsive to the characteristics of the young child, family, and program
- 4.2 Develop and administer informal assessments and/or select and use valid, reliable formal assessments using evidence-based practices, including technology, in partnership with families and other professionals.
- 4.3 Analyze, interpret, document, and share assessment information using a strengths-based approach with families and other professionals.
- 4.4 In collaboration with families and other team members, use assessment data to determine eligibility, develop child and family-based outcomes/goals, plan for interventions and instruction, and monitor progress to determine efficacy of programming.

### Standard 6: Using Responsive and Reciprocal Interactions, Interventions, and Instruction

- 6.2 Engage in reciprocal partnerships with families and other professionals to facilitate responsive adult-child interactions, interventions, and instruction in support of child learning and development.
- 6.3 Engage in ongoing planning and use flexible and embedded instructional and environmental arrangements and appropriate materials to support the use of interactions, interventions, and instruction addressing developmental and academic content domains, which are adapted to meet the needs of each and every child and their family.
- 6.4 Promote young children's social and emotional competence and communication, and proactively plan and implement function-based interventions to prevent and address challenging behaviors.
- 6.6 Use responsive interactions, interventions, and instruction with sufficient intensity and types of support across activities, routines, and environments to promote child learning and development and facilitate access, participation, and engagement in natural environments and inclusive settings.

## INITIAL PRACTICE-BASED STANDARDS FOR (GRADES K-12; CEC, 2020):

### Standard 6: Supporting Social, Emotional, and Behavioral Growth

- 6.1 Use effective routines and procedures to create safe, caring, respectful, and productive learning environments for individuals with exceptionalities.
- 6.2 Use a range of preventive and responsive practices documented as effective to support individuals' social, emotional, and educational well-being.
- 6.3 Systematically use data from a variety of sources to identify the purpose or function served by problem behavior to plan, implement, and evaluate behavioral interventions and social skills programs, including generalization to other environments.



## GLOSSARY

**A-B-C data charts** - help team members determine what happens before the behavior (the antecedent), when the behavior that occurs (behavior), and what happens directly after the behavior (the consequence)

**Antecedent** - the activities and specific events preceding the behavior

**Baseline data** - data collected on current performance level prior to implementation of intervention

**Consequence** - events that followed or results of the behavior

**Fidelity** - how well and how often the implementation steps for an evidence-based practice are followed

**Functional Behavioral Assessment (FBA)** - A systematic way of determining the underlying function or purpose of a behavior so that an effective intervention plan can be developed.

**Functional Communication Training (FCT)** - A set of practices that replace an interfering behavior that has a communication function with more appropriate and effective communication behaviors or skills.

**Extinction (EXT)** - The removal of reinforcing consequences of a behavior that interferes with the learner's safety or learning to reduce the future occurrence of that behavior.

**Generalization** - when the target skill or behavior continues to occur when the intervention ends, in multiple settings, and with multiple individuals (e.g., peers, teachers, parents)

**Gestural prompt** - a movement that provides the learner with information about how to perform the target skill/behavior (e.g., pointing to the top of the paper to remind the student to write their name).

**Implementation checklist** - the specific steps needed to accurately follow an evidence-based practice.

**Interfering behavior** - is a behavior that interferes with the learner's ability to learn

**Model prompt** - demonstrating the correct way to perform the target skill/behavior for the learner. Useful when verbal or visual prompts are not sufficient to help the learner perform the target skill correctly.



**Physical prompt** - hands on assistance given to a learner to successfully perform the target skill or behavior. It is generally used when the learner does not respond to less restrictive prompts. Useful when teaching adaptive or motor skills.

**Picture Exchange Communication System™** - A type of Augmentative & Alternative Communication (AAC) using and/or teaching the use of a system of communication that is not verbal/vocal which can be aided.

**Prompt** - any help provided that will assist the learner in using specific skills. Prompts can be verbal, gestural, or physical.

**Prompting (PP)** - Verbal, gestural, or physical assistance given to learners to support them in acquiring or engaging in a targeted behavior or skill.

**Prompting hierarchy** - the order and types of prompts to give a learner to assist with performing the target skill or behavior. The hierarchy can be different depending on the needs of the student and the type of goal.

**Reinforcement (R)** - The application of a consequence following a learner's use of a response or skills that increases the likelihood that the learner will use the response/skills in the future.

**Reinforcer sampling** - helps to identify activities and materials that are motivating to autistic learner. Also known as a preference assessment.

**Reinforcers** - increase the likelihood that the target skill/behavior will be used again in the future.

**Replacement communicative behavior** - used in place of the interfering behavior during functional communication training to serve the same function

**Team members** - includes the parents, other primary caregivers, IEP/IFSP team members, teachers, therapists, early intervention providers, and other professionals involved in providing services for the learner on the spectrum.

**Time Delay (TD)** - A practice used to systematically fade the use of prompts during instructional activities by using a brief delay between the initial instruction and any additional instructions or prompts.

**Verbal prompt** - includes any spoken words directed to learners to help them perform a target skill correctly. Verbal prompts range in intensity level from least to most restrictive.

**Visual prompt** - a picture, icon or object used to provide learners with information about how to perform the target skill or behavior.

**Visual Supports (VS)** A visual display that supports the learner engaging in a desired behavior or skills independent of additional prompts

## REFERENCES

1. Brown, K. A., Wacker, D. P., Derby, K. M., Peck, S. M., Richman, D. M., Sasso, G. M., ... & Harding, J. W. (2000). Evaluating the effects of functional communication training in the presence and absence of establishing operations. *Journal of Applied Behavior Analysis*, 33(1), 53-71. doi: 10.1901/jaba.2000.33-53
2. Buckley, S. D., & Newchok, D. K. (2005). Differential impact of response effort within a response chain on use of mands in a student with autism. *Research in Developmental Disabilities: A Multidisciplinary Journal*, 26(1), 77-85. doi: 10.1016/j.ridd.2004.07.004
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