

TIPS and TOOLS FOR FAMILIES:

Functional Behavioral Assessments and Behavior Intervention Plans (FBAs and BIPs)

Students face a variety of behavior expectations at school. They are generally expected to sit quietly, listen to the teacher, walk, not run, use indoor voices, and respect others.

This list could be endless if we tried to include all expectations at different grade levels, in different settings, and the many different approaches to behavior in different classrooms and schools.

Students need opportunities to learn behavior expectations, just as they need opportunities to learn reading, writing and math.

They need opportunity to learn **what** expected behaviors look like, **how** to meet the expectations, and **why** they matter. They need opportunities to practice, to learn from mistakes, and to receive positive feedback when they meet expectations.

When schools share information with families about behavior expectations, families can help reinforce the learning at home.

If a student is struggling to meet behavior expectations, a first step is to check that the student understands what is expected, and how to meet expectations.

If a student's behavior is getting in the way of learning, and it continues after attempts to address it, schools and families can work together to better understand where it is coming from, and what a student might be communicating through the behavior.

A Functional Behavioral Assessment (FBA) is:

- A **problem-solving process** to try to understand the functions of behavior.
- It can also be a type of **evaluation** for an individual student to understand their behavior.

An FBA generally includes **observation** and **data collection**, looking at:

- The **environment** where the behavior occurs;
- The **ABCs**— the **Antecedents** (what happens before the behavior), the **Behavior** itself, and the **Consequences** (what happens after the behavior); and
- **Other factors** that may be influencing the behavior.

An FBA leads to a **hypothesis about what “function” or purpose a behavior serves**, so a team can identify **alternative “replacement” behaviors** that can serve the same function, or meet the same need, without interfering with learning.

Information gathered in the FBA is generally used to develop a **Behavior Intervention Plan (BIP)**.

If attempts to address behavior have not been successful, and the behavior is interfering with learning, a **Functional Behavioral Assessment (FBA)** may be necessary to understand the “function” or purpose of the behavior, and to help guide effective, positive interventions.

An FBA is **required** in some circumstances when a child with a disability is suspended or expelled for 10 days or more. An FBA can be a useful tool for supporting any child, with or without a disability.

If you are concerned that your child’s behaviors are getting in the way of learning, are leading to repeated disciplinary actions, or are keeping your child from having more time in a general education setting, **you can ask the school to do an FBA and develop a BIP.**

For more information, take a look at OEO’s [FAQs on FBAs and BIPs, Checklists: Things to Look for in an FBA and BIP and Sample Letters for Requesting an FBA and Reviewing a BIP.](#)

FAQs on FBAs and BIPs

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When Can I, or Should I, ask for an FBA for my Child?

Consider asking about an FBA if your child's **behavior** appears to be **interfering** with your child's own **education**, or with the education of others, and

- ✓ it is **not clear why** the behavior is occurring; and
- ✓ the teacher has tried different **interventions** to address the behavior but they **haven't been successful**.

Some specific examples of when you might ask about an FBA:

- your child's **behavior** is identified as a **barrier** to spending more **time in a general education classroom**.
- your child is **sent out of the classroom frequently** or for long periods of time for disruptive or inappropriate behavior;
- your child is **not participating in class or engaging with instruction** on a regular basis (maybe putting their head down, falling asleep, or refusing to do work).

Ask for Some Baseline Data

If you don't know yet how often the behavior is occurring, or how frequently a child is removed from the classroom, the first step may be to **ask the teacher and/or principal to start keeping track**, in other words to start taking some data, on how often it is happening.

This can give you all a "baseline" or starting point, for understanding the situation.

How do I ask for an FBA for my Child?




The **best practice** is to make a request for an FBA **in writing**. That can be by email, or by letter. Keep a copy for yourself. Check out the [Sample Request for an FBA](#).

You can also make a request for an FBA in person at a meeting, or in a conversation with your child's teacher or principal. It is important to follow up if you do not hear back about next steps, because sometimes verbal requests get lost in the busy day to day of school.

If you make the request for an FBA at an IEP meeting, be sure to check to see that the request and the team's response to it is reflected in a **Prior Written Notice (PWN)** after the meeting. The Prior Written Notices help you and the others on your child's IEP team keep track of important requests and decisions.

Who do I ask for an FBA?

There's no single right answer, but here are places to start:

If your child has an IEP		IEP Case Manager or Special Education teacher
If your child has a 504 plan		Teacher and/or school counselor
If your child doesn't have an IEP or 504 plan		Teacher, school counselor and/or principal

What if I get no response?

If you make a request for an FBA and do not hear back in a few days, start by following up with the same person by email or phone.

If you still do not hear back, consider **elevating the request** to the principal, a school psychologist or a district special education supervisor.

What if the school says “No” to my request for an FBA?

If the initial response to a request for an FBA is “no,” consider requesting a meeting to discuss it. At the meeting, be ready to share the reasons why you are requesting the FBA, and to listen to understand why the school or other team members think an FBA is not necessary.

Before the meeting, ask the school to gather information in order to share an update regarding your child's recent behavior.

- ✓ If your child has been removed from the classroom for behavior, ask the team to **keep track of each time the student is removed**, what it was for and how long it lasted;
- ✓ If you are concerned your child has been avoiding work, ask if the teacher or another team member could take some **informal data or notes** and report back regarding how often, for how long your child appears to be disengaged or off-task.

After getting additional information, if it appears that a pattern of behavior is disrupting your child's learning, you can ask the team to consider the request for an FBA again. If the school does not see a pattern of problem behavior, or believes there are additional interventions they can try first, ask to set a date to check in again to review how things are going. Set yourself a reminder to check in again in a month or two to see how things are going.

If your child has an IEP, after the team has a chance to discuss and make a decision, be sure you check for a **Prior Written Notice (PWN) documenting the decision** and reasons for it.

If you still disagree with the decision, and want to understand options for dispute resolution for students receiving or eligible for special education services, take a look at [OEO's Parent Guide on Protecting the Educational Rights of Students with Disabilities in Public Schools](#), and our [Toolkit on Prior Written Notice](#).

What is a Functional Behavioral Assessment (FBA)?

A functional behavioral assessment (an "FBA"), is a type of evaluation used by a school district to determine the cause (or "function") of behavior.

An FBA focuses on a particular behavior of concern, or "target behavior." Using various methods, often including observation, data collection, and interviews, the FBA tries to identify what leads to the behavior and what keeps it going. It looks at whether the current responses to the behavior are unintentionally reinforcing it. It looks at what could be appropriate, "replacement" behaviors to meet the same need, without interfering with learning.

An FBA helps answer questions about:

- ✓ why a behavior occurs,
- ✓ when and where it happens,
- ✓ what generally comes before it, and
- ✓ what happens afterward.

That information is used to design and target **positive interventions** to teach and support the student in **replacing inappropriate behaviors with appropriate behaviors**. Under special education rules, a parent's consent is required for an evaluation, including an FBA.

What is this Behavior communicating?

Our behaviors (what we do), can communicate a lot about what we think, feel, want or need. Exactly what a behavior is communicating is often not clear, and can be misinterpreted.

We might safely assume that a student clapping and smiling is communicating approval, and that a student shaking their head side to side is communicating "no."

- What about a student crying? Is that communicating sadness? Frustration?
- What about a student looking away and shaking their head in response to questions? Is that communicating confusion? Defiance? Exhaustion?

If we misinterpret the meaning of a behavior, our responses can be ineffective.

An FBA can help uncover the meaning(s) of a behavior that is getting in the way of learning, and effective ways to address it.

How is an FBA different from other evaluations?

An FBA generally focuses on very **specific, observable behaviors** in a **specific environment**. An FBA considers how the environment of the classroom or other setting might be influencing a child's behavior.

Other types of behavior assessments, often included in comprehensive evaluations, look more broadly at a student's behavior over time and in various settings.

In other words, an FBA generally looks specifically at behaviors that are getting in the way of learning where the child is at, and focuses on how those behaviors can best be addressed in that context.

FBA and Discipline - When Is an FBA Required?

An FBA is sometimes required for students who have an IEP (Individualized Education Program), if the student is suspended or expelled for more than 10 school days. Specifically, a school is required to do an FBA and develop a BIP for any student who has an IEP if:

- ✓ the student is **suspended or expelled**; and
- ✓ the suspension or expulsion will be for **more than 10 days**; and
- ✓ in making a manifestation determination, members of the child's IEP team, including the parents, determine that the **behavior** that led to the suspension or expulsion **was a "manifestation" of the disability** – that is, it was caused by or had a direct and substantial relationship to the child's disability.

This also applies if the student has been suspended or expelled several different times for shorter periods (less than 10 days), but the multiple suspensions or expulsions make a pattern that adds up to more than 10 days.

If a student's behavior is determined *not* to be a manifestation of the disability, the rules recommend that the team do an FBA and develop a BIP to avoid similar behaviors from happening again.

You can find the details about requirements for FBAs for students with IEPs in the special education regulations, at in WAC Chapter 392-172A, available online at: <https://apps.leg.wa.gov/wac/default.aspx?cite=392-172a&full=true>.

To **read more about discipline requirements for students who have an IEP**, or meet the requirements for an IEP but have not yet been evaluated, see [OEO's Parent Guide on](#)

[Protecting the Educational Rights of Students with Disabilities in Public Schools](#) and OSPI's [Technical Assistance Paper No. 2 \(TAP 2\)](#).

Who completes the FBA?

School districts generally decide which staff they will assign to complete FBAs. It might be a school psychologist, a behavior specialist, or a special education teacher. Often, the process starts with a team discussion about which behavior is the greatest concern, who will observe the student in order to take data about that behavior, and when and in what settings they will take the data.

Special education rules require that evaluations be completed by a person with the necessary experience and qualifications. The more complicated the behavior, the more likely it is that a specialist may be needed to help understand the functions of the behavior and identify effective interventions.

Are FBAs and BIPs only for students with IEPs or only certain kinds of IEPs?

No. Functional Behavior Assessments are a tool that schools and families can use to help understand and address challenging behaviors for **any student**.

The use of FBAs might be most familiar for students with IEPs because in some cases they are required (see the section on discipline). Also, special education rules require that IEP teams consider the use of “positive behavioral interventions and supports and other strategies” for *any child with an IEP* whose behavior is getting in the way of that own child’s learning, or of other students’ learning. Developing an effective behavior intervention plan depends on first developing a good understanding of why the behavior is occurring, and that is what an FBA can do.

Can I request an Independent Educational Evaluation (IEE) if I disagree with the district’s FBA?

Yes, if it was for a child with an IEP. Under special education rules, each time a district does an evaluation, if a parent disagrees with the results, the parent can request an Independent Educational Evaluation at district expense. An FBA that looks at an individual’s child’s behavior is a type of evaluation, so if a parent disagrees with the results, the parent can request an IEE at public expense. The district either can agree, or must initiate a due process hearing to defend its own evaluation. For details on IEEs, see: [OEO’s Parent Guide on Protecting the Educational Rights of Students with Disabilities in Public Schools](#) and [OSPI’s Special Education page on Guidance for Families](#).

What is a Behavioral Intervention Plan (BIP)?

Washington state's special education rules define a Behavioral Intervention Plan, or BIP, as a plan that is incorporated into a child's IEP if the team determines it is necessary, and that describes, at a minimum:

- ✓ The pattern of behavior that is impeding (getting in the way of) the student's learning or others;
- ✓ The instructional and/or environmental conditions or circumstances that contribute to that pattern of behavior
- ✓ The positive behavioral interventions and supports to:
 - reduce the behavior that is getting in the way of learning and increase desired prosocial behaviors and
 - ensure the plan is implemented consistently across the student's school day, including classes and activities; and
- ✓ The skills that will be taught and monitored as alternatives to the challenging behavior.

Most importantly, BIPs should describe an alternative behavior that the student will be taught to replace the inappropriate behavior – this is often called a “**replacement behavior.**”

The plan should identify what replacement behavior will be taught, how it will be taught, and who is responsible for teaching it to the student.

The plan should identify strategies and instruction that will

- ✓ provide alternatives to challenging behaviors,
- ✓ reinforce desired behaviors, and
- ✓ reduce or eliminate the frequency and severity of challenging behaviors.

What do we mean by “Behavior”?

Behavior is everything we do – it can be words, actions, gestures or a combination of those. Behaviors can be observed; they can be seen or heard.

Disruptive or “externalizing” behaviors, such as yelling, hitting, or breaking things, often draw the most attention, and discipline.

Other behaviors that are less obvious or disruptive to others can still be significant and interfere with a student's own learning, like avoiding class or peer interactions, or engaging in self-harm.

If the behavior is persistent and is interfering with learning, you can ask about doing an FBA and developing a BIP to address it.

Positive behavioral interventions include the consideration of environmental factors that may trigger challenging behaviors and teaching your student the skills to manage her or his own behavior.

What if my child already has a BIP but is still struggling with behavior?

If a child's behaviors continue even after a BIP has been developed and implemented, or if new challenging behaviors start, consider asking for a meeting to review the current plan and consider next steps.

Before the meeting, you can ask the team working with your child to share the data collected under the current behavior plan. As the team reviews the most recent data regarding your child's behavior, you can consider whether:

- There is enough information to make changes to the current BIP and continue to track progress; or
- The team needs updated information about the possible purposes and triggers of your child's behavior.

If new, updated information is needed, a new FBA can be done to help design an updated BIP.

Generally, new behavioral interventions will take time to show results, and the team may want to allow at least six weeks or a month and a half to give your child time to learn the new expected behavior.

Where can I learn more about FBAs and BIPs?

Washington State Special Education Rules (the WACs):

<https://apps.leg.wa.gov/WAC/default.aspx?cite=392-172A&full=true>

OSPI (Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction):

Guidance for Families re Behavior and Discipline:

<https://www.k12.wa.us/student-success/special-education/guidance-families-special-education-washington-state/behavior-and-discipline>

Model State Forms for Special Education, including FBAs and BIPs:

<https://www.k12.wa.us/student-success/special-education/program-review/model-forms-services-students-special-education>

Letters from the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP): <https://www2.ed.gov/policy/speced/guid/idea/memosdcltrs/index.html>.

Click on the Expand/Collapse OSEP Policy Letters Listing button to find letters by year.

Letters relating to discipline procedures and Functional Behavior Assessments include:

Letter to Gallo, April 2, 2013;

Letter to Janssen, June 5, 2008; and

Letter to Christiansen, February 9, 2007.

U.S. Department of Education Dear Colleague Letter:

<https://www2.ed.gov/policy/speced/guid/idea/memosdcltrs/index.html>. Click on the Expand/Collapse OSEP Policy Support Documents Listing button to find policy documents, including:

Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports in IEPs, August 1, 2016:

<https://www2.ed.gov/policy/speced/guid/idea/memosdcltrs/index.html>

Checklist: Things to Look for in an FBA

- Does it define a specific behavior that is observable and measurable
 - Can you picture it in your mind?
 - Would a stranger imagine the same behavior if they read the description?
 - If it says something general like “disruptive behavior” – ask for a more concrete, specific definition.

- Does it explain how often, when and where that behavior occurs?

Examples: General	Concrete, specific
Aggressive behavior	Hitting, biting, kicking, pinching (self, adults, or other students)
Self-injurious behavior	Hitting head, biting fingers, scratching
Disruptive behavior	Blurting out in class, making noises, slamming door
Time off task	Sleeping, walking around classroom, throwing or dropping paper, pencils

 - Is there **recent** data showing how often it has been happening?
 - Does the information describe how often and when the behavior is occurring in your child’s **current placement or setting?** (if the placement has changed since the FBA was completed, a new look may be needed).

- Does it consider environmental factors?
 - Does it consider how the dynamics of the classroom, hallways, lunchroom, gym or recess might influence the behavior?
 - Does it consider how instruction – both what is taught and how it is taught – might influence the behavior?
 - Does it consider how interaction with peers or adults might influence the behavior?

- Does it reflect information you have been able to share regarding your child’s behavior, including:
 - Whether/when/how often the behaviors that occur in the classroom or at school also happen in other settings;
 - What you have observed regarding what seems to trigger inappropriate behaviors; and
 - What you have found seems to be successful in calming, redirecting or motivating your child.

- Does it take into account information about your child’s mental health? Or experience with trauma, if that is relevant?

- Does it include a suggestion about the purpose of the behavior that makes sense in light of the data?

Checklist: Things to Look for in a Behavior Intervention Plan (BIP)

- Does it describe a specific behavior that the team is going to work on reducing?
- Does it describe a specific, appropriate alternative or “replacement” behavior that the team is going to help your child learn and practice?
- Does it explain to adults working with your child what they can do in order to avoid things that trigger your child’s inappropriate behavior?
- Does it describe warning signs that might mean your child is getting upset?
- Does it explain to adults working with your child what they can do to help your child feel safe and de-escalate if they get upset?
- Does it describe a set of things that your child likes that can be used to reinforce and reward your child for positive behavior?
- Does it include a plan to taking data to see how the interventions are working?

Sample Request for a Functional Behavior Assessment (FBA)

Date:

Dear IEP Case Manager/Special Education Teacher or Principal

Re: Request for FBA

I am requesting a Functional Behavioral Assessment (FBA) for my child.

I am concerned that my child's behavior is interfering with their education. *[Add more detail here, for example: they are not making progress on IEP goals or it is keeping them from spending more time in general education.]*

I am also requesting an IEP team (or 504 team) meeting to discuss a plan for the FBA. *[Make a note here if there are specific people you want to have at the meeting. For example: I would like the school psychologist or a district behavior specialist to attend the meeting.]*

I can meet on: _____ [dates/times].

I look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

(Signature)

Sample Request for Review of a Behavioral Intervention Plan (BIP)

Date:

Dear IEP Case Manager/Special Education Teacher

Re: Request for Meeting to Review My Child's Behavior Plan

I am requesting an IEP team (504 team) meeting to review my child's Behavior Intervention Plan (BIP).

At the meeting, I hope we can review recent behavior data and talk about how the plan is working.

At least a few days before the meeting, please send me copies of the data collected over the past (months/weeks/year) relating to the behavior plan.

I can meet on: _____ [dates/times].

I look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

(Signature)