

❖How To❖

Find a Behavior Specialist

When your child with developmental disabilities starts exhibiting challenging behavior, you may run out of ways to deal with the behavior and want help putting together a comprehensive system of positive behavioral support.

If you consult with a behavior specialist, which one should you choose? This can be difficult. People may only have knowledge from classes, hands-on experience, one disability or behavioral issue, or only claim to have behavioral expertise. To find a qualified behavior analyst, examine the person's credentials.

Education. Look for professionals with either a master's or doctoral degree in psychology, education, social work, or related field and who has completed at least three to four graduate classes in behavior analysis. The Association for Behavior Analysis has accredited certain university programs in behavior analysis; however, these programs do not concentrate on children with disabilities and are also relatively new. *Rule of thumb:* The more severe the behavior, the more educational training the professional should have. Practitioners need also to keep abreast of new developments by attending conferences and workshops specifically related to behavior analysis.

Specific degree. Some psychology programs does offer an emphasis in behavior therapy. Students with this degree typically concentrate on behavior analysis, behavior therapy, or cognitive therapy. Students who grad-

uate with this degree must have their work reviewed by colleagues, complete an oral examination, and finish an original project.

Certification. Some states, such as Florida and California, offer certification in behavior analysis; however, they are disability-specific. Certification requires that the professional have sufficient education in the area and pass a written examination on behavior management, functional relations, data interpretation, behavioral assessment, and related issues. Other states have similar certification programs. Usually, these programs operate through state government or a state agency. Families often find that a specialist's certification in behavior analysis gives them some assurance that the professional has at least some qualifications in behavior analysis.

Hands-on experience. Classes alone are not enough to qualify a person to work as a behavior analyst. A specialist needs supervised work experience through an internship, employment, or practicum. Quality of experience is as important as quantity. Experience with a specific disability may also be an important consideration.

Referral. Ask schools, disability organizations, and others to recommend a specialist. To locate a behavioral specialist, contact a professional organization, such as the Association for Behavioral Analysis (Association for Behavior Analysis, Dpt. of Psychology, 213 West Hall, Western Michigan

University, Kalamazoo, MI 49008, (616) 387-8341, 76236.1312@compuserve.com, which has several affiliated chapters. Or contact your local Parent Training and Information Center (617-482-2915) or Parent to Parent organization (785-864-7600). Once you have found a candidate, give the person a general overview of your family's situation and your vision for your child. Ask about services provided, fees, time schedules, assessment method, and general approaches. Inquire about his or her past "success stories." Make sure the specialist can help you:

- Clearly define what your child's problem behavior is
- Conduct a functional assessment (the probable reason why the behavior happens)
- Find other support services (no one person can handle all the aspects of your child's challenges)
- Develop a behavior support plan to prevent the challenging behavior from occurring. This typically is done with all the relevant people in your child's life and should include multiple aspects of the child's life
- Train and support the people who will be carrying out the plan and be prepared for plan changes along the way

To make behavioral support more effective, obtain support for the child before the behavior turns into a major

crisis. Don't expect behavioral consultants to change the person with the challenging behavior. They concentrate on changing the reasons (how and why) the behavior gets "triggered." Be prepared to work with the analyst; the person you hire can not "fix" the problem alone.

For more information on positive behavioral support, call the Family Connection at 1-800-854-4938 and ask for our free fact sheets, a listing of related articles, or answers to questions.

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