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Achieving Behavior Change Goals and Strengthening Home-School Partnerships through Conjoint Behavioral Consultation: A Case Study

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Introduction

IConjoint behavioral consultation (CBC; Sheridan, Kratochwill, & Bergan, 1996) is an indirect, structured model of service-delivery whereby parents, teachers, and support staff are joined to work together to address the academic, social, or behavioral needs of an individual for whom all parties bear some responsibility (Sheridan & Kratochwill, 1992).

Conceptually and in practice, CBC is couched within the broader frameworks of home-school partnerships, collaborative problem-solving, ecological theory, and behavioral consultation. Through the CBC process, parents and teachers (i.e., consultees) work closely together with the guidance and support of the school psychologist to identify, analyze, and develop interventions for academic, social, and/or behavioral concerns across settings for an individual student. Additionally, the team collaboratively determines the efficacy of the intervention, and plans for generalization, maintenance, and/or termination.

CBC content/outcome goals include: (a) obtain comprehensive and functional data over time across settings; (b) establish consistent treatment programs across settings; (c) improve the skills, knowledge and behaviors of all parties; (d) monitor behavioral contrast and side effects during treatment implementation; (e) enhance generalization of maintenance of treatment effects across settings; and (f) develop skills and competencies to promote further independent conjoint problem solving (Sheridan, Kratochwill, & Bergan, 1996).

CBC process/relational goals include: (a) increase communication and knowledge about family; (b) improve relationship among the child, family and school personnel; (c) establish home-school partnership; (d) promote shared ownership for problem definition and solution; (e) increase parent and teacher commitments to educational goals; (f) recognize the need to address problems as occurring across rather than within settings; (g) promote greater conceptualization of a problem; and (h) increase the diversity of expertise and resources available (Sheridan, Kratochwill, & Bergan, 1996).

CBC has received much empirical support to date (see Sheridan, 1997 for a review; see Sheridan, Eagle, Cowan, & Mickelson, 2001 for a large scale outcome study); however, much of the data obtained through CBC has been in relation to elementary-aged children, with limited application of CBC to pre-school aged children. More research is needed to determine the application and efficacy of CBC for use with this population.

Purpose of Study

1. To familiarize psychologists with the content/outcome and process/relational goals of conjoint behavioral consultation.
2. To explore a case study illustrating strategies used to achieve content/outcome and process/relational goals within the CBC framework.

Methods

Participants. The primary consultees included a 38 year-old female Anglo-European ECSE teacher and a 34 year-old Anglo-European mother. The client was a 4 year-old Anglo-European male who qualified for ECSE services under the Developmental Delay, Speech Impairment, and Orthopedic Impairment Special Education criteria.

Procedures. This case followed the four stage problem-solving model including : conjoint problem identification, conjoint problem analysis, conjoint treatment implementation, and conjoint treatment evaluation (see Sheridan et al., 1996).

Instrumentation. Goal Attainment Scaling (GAS; Kiresuk, Smith, Cardillo, 1994) was used to determine parent's and teacher's perceptions of attainment of consultation goals on a scale of -2 (situation became significantly worse) to +2 (goal completely met).

Outcomes

Content/Outcome Goal

Goal: Obtain comprehensive and functional data over time, across settings.

Strategies:

(1) Established and implemented context-specific data collection procedures. This critical feature of the CBC process allowed the team to monitor and intervene on a behavior that would have otherwise not been addressed.

(2) Conducted functional assessment to determine the function of the behavior (i.e., "tantrumming"). The team hypothesized that the function of the behavior was reinforcement for tantrumming (i.e., he was getting his way).

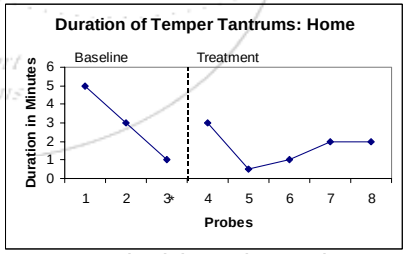
(3) Set context-relevant behavior change goals. For the classroom setting the goal was met prior to formal intervention. At home, baseline data allowed the team to determine a reasonable goal regarding tantrum duration.

(4) Allowed data to determine the course of the problem-solving process. When the behavioral goal was met, the team determined CBC to be a successful process and planned for behavior change maintenance and generalization.

Outcomes:

(1) At school, he was able to remain in a large group setting without tantrumming for an extended time period.

(2) At home, duration of tantrums decreased from a mean baseline duration of 4 minutes to a mean treatment phase duration of 1.7 minutes.



* = Data point not used to calculate mean due to unusual circumstances

(3) All consultees agreed that the behavioral goal was met (i.e., using the GAS rating system, they endorsed the highest rating of +2 [goal fully met]).

Process/Relational Goals

Goal: Promote greater conceptualization of a problem.

Strategy: Consultees compared the observed behavior across settings.

Outcomes: The consultees gained a more thorough understanding of the function of the client's tantrums.

Goal: Increase the diversity of expertise and resources available.

Strategies:

(1) The team explored strategies employed by the ECSE team (i.e., experts in the classroom) in the classroom and modified them for use in the home setting, while still addressing the function of the behavior (i.e., reinforcement).

(2) Highlighted the mother's understanding of how the intervention would apply to the home setting, given the differing surrounding conditions.

Outcomes:

(1) Empowered the mother to use new interventions both at home and in the community.

(2) All consultees began to recognize each others' strengths and the advantages of pooling resources when problem - solving.

Discussion

CBC appears to be an effective problem solving process for use with pre-school aged children. Further, the use of this model may be beneficial for psychologists and educators for building home-school partnerships with the parents of children in ECSE.

More single-subject research and/or large-scale studies are needed to determine the applicability and efficacy of CBC as both a pre-referral and special education tool for meeting the educational needs of pre-school aged children.