

Many students with autism work with a team of professionals on a regular basis. Those teams might include a speech-language pathologist, physical therapist, occupational therapist, intervention specialists and behavior analyst. SLPs and behavior analysts treat people with autism and—especially in school settings—these two professionals often work together to help the same students. They also share several areas of expertise, so they might find handling their overlap of services challenging.

However, when SLPs and behavior analysts **forge a collaborative, positive and effective relationship**, the sky is the limit for students! Professionals working toward common goals help their students increase overall engagement and decrease disruptive behavior. Teamwork between SLPs and behavior analysts can also better teach our students to develop and use functional communication skills across a variety of instructors and environments.

Here are ten tips to help initiate and maintain a collaborative process with behavior analysts.

1. **Take time to introduce yourself and talk with one another.** Often, a behavior analyst might work as a contractor, so they might be a new member of the educational team. Although you're probably swamped, the small gesture of introducing yourself can go a long way in developing a productive working relationship.
2. **Share current progress regarding communication goals.** Highlight areas in which the student has made good progress, as well as trickier target goals. Everyone benefits if you take time to discuss the student's strengths and weaknesses. Advocate to your principal about creating time for this meeting. This will help work the collaboration into your already busy schedule.
3. **If your student demonstrates disruptive behavior that prevents their learning, try talking about it.** Behavior analysts receive specific training in evaluating and setting up systems to decrease difficult behavior and increase student engagement. For example, the behavior analyst may ask you and other team members for data regarding **what happens just before disruptive behavior, what the observable behavior looks like and what happens after the behavior**. Analyzing this type of data—along with additional information—helps **determine the function of this behavior**.
4. **When planning to decrease noncompliant behavior, make sure you feel comfortable implementing recommended strategies.** Ask questions. Being on the same page when carrying out a plan to change

behavior improves chances of success and progress with our students. This applies to anyone on the team who suggests a plan or technique.

5. **Give input on functional communication.** Help develop phrases or words the student can use to communicate how they feel when working with the behavior analyst—or anyone on the team. For example, if a student tries to leave the room when asked to do a hard task, try to teach them to express something like: “Can I take a break?” or “Can we work on something different?”
6. **Develop shareable communication goals.** If we can teach team members to implement communication-based goals, students get more opportunities to practice these skills throughout their school day. These opportunities outside the speech room can help students become more independent and effective communicators.
7. **Work together to create a daily data sheet.** As mentioned, shared goals are important for students with autism and other complex disorders. Try creating a shared data sheet to allow all team members to gather information throughout the day. Use it to gather data on the use of unprompted and prompted requests throughout the day, for example.
8. **Find time to watch each other work with the student.** Are you targeting something in a different way that the behavior analyst can use when working with the student—or vice versa? Learning from each other can benefit all involved!
9. **Share any approaches you think will work better for the student.** Collect research and daily data to support your idea. This information will set the foundation for a professional discussion about the best way to target goals for your student. Sometimes it’s fine to agree to disagree. Just discuss progress frequently.
10. **Share communication sciences and disorders research findings.** Behavior analysts may not know about all the wonderful information available through [ASHA and journals dedicated to speech-language pathology](#). And ask the behavior analyst for research on applied behavior analysis. This shared learning can increase competency for both professionals and help students make functional gains.

I hope these guidelines help your work become more collaborative for your students with autism. If you have any suggestions on improving collaboration—please share in the comment section below.

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