

Module: Functional Communication Training (FCT)

Overview of Functional Communication Training (FCT)

Franzone, E. (2009). *Overview of functional communication training (FCT)*. Madison, WI: National Professional Development Center on Autism Spectrum Disorders, Waisman Center, University of Wisconsin.

Functional communication training (FCT) emerged from the literature on functional behavioral assessment (FBA) as a systematic practice to replace inappropriate behavior or subtle communicative acts with more appropriate and effective communicative behaviors or skills. FCT is always implemented after an FBA has been conducted to identify the function of an interfering behavior. When using FCT, teachers/practitioners analyze the interfering behavior to determine what the learner is trying to communicate. For example, is the learner biting peers when she wants a toy that another child has? Or is the learner yelling out in class so that he will be sent out of the room? After teachers/practitioners have identified the function of the interfering behavior, they then implement FCT to identify and teach a replacement behavior that is easy for the learner to use and serves the same purpose as the interfering behavior, but in a more appropriate way.

Evidence

FCT meets the evidence-based practice criteria with five single-subject design studies, demonstrating its effectiveness for promoting appropriate behavior and communication skills for children at the preschool and elementary school levels.

With what ages is FCT effective?

FCT can be used effectively with children with ASD, regardless of cognitive level and/or expressive communicative abilities. The evidence base shows that FCT is an effective intervention for learners at the early childhood and elementary levels. It is reasonable to assume that it would be an effective practice for older learners as well.

What skills or intervention goals can be addressed by FCT?

FCT targets skills that help children and youth with ASD effectively communicate with others in a variety of situations and settings. In the evidence base, FCT was used to decrease the incidence of interfering behaviors and to replace subtle, less-clear communicative forms (e.g., leading an adult by the hand to a desired item) with clearer communicative forms (e.g., pointing).

In what settings can FCT be effectively used?

The evidence-based studies were conducted in clinical, school-based, and home environments. While the research did not demonstrate use of FCT in community settings, it might be ideal for teaching to occur in community settings if interfering behaviors regularly occur there. Teaching in varied and/or more natural environments has been demonstrated to promote generalization of skills.

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Evidence Base

The studies cited in this section provide the basis upon which this practice was determined to meet the NPDC on ASD's criteria as an evidence-based practice. This list is not exhaustive; other quality studies may exist that were not included.

Preschool

Carr, E. G., & Kemp, D. C. (1989). Functional equivalence of autistic leading and pointing: Analysis and treatment. *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders, 19*(4), 561-578.

Mancil, G. R., Conroy, M. A., Nakao, T., & Alter, P. J. (2006). Functional communication training in the natural environment: A pilot investigation with a young child with autism spectrum disorder. *Education and Treatment of Children, 29*(4), 615-633.

Olive, M., Lang, R., & Davis, T. (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.

Schindler, H., & Horner, R. (2005). Generalized reduction of problem behavior of young children with autism: Building trans-situational interactions. *American Journal on Mental Retardation, 110*(1), 36-47.

Elementary

Casey, S., & Mercial, C. (2006). The use of functional communication training without additional treatment procedures in an inclusive school setting. *Behavioral Disorders, 32*(1), 46-54.

Selected Additional Resources

Braithwaite, K. & Richdale, A. (2000). Functional communication training to replace challenging behaviors across two behavioral outcomes. *Behavioral Interventions, 15*, 21-36.

Buckley, S., & Newchok, D. (2005). Differential impact of response effort within a response chain on use of mands in a student with autism. *Research in Developmental Disabilities, 26*(1), 77-85.

Carr, E. G., & Durand, V. M. (1985). Reducing behavior problems through functional communication training. *Journal of Applied Behavior Analysis, 18*, 111-126.

Charlop-Christy, M. H., & Kelso, S. E. (2003). Teaching children with autism conversational speech using a cue card/written script program. *Education and Treatment of Children, 26*(2), 108-127.

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- Durand, M. (1990). *Severe behavior problems: A functional communication training approach*. NY: Guilford.
- Hagopian, L. R., Contrucci-Kuhn, S. A., Long, E. S., & Rush, K. S. (2005). Schedule thinning following communication training: Using competing stimuli to enhance tolerance to decrements in reinforcer density. *Journal of Applied Behavior Analysis, 38*(2), 177-193.
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- Martin, C. A., Drasgow, E., Halle, J. W., & Brucker, J. M. (2005). Teaching a child with autism and severe language delays to reject: Direct and indirect effects of functional communication training. *Educational Psychology, 25*(2 & 3), 287-304.
- O'Neill, R. E., & Sweetland-Baker, M. (2001). Brief report: An assessment of stimulus generalization and contingency effects in functional communication training with two students with autism. *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders, 31*(2), 235-240.