

Module: Functional Communication Training

CASE STUDY

Ben

Ben is a six-year-old kindergartener with ASD. Prior to starting kindergarten, he attended a community preschool for 2 hours a day. He did well in this environment, and his teachers did not have any concerns with his behavior. In kindergarten, however, Ben started exhibiting some interfering behaviors during physical education class. Several times per week, Ben would run from the gym and try to leave the school. This also occasionally happened in the lunchroom.

Ben's team decided that an FBA was needed to determine why he was fleeing P.E. and lunch. They had several hypotheses. For example, maybe he did not like the activity, or maybe he was avoiding the teachers. A thorough FBA determined that Ben was fleeing to avoid the noise level in the gym and cafeteria. Ben's speech therapist and teacher, who both knew him well, discussed what kind of communicative act they could teach Ben that would be easy for him to use when he was feeling uncomfortable with the noise. Although Ben was verbal, his language skills were delayed and he frequently relied on other methods of communication. They decided to provide Ben with a picture of headphones, which he could hand to the P.E. teacher to obtain sound-reducing headphones. The picture was attached to the wall of the gym and cafeteria with velcro, close to where Ben usually sat.

When FCT was first implemented, a support person started going to P.E. and lunch with Ben's class. She watched for antecedents to Ben's flight, which the team had identified during the FBA. These included free play time, when children started yelling at one another, and the last five minutes of lunch, as children finished eating. The support person was able to prompt Ben to use the picture by physically walking Ben to the picture and then walking him to the P.E. teacher/cafeteria supervisor. Later, the prompts became more subtle (e.g., pointing to the picture). Ben enjoyed the headphones (he thought they were like a pilot's) and they dampened the sound enough to allow him to stay in the gym and cafeteria.

FCT taught Ben how to use a communicative act to request a change in his environment that was functionally equivalent to fleeing the gym and cafeteria. Rather than providing him with the headphones all of the time, he was able to use them only when needed.