

Choosing a Motivation on the Behavior Incident Report

 BIRS

Key Ideas to Remember:

- ▶ Behavior is a form of communication
- ▶ Behavior has meaning - signifying wants, needs, likes, and dislikes
- ▶ Behavior is motivated

Behavior can mean many things and is one way a child communicates their wants and needs; their likes and dislikes. Collecting data about what's happening when the behavior occurs can help you understand the meaning of the behavior. A key part of this is identifying the motivation behind the behavior. The motivation category on the Behavior Incident Report (BIR) asks you to take your best *guess* about what the child is trying to communicate. You are trying to answer the question, 'Why did the behavior occur?' in order to put the right strategies in place to support that child.

Identifying the “Why?”

Motivation can be determined by looking at what happens during or immediately after the behavior incident. You might ask yourself these questions:

- ▶ What did an adult do during and after the behavior?
- ▶ What did peers do during and after the behavior?
- ▶ Is there an object (ex: a toy) involved? What happens with the object?
Does the child keep it or is it removed?
- ▶ Did the child get to play with something?
- ▶ Did the child complete the instructions or task?
- ▶ Did the child get out of the task?

The motivation can be divided into two general categories: the child gains something or avoids/escapes something. When a child avoids something, they prevent it from happening. For example, the child will not go to circle or will not clean up. The child has avoided circle or cleaning up – at least temporarily. Escape means that the child is already doing something, and the challenging behavior allows them to get to stop doing it. For example, the child is already in circle but leaves it or the child begins to clean up but then begins to play with some of the toys. Avoiding and escaping are both counted as “Avoid” on the BIR form.

These categories are listed in the BIR motivation checklist.

Obtains	Avoids (Escapes)
Adult Attention/comfort or peer attention	Adults or peer
Desired Item or Activity	Task
Sensory	Sensory

Remember:

- ▶ What happens during and after the behavior occurs indicates the possible motivation for the behavior
- ▶ You are making your best guess – you don't have to know for sure to complete the motivation section of the checklist.

Below are examples of behaviors you may see in an early childhood classroom. As you read through the examples, you will notice that some of the behaviors are positive behaviors that we look for children to demonstrate. However, there is still a 'possible motivation' that goes along with that behavior. All behavior has a motivation.

Behavior	What happens during/after the behavior	Possible Motivation(s)
1. Child asks for a toy from peer	Peer gives child toy	Obtains desired item
2. Child hits peer and takes toy	Child plays with toy	Obtains desired item and activity
3. Child asks for help	You talk to child and provide help	Obtains adult attention/comfort
4. Child jumps around in circle	Peers laugh You redirect child to sit	Obtains peer attention Obtains adult attention Obtains sensory (jumping)
5. Child continues to play after given a direction to cleanup.	Child continues playing while others are cleaning. You do nothing	Obtains desired activity (playing) Avoids task (cleanup)
6. Child continues to play after given a direction to cleanup	Child sits in chair where you have moved him without any toys.	Avoids/Escapes task (cleanup)
7. Child refuses to go to small group.	You sit with child, remind them of the rules, and continue instruction to go to small group.	Avoids task (small group) Obtains adult attention
8. Child grabs peer's snack	Child eats snack. Peer yells.	Obtains desired item (food) Obtains peer attention
9. Child cries at sand table.	Other children leave.	Avoid peers Obtains desired activity (playing with all toys at sand table)
10. Child cries at sand table	You comfort child.	Obtains adult attention

Sometimes more than one thing happens during or immediately after the behavior, as seen in Examples 4, 5, 7, 8, and 9. How do you choose a motivation then? When completing the BIR, you can only choose one possible motivation. So, you make your best guess about the primary possible motivation.

Make your best guess!

How do you do that?

Let's first discuss Example 4. In Example 4, consider the context of the situation.

For example:

- ▶ What else was the child doing that might indicate the motivation?
 - Were they watching the peers laugh? Were they laughing or smiling with them? Did they talk to the peers?
 - Was the child more interested in you or another teacher? Were they looking at the adult(s)? Did they turn to the adult when redirected to sit? Talk to the adult?
- ▶ Did the child seem to be more focused on jumping rather than other people?

You are identifying a *possible* motivation. You aren't expected to be perfect. So, think about it and make your best guess. This "guess" will improve over time as you see more instances of this behavior. For example, the child may jump around even when the children aren't laughing. The child may look or smile at you or another adult in the classroom while jumping around, indicating the motivation is adult attention. Alternatively, the child may talk to the other children, smile, and laugh at them, indicating the motivation is peer attention. As the behavior occurs more often, your observations should begin to be more precise. What happens after the behavior occurs becomes clearer. But, if it doesn't, that's okay. This is not data collected for an individualized intervention. This is still your best guess.

Example 5 describes a situation that may often occur in an early childhood classroom. The child is both obtaining and avoiding something, but for the BIR, you want to try to identify the stronger possible motivation. You might ask:

- ▶ Is the child engrossed in play or playing a little and watching others clean up? Being engrossed with the object and playing might indicate the motivation is gaining an activity.
- ▶ What happens if you take the object away and redirect the child to cleanup? Escalation of challenging behavior by trying to get the desired object may indicate the motivation is more likely to be gaining an object or activity.
- ▶ Does the child stop playing as soon as cleanup is complete? Reengaging in classroom activities after cleanup may indicate that the motivation is avoiding cleaning up.

In Summary:

1. Look at and think about what happens during and immediately after the behavior. You will find the motivation there.
2. If there is more than one thing that happens, think about the one that seems to be the strongest or has most of the child's attention.
3. Make your best guess.