

## Behavior Rating Scale - Overview

One simple tool for collecting data is the *Behavior Rating Scale (BRS)* (cf., Kohler & Strain, 1992). The *BRS* is a team-developed measure to assist in collecting data on the student's targeted behaviors.

### Developing the *Behavior Rating Scale (BRS)*

There are three key areas to be addressed when developing the *BRS*. These include: (1) clearly **defining the target behavior(s)**, (2) determining the **best method** (i.e., scale) for measuring the target behavior(s), and (3) establishing appropriate **anchor points** for recording behavioral occurrence. All these elements are essential for accurately measuring behavior change.

### Defining Target Behaviors

The first step in the development of the *BRS* is to determine appropriate operational definitions for each behavior the team wants to track (behavior, social and/or academic). The team will need to describe exactly what each behavior 'looks like', being as specific and descriptive as possible. The team will use the short-term goals previously developed to create the *BRS*. However, several behaviors of concern were probably identified by the team as being significant (e.g., tantrums, out-of-seat, crawling under desks). As the team begins to develop the *BRS*, it is not necessary to try and target all the problem behaviors identified in the short-term goals, as this could be quite overwhelming. Instead, the team should prioritize the problem behaviors and gain consensus regarding which behavior is *the* most significant, which behavior ranks second and so forth. The team will select only the top one or two behaviors of concern to track using the *BRS*. Tracking only the top one or two problem behaviors helps ensure that the behavior intervention plan developed later focuses on the primary behavior problem(s), is feasible for the teacher to implement, and allows for obtainable behavioral changes for the student.

Returning to the previous example, Johnny's team determined that his daily tantrums were the most significant behaviors of concern. Johnny's short-term behavioral goal was to decrease tantrums. The team needs to agree on an operational definition (a clearly defined description) of Johnny's tantrums that will allow each member to consistently recognize when Johnny is engaged in a tantrum. The team begins by making a list of all the different behaviors Johnny demonstrates that were of greatest concern to each member. Those behaviors include screaming, repeatedly calling out, kicking furniture, throwing pencils and papers, mumbling, kicking others, and scribbling on his assignment. After discussing all the behaviors, the team agrees that the operational definition of Johnny's tantrums will include 'screaming, kicking furniture and/or people, and throwing work materials.' At a minimum, all three of these behaviors will need to occur to label Johnny's behavior as a tantrum.

In addition, the team had decided that Johnny's short-term academic goal was to increase academic engagement time. First, the team must determine what behaviors will indicate that Johnny is academically engaged. Again, the team lists all the behaviors they

believe should be present in order for Johnny to be considered ‘engaged’ in an academic task. After discussing the list, the team agrees on the following as an appropriate operational definition for on-task behavior: Johnny will remain in his seat with his eyes focused on the teacher or work materials during academic activities.

The team will develop operational definitions, similar to the examples above, for each behavior they want to track on the *BRS*. The definitions must be clear and easily understood by each member. The *BRS* key will include the behavioral descriptions developed by the team for each targeted behavior to ensure accuracy of measurement.

### **Methods of Measurement**

After the behavior(s) are clearly defined, the team will determine the most effective and appropriate method to measure the behavior(s) by asking the following questions:

- What will be the easiest way to measure this behavior?
- What measure (frequency, duration or intensity) will most likely capture significant behavioral changes?

Some behaviors have discrete start and end points (i.e., slap or hit, kick, bite, calling-out). For these types of behaviors, measuring the *frequency* might be most effective. If the team chooses to measure the frequency of a targeted behavior, they will simply estimate how many times the behavior occurs within a given period and document that number on the *BRS*.

However, some behaviors may not be as discrete (clear start and end points) but may involve (1) the repetition of a single behavior (i.e. fist-pounding, head-banging), (2) the rapid successive occurrence of a group or chain of behaviors (i.e. a tantrum involving cursing, hitting, kicking, throwing objects), or (3) one behavior occurring over a sustained period of time (i.e. crying, rocking, finger-flapping, academic engagement). These types of behaviors might be more accurately and effectively measured by recording the *duration* of the event. If the team decides the best way to measure a target behavior is by recording its duration, they will document the length of time the student engaged in the problem or desired behavior on the *BRS*.

Finally, some behaviors might best be measured using changes in *intensity* (i.e., ear-piercing scream vs. a whimper; a tap on the cheek vs. a slap leaving a red mark). This method of measurement involves defining the various degrees of the targeted behavior. If the team chooses to measure the intensity of a behavior, it is important to develop a reliable system for ranking each intensity level. For example, if the targeted behavior is ‘fighting’ the *BRS* intensity scale may include the following degrees for the behavior.

- 5= all out brawl on the floor with several peers (really bad day)
- 4= multiple punches/hits and kicks to peer (typical/normal day)
- 3= a few punches or kicks to peer (good day)

- 2= slight slap toward, or an attempted hit or kick toward peer (better day)
- 1= No fighting (exceptional day/goal)

### **Developing Anchor Points**

Once the team agrees upon the best method (frequency, duration, or intensity) for measuring the targeted behaviors, the next step is to establish appropriate anchor points for the *BRS*. The process for setting anchors on the *BRS* is similar across all metrics. When setting anchor points for ***challenging behavior***; the first step is to determine the behavior's occurrence on a typical day. This response (e.g., 4-6 times, 10 minutes, 10% of opportunities) becomes Anchor 4. Next, the team discusses the reasonable goal they would like to achieve by the end of the intervention period and sets this as Anchor 1. The team now completes the remainder of the anchor points. Anchor 5 represents a day that is worse than a typical day; therefore, the anchor point will be set at a measure greater than Anchor 4. For example, if the team determines that a student typically uses curse words in group work about 8-10 times per day (Anchor 4), Anchor 5 would represent the student having an extremely bad day by cursing more often than usual (i.e., more than 10 times per day). Anchors 3 and 2 will represent intermediate performances between the typical day (Anchor 4) and the reasonable goals (Anchor 1). Anchor 3 represents 5-7 occurrences of cursing behavior, whereas Anchor 2 represents 3-4 occurrences.

Setting the *BRS* anchors for ***appropriate behavior*** is identical to the challenging behavior process described above; however, because the teams wants to see theses behaviors improve (or increase), the scale is reversed. That is, the typical day is set at Anchor 2 (rather than 4), the most undesirable day is set at Anchor point 1 (rather than 5), and the reasonable goal is set at Anchor 5 (rather than 1). The interim anchors points for appropriate behavior are points 2 and 3. Revisiting the student above, the team determined that the behavior they would prefer the student use suitable or kind words when interacting with peers and adults during group work in place of the cursing. They estimate that on a typical day, the student performed this skill approximately once or twice. The team set Anchor 2 at 1-2 times. Next, the team determined that increasing the student's use of kind words to 10 or more times a day would be ideal. Anchor 5 was set at 10 or more times. Anchor 1, representing extremely bad days was set at 0 times (lower than the 1-2 times of Anchor 2). Anchor 3 is 3-6 times, whereas Anchor 4 is 7-9 times.

### **Frequency Anchor Points**

There are several ways to measure the frequency of a behavior. The team may measure the actual occurrences of the behavior, a range (e.g., 10-20 times per day) for behavioral occurrence, or the percentage of time (e.g., 0-25%, 26-50%) that the behavior occurs. The following examples may assist when developing *BRS* frequency anchor points.

**Range Example:**

- 5 = 10+ times/day (bad day)
- 4 = 7-9 times/day (typical/normal day)
- 3 = 4-6 times/day (good day)
- 2 = 2-3 times/day (really good day)
- 1 = 0-1 time/day (exceptional day/goal)

Behavior		Date					
<b>Tantrums</b>	10+ daily	5	5	5	5	5	5
	7-9	4	4	4	4	4	4
	4-6	3	3	3	3	3	3
	2-3	2	2	2	2	2	2
	0-1/day	1	1	1	1	1	1

**Percentage Example**

- 5= 41-50% of the day (bad day)
- 4= 31-40% of the day (typical/normal day)
- 3= 21-30% of the day (good day)
- 2= 10-20% of the day (better day)
- 1= <10% of day (exceptional day - goal)

Behavior		Date					
<b>Tantrums</b>	41-50% of day	5	5	5	5	5	5
	31-40%	4	4	4	4	4	4
	21-30%	3	3	3	3	3	3
	10-20%	2	2	2	2	2	2
	<10% of day	1	1	1	1	1	1

**Duration Anchor Points**

- 5 = 10+ minutes (bad day)
- 4 = 6-9 minutes (typical/normal day)
- 3 = 3-5 minutes (good day)
- 2 = 1-2 minutes (better day)
- 1 = < 1 minute (exceptional day - goal)

Behavior		Date					
<b>Tantrums</b>	10+ min	5	5	5	5	5	5
	6-9 min	4	4	4	4	4	4
	3-5 min	3	3	3	3	3	3
	1-2 min	2	2	2	2	2	2
	<1 minute	1	1	1	1	1	1

**Intensity Anchor Points**

- 5 = Ear-piercing scream (Hear it on the street)
- 4 = Louder than playground voice (Hear it in the parking lot)
- 3 = Playground voice (Hear it in the next class)
- 2 = Louder than inside voice
- 1 = Whimper, squeal

Behavior		Date					
<b>Screaming</b>	Ear-piercing scream	5	5	5	5	5	5
	Louder than playground voice	4	4	4	4	4	4
	Playground voice	3	3	3	3	3	3
	Louder than inside voice	2	2	2	2	2	2
	Whimper/squeal	1	1	1	1	1	1

Once the team gains consensus on how to measure the target behavior(s) and establishes the *BRS* anchor points for recording the behavioral occurrences, they will select a start date for collecting data and identify who will be responsible for completing the *BRS*. At a minimum, the classroom teacher primarily responsible for the student will complete the *BRS* daily. However, there may be other team members working with the student on a consistent and/or frequent basis who may also collect *BRS* data.

It is important to clarify one point with respect to the development and use of the Behavior Rating Scale. The *BRS* is a flexible tool meant to gather relevant data on problem behaviors, pro-social behaviors and replacement behaviors. Because the initial anchor points developed by the team are only estimates or approximations of how often the student engages in each behavior, it is imperative to remember that the team may need to adjust the anchors once data collection has started if it is determined that the original anchor points do not accurately reflect the student's behavior.

However, not only is the team able to adjust the anchor points for the behaviors initially recorded on the *BRS*, they may also add behaviors to the form, as needed. For example, the team initially decided to collect data on Johnny's tantrums (problem behavior) and his task engagement time (appropriate academic behavior). However, as the team begins to develop the behavior intervention plan (Chapter 5) they decide to teach Johnny to raise his hand to request help vs. engaging in the tantrums. The chosen replacement behavior to be taught (hand-raising) was not initially listed on the *BRS*. In order to track Johnny's hand-raising behavior, the team operationally defines the new behavior, develops anchor points and adds it to the *BRS*. It is important for the team to remember that the *BRS* is a simple, flexible, easily adjusted tool for daily data collection throughout the PTR process.

In conclusion, when starting the data collection process, the team must have well-defined, operational definitions for each target behavior. They will need to decide on the best method for measuring those behaviors by focusing on the area of greatest concern; ***how often*** the behavior occurs, ***how long*** the behavior lasts, or the behavior's ***intensity***. Finally, the team will need to establish appropriate anchor points for recording the target behaviors. It is essential for the team to determine the most effective and accurate way to measure and record the student's behavior since the information obtained throughout the data collection process will allow the team to make appropriate decisions when completing the functional behavior assessment and developing the behavior intervention plan.