

## BEHAVIOUR CHAIN INTERRUPTION STRATEGY

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### STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Teaching communication skills to students with significant intellectual disabilities is a key priority for educators and can often be a challenging task.

### PROPOSED SOLUTION/ INTERVENTION

The behaviour chain interruption strategy (BCIS) uses natural routines as teaching opportunities to develop specific and predetermined communication skills involving requesting. The key feature of the technique is the use of interruption or sabotage in the middle of an ongoing and motivating routine. A prerequisite for use of BCIS is the ability of the learner to anticipate the next step in the routine. The steps involved in implementing BCIS are as follows: (1) A familiar **routine of several steps** is commenced; (2) the teacher uses an **interruption** in the **middle** of the routine such that it may not continue. Interruptions may include: delaying presentation of a needed item; placing an item out of reach; holding an item down; giving the learner faulty or inoperative materials; withholding assistance; blocking access to the next action; (3) the teacher **waits** for a fixed time for the student to respond; (4) if the targeted communication is not forthcoming, predetermined **prompting** is used; and (5) once the targeted communication is produced, the **chain continues**.

### THE THEORETICAL RATIONALE – HOW DOES IT WORK?

There are several plausible theoretical explanations for the effectiveness of the BCIS. In particular, it may

increase the reinforcing value of an item or action (such as assistance from a partner to remove the interruption) and increase the likelihood of communication.

### WHAT DOES THE RESEARCH SAY? WHAT IS THE EVIDENCE FOR ITS EFFICACY?

There are over 10 small n studies examining the BCIS. It has been successfully applied to children and adults with moderate to profound intellectual impairments, as well as to individuals with autism and multiple disabilities, including physical and sensory impairments. A range of communication forms has been taught including natural gestures, signing, pictures, speech and a switch activated communication device. Some preliminary evidence suggests that learners may demonstrate taught communication outside the context of a contrived interruption, which is an important outcome.

### CONCLUSIONS

The BCIS is a relatively straightforward procedure to implement in natural routines but it does need some planning and practice. A small but sound body of research is generally supportive of the BCIS but a few questions remain.

### THE MUSEC VERDICT: WORTH A TRY

Key references may be found at:  
[http://www.musec.mq.edu.au/co\\_brief.asp](http://www.musec.mq.edu.au/co_brief.asp)

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