



0005-7916(94)00047-6

A BRIEF INSTRUMENT TO ASSESS KNOWLEDGE OF BEHAVIORAL PRINCIPLES

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Summary — A brief questionnaire is presented that assesses knowledge of behavioral principles among counselors who provide care to individuals with developmental disabilities.

Inservice training in behavior management is a common method of increasing the knowledge and use of behavioral principles among counselors who provide care to individuals with developmental disabilities. Typically, these programs are evaluated by asking counselors to complete measures that assess knowledge acquired during training. Unfortunately, these measures are often constructed ad hoc and may possess unknown psychometric properties.

In order to provide a standardized measure of counselors' knowledge of behavioral principles, a 20-item multiple-choice questionnaire was constructed. Items contained in this measure were adapted from O'Dell, Tarler-Benlolo, and Flynn (1979) and consisted of a series of practical problem situations. The directions that accompanied this questionnaire instructed counselors to select the most appropriate solution for each of the problem situations.

The questionnaire was distributed to 185 counselors employed by a community-based agency located in western Ontario that provided residential services to individuals with developmental disabilities. Fifty counselors returned completed questionnaires giving a response rate of 27%. The respondents' demographic and occupational characteristics

were similar to those reported in a survey of 2,747 counselors employed in community facilities (Janicki, Jacobson, Zigman, & Gordon, 1984).

The 20-item questionnaire yielded a moderate internal consistency coefficient ($\alpha = .69$). In order to improve the scale's internal consistency, 10 of the 20 multiple-choice items were selected to represent the final measure (see Appendix). Those items that were selected had corrected item-total correlations greater than .30 and yielded a reliability coefficient of $\alpha = .79$ for the modified instrument. Respondents' mean number of correct responses on the modified measure was 5.92 with a standard deviation of 2.75.

The modified 10-item measure was cross-validated by distributing this measure to 137 counselors employed by a community-based agency located in eastern Ontario that also provided residential services to individuals with developmental disabilities. This agency was located approximately 360 miles from the first sample. Forty-six counselors returned completed questionnaires giving a response rate of 34%. The 10-item measure yielded an internal consistency coefficient of $\alpha = .76$ and was not significantly different from the coefficient yielded by the first sample. Respondents' mean number of correct responses on the measure was 5.33 with a standard

deviation of 2.57 and was similar to mean number of correct responses provided by the first sample.

In summary, the 10-item questionnaire represents an internally consistent instrument that may be useful in assessing knowledge of behavioral principles and evaluating the effectiveness of inservice training in behavior management.

References

- Janicki, M. P., Jacobson, J. W., Zigman, W. B., & Gordon, N. H. (1984). Characteristics of employees of community residences for retarded persons. *Education and Training of the Mentally Retarded, 19*, 35-44.
- O'Dell, S. L., Tarler-Benlolo, L., & Flynn, J. M. (1979). An instrument to measure knowledge of behavioral principles as applied to children. *Journal of Behavior Therapy and Experimental Psychiatry, 10*, 29-34.

Appendix

Problem Situation Questionnaire

The following examples describe minor problems that parents are often confronted with when raising children. You, as a counselor, are being asked for your advice by the parents in each of the examples listed below. Use your knowledge and experience as a counselor and select what you believe is the most appropriate answer to the parents' dilemma. Although you may feel that more than one answer is correct, please select only one response for each problem.

- (1) A child begins to whine and cry when his parents explain why he can't go outside. The parents wish to know how to react. Your advice is that the parents should:
 - (a) Ask the child why going outside is so important to him.
 - (b) Explain that it is a parent's right to make such decisions.
 - (c) Explain to the child why he should not go outside.
 - (d) Ignore the whining and crying.
- (2) A child's parents have decided to punish their child every time he plays football in the house. They wish to know which punishment would be the best to use. You suggest that they:
 - (a) Make the child do extra homework.
 - (b) Clearly express their disapproval.
 - (c) Remove the child to a boring situation every time.
 - (d) Give the child a reasonable spanking.
- (3) Every time Billy's mother starts to read, Billy begins to make a lot of noise which prevents her from enjoying her reading time. She wants to know the best way to get Billy to be quiet when she reads. Your advice is:
 - (a) Severely reprimand Billy when this occurs.
 - (b) Pay close attention and praise and hug him when he plays quietly while she is reading and ignore his noisy behavior.
 - (c) Call him to her and carefully explain how important it is for her to have a quiet time for herself each time this occurs.
 - (d) Tell him he won't get a dessert after dinner if he continues.
- (4) A young child often whines and cries when he is around his mother. The child's mother wishes to know why he cries. You suggest that the child's mother should consider the possibility that:
 - (a) He is trying to tell her something.
 - (b) He needs more of her attention.
 - (c) She is somehow rewarding his crying.
 - (d) She is not giving him enough attention.
- (5) A child's parents wish to know the most likely reason their child misbehaves. You suggest that it is because:
 - (a) He is expressing angry feelings which he often holds inside.
 - (b) He has learned to misbehave.
 - (c) He was born with the tendency to misbehave.
 - (d) He has not been properly told that his behavior is wrong.
- (6) You also suggest that what is probably most important in helping a child behave in desirable ways is:
 - (a) To teach the child the importance of self-discipline.
 - (b) To help him understand right and wrong.
 - (c) Providing consistent consequences for his behavior.
 - (d) Understanding his moods and feelings as a unique person.
- (7) A mother and father want to know the most effective way of getting their child to do homework. Your advice is that they:
 - (a) Say, "When you finish your homework, you can watch T.V."
 - (b) Say, "You can watch this show on T.V. if you promise to do your homework when the show is over."
 - (c) Say, "If you don't do your homework tonight, you can't watch T.V. at all tomorrow."
 - (d) Explain the importance of school work and dangers of putting things off.
- (8) A child's parents want to make a behavior a long-lasting habit. You suggest that they should:
 - (a) Reward it every time.
 - (b) First reward it every time and then reward it occasionally.
 - (c) Promise something the child wants very much.
 - (d) Give several reasons why it is important and remind the child of the reasons often.
- (9) A father tells a child she cannot go to the store with him because she didn't clean her room like she promised. She

reacts by shouting, crying, and promising she will clean her room when she gets home. What do you suggest the father should do?

- (a) Ignore her and go to the store.
- (b) Take her to the store but make her clean her room when they return.
- (c) Calm her down and go help her clean her room together.
- (d) Talk to her and find out why she doesn't take responsibility.

(10) Jimmy sometimes says obscene words, but only in front of his mother. She has been shocked and makes her feelings clear to him. She wishes to know how she should react when Jimmy uses obscene words. Your advice is that she should:

- (a) Wash his mouth out with soap.
- (b) Ignore him when he uses obscene words.
- (c) Tell him how bad he is and how she doesn't like him to use those words.
- (d) Explain to him the reason such words are not used.

The correct answers, indicated by underlined letters, are 1d, 2c, 3b, 4c, 5b, 6c, 7a, 8b, 9a, and 10b.