

The Family Ecology Assessment: Enhancing Family Centred Service Delivery in PBS with Families

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Workshop
BILD PBS International Conference
Birmingham, UK
May 8-10, 2019

Family Ecology Assessment

- Collaborative, strengths-based assessment of features of family ecology relevant to design of contextually-appropriate PBS plan and family-focused supports (Lucyshyn et al., 2002; McLaughlin et al., 2012)
- Two sections:
 - 1. Broad assessment family ecology
 - 2. Focused assessment of family routines

Part 1. Broad Assessment of Family Ecology

- Purpose
 - Gather broader ecological information relevant to design of a contextually appropriate PBS plan
 - Identify family-centered supports that extend beyond components of PBS plan
 - Ensure PBS plan is feasible for family
 - Nurture trust and hope
 - Build collaborative partnership/ therapeutic alliance aimed at change

Part 1. Broad Assessment of Family Ecology (continued)

- Theoretical links
 - Family-centered philosophy (Dunst, Trivette & Deal, 1988)
 - Strengths-based assessment (Turnbull & Turnbull, 2001)
 - Stress and Adaptation Theory (Singer & Irvin, 1991)
- Key Elements
 - Family strengths & child positive contributions
 - Resources and social supports available to family
 - Stressors impinging on family
 - Family goals for child and family as a whole

Part 1. Broad Assessment of Family Ecology (continued)

- What would you characterize as your family's strengths?
- What would you characterize as your child's positive contributions to the family?
- What formal and informal resources have you used, or are available, to support your child and family?
- What are your sources of social support?
- What are sources of stress?
- What are your goals for: focus child; yourself as parent; family as a whole?

Guidelines for Conducting Family Ecology Assessment

- Provide rationale for conducting assessment
- Seek family's informed assent
- Schedule between 1-2 hours to conduct assessment with child's parent(s)
- Open with brief reiteration of rationale for assessment
- Prior to posing each question, provide background as to why question is important:
 - For family strengths, research shows that families of children with autism have many strengths
 - For child contributions, research that shows that children with autism make positive contributions to their family; some of these are intangible but still important to families

Guidelines for Conducting Family Ecology Assessment (continued)

- Conduct interview in informal, conversational style
 - Be prepared to answer questions parents pose as well as to ask questions
 - With appropriate discretion, share information about your life related to questions if it may help facilitate conversation
- If family member discloses information they find embarrassing, normalize the experience
 - Share similar event from your life.
 - note how other families have similar experiences

Illustration: Amanda and Family

- Amanda
 - 8 year old girl with moderate intellectual disability
 - Verbal: English & Mandarin
 - Loves stuffed animals; visiting zoo
- Family
 - Mother and father
 - Older sister
 - Immigrated to Canada from Taiwan
 - Grandparents live next door
 - Father works from home

Illustration: Family Ecology Assessment Results

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Family Strengths <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ very caring ■ put children first ■ strong marital partnership ■ Child + Contributions <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Amanda teaches parents: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ to be patient, ■ to respect people with differences ■ to appreciate "little things" ■ Resources/Social Supports <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ <i>only</i> immediate family | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Stressor <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ problem behavior makes mom depressed & dad angry ■ avoid doing things in public ■ financial stress due to father not working outside home ■ Goals <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Amanda lives "normal" life <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ can do things independently ■ Do things in community together as family ■ Sisters get along better |
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Exercise 1. Contextual Fit Considerations

- Given family ecology assessment results for Amanda's family, what would be important contextual fit considerations?

Illustration: Family Ecology Assessment Results

- Family Strengths**
 - very caring
 - put children first
 - strong marital partnership
- Child + Contributions**
 - Amanda teaches parents:
 - to be patient,
 - to respect people with differences
 - to appreciate "little things"
- Resources/Social Supports**
 - only immediate family
- Stressor**
 - problem behavior makes mom depressed & dad angry
 - avoid doing things in public
 - financial stress due to father not working outside home
- Goals**
 - Amanda lives "normal" life
 - can do things independently
 - Do things in community together as family
 - Sisters get along better

Exercise 2. Family Centered Supports

- Given Family Ecology Assessment results for Amanda's Family, what family centered supports would you advise?

Part 2. Focused Assessment of Family Routines

- Purpose
 - Identify valued but problematic family routines
 - Prioritize routines for intervention
 - Strategically decide where to begin intervention
 - Family routine most likely promote initial success
 - Pivotal routine that may promote spread of effect to other family routines
 - Generate family vision of successful target routine(s)
 - Given elements of target routine & broader ecology assessment results, ensure contextual fit

Part 2. Focused Assessment of Family Routines (continued)

- Theoretical links
 - Activity setting as unit of analysis (Vygotsky, 1978; Gallimore, Goldenberg, & Tharp 1993)
- Key elements of routines
 - Time and place
 - People present
 - Materials and social resources
 - Tasks
 - Goals and values

Part 2. Focused Assessment of Family Routines (continued)

- List child's typical daily schedule
- Identify valued but problematic family routines
 - Home routines
 - Community routines
 - Home or community routines family no longer does
- Prioritize routines for intervention



Question Guide for Selecting & Prioritizing Family Routines for Intervention

- How much change is required for routine to be successful?
- How many people are involved in routine, and how many will need to make changes in their behaviour?
- Should *both* parents be involved in change process at start, or should one parent start change process and other parent enter process later?
- How much time and effort required?
- How much knowledge and skill needed?
- Is there potential for a reasonably quick success with minimal training and support?
- Might successful intervention have positive impact on other areas of child and/or family's life?
- Are there obstacles that may arise and impede family progress?



Exercise 3. Selecting Priority Routine for Intervention

- Amanda's family selected the following routines
 - Going grocery shopping with Amanda
 - Going to bed and sleeping in own bed alone
 - Going to restaurant together as family
 - Parent dinner prep/child free time
- Given decision rules, where might it be best to begin intervention?



Exercise 3. Selecting Priority Routine for Intervention

- Given decision-rules, best routine in which to begin intervention and support:

Collaborate with Family to Define Vision of Successful Target Routines

- Key elements of routines
 - Time and place
 - People present
 - Material resources
 - Tasks for focus child and for each person in routine
 - Goals and values

Illustration: Family Vision of Child Free-Time Dinner Prep Routine

- Time and place
 - 5:00 – 6:00 pm
 - Kitchen/dining area, and family room
- People present
 - Amanda, mother, father
- Material resources
 - Play materials, T.V., video player, music video
 - Stove, cookware, foods to prepare for dinner

Illustration: Family Vision of Child Free-Time Dinner Prep Routine

- Tasks for focus child and each person in routine:
 - Amanda
 - Select play materials; play independently; remain in assigned area; put play materials away before supper begins
 - Mother
 - Help Amanda set up play activities; prepare supper, give minimal directions and supervision from kitchen
 - Father
 - Work in home office; sometimes help mom cook or take mom's place preparing supper
 - Sister
 - Do homework; if asked, help sister set up play activity; provide encouragement to Amanda

Illustration: Family Vision of Child Free-Time Dinner Prep Routine

- Goals and values:
 - Amanda playing independently
 - Mother enjoying preparing nice dinner
 - Father and sister being able to work alone in their rooms
 - Family functioning in more typical fashion

Exercise 4: Conducting Family Ecology Assessment

- Small group activity: Work in groups of 2 for 20-30 minutes
- One person plays role of parent
- Other person plays role of family interventionist
- Family interventionist uses family ecology summary form to write down parent responses to questions on family strengths, child positive contributions, etc.
- After completing assessment, identify family-focused supports that may be needed during a process of family centered PBS

Contextual Fit Considerations from Family Ecology Assessment

- Family-Focused Supports for Olivia and her Family:



Summary: Uses of Family Ecology Results

- Select valued family routines for intervention and support
- Increase contextual fit between PBS plan and larger ecology of family
 - Build on family strengths
 - Incorporate family resources and supports
 - Diminish stressors
- Increase fit between PBS strategies and key elements of routines (e.g., time and place, people, resources, tasks, goals & values)
- Identify family-focused supports
