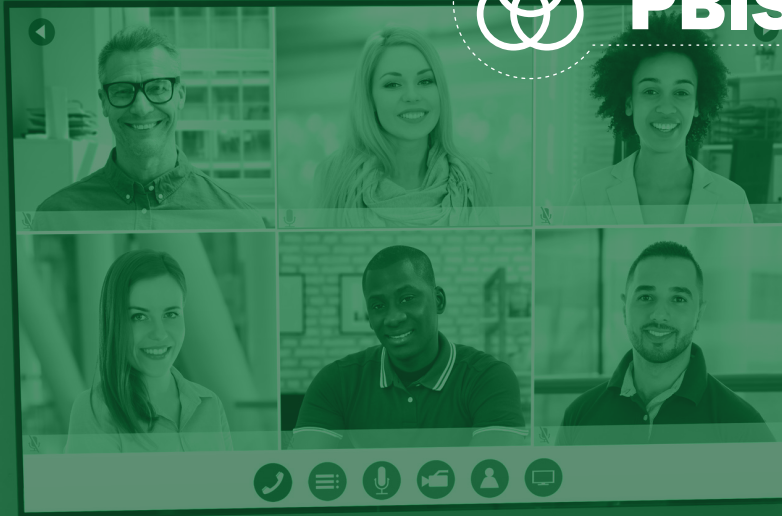




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CONSIDERATIONS FOR CONDUCTING VIRTUAL FUNCTIONAL BEHAVIOR ASSESSMENTS & BEHAVIOR INTERVENTION PLANS (FBAs & BIPs)

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Considerations for Conducting Virtual Functional Behavior Assessments & Behavior Intervention Plans (FBAs & BIPs)

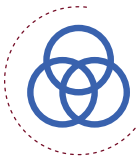
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Introduction

This brief will provide considerations for conducting and implementing functional behavior assessments (FBA) and behavior intervention plans (BIPs) using virtual technology. There are many situations in which virtual FBA/BIP implementation may be necessary or desired. For example, virtual FBA/BIPs can support students attending schools in areas that may be difficult or cost-prohibitive to do all FBA/BIP related activities on site, such as remote or rural areas, or in situations where school policy limits outside visitors to the campus. There may also be some cases in which a student is unable to attend school for an extended period and require virtual instruction (e.g., due to illness or other conditions that prevent in-school attendance).



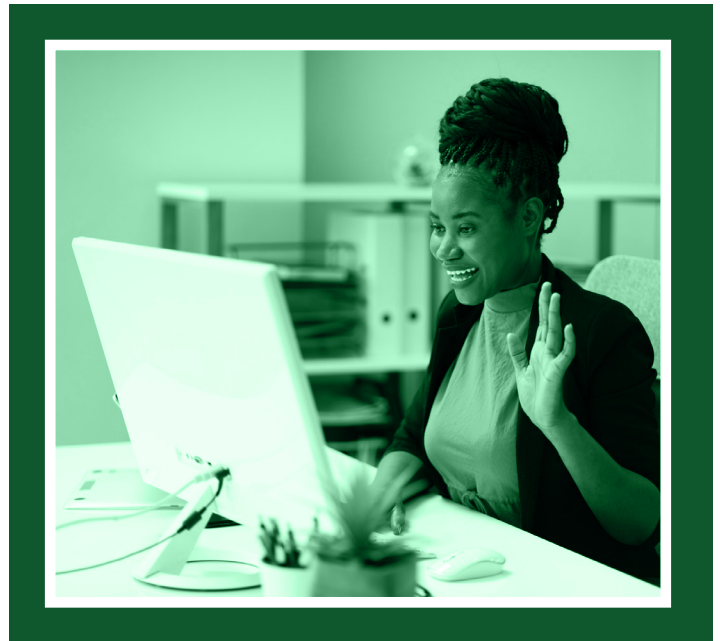
Educators may find virtual FBA/BIPs helpful when supporting the behavioral needs of students in home/community environments outside of school hours. Finally, hybrid approaches for conducting FBA/BIPs may enhance the process. This could include some activities taking place face-to-face and others occurring virtually. For instance, if an on-site observation of a student is challenging to complete due to student reaction to novel people being in the classroom, the observation can occur virtually. In other examples, all participants may be unable to attend meetings face-to-face; thus, some can join virtually.

This guide will address two key considerations for educators in conducting virtual FBA/BIPs. These relevant factors are not exhaustive; but do reflect the most salient aspects in our experiences conducting virtual FBA/BIPs. The following considerations will be reviewed:

1. five technological features that promote successful virtual FBA/BIPs, along with addressing challenges that may be encountered
2. five virtual adaptations for implementing FBA/BIP activities

Technological Features for Implementing Virtual FBAs/BIPs

When implementing the FBA/BIP processes virtually, there are specific technology features that educators



should consider prior to engaging in the virtual process. Conducting virtual FBA/BIPs does require the use of technology, which for some people is a challenge. The selected features include:

- reliable Internet connection
- plan for problem solving technology difficulties
- videoconferencing platform
- ability to send and receive information digitally
- device for virtual observations

How to address challenges that may be encountered are also discussed.



Reliable Internet Connection

On-line video-conference platforms are used for most virtual FBA/BIP activities. The minimum internet connection needs to be stable enough to support a video conference platform for the time duration of the activity.

Addressing Challenges

If support with resources is needed, school districts may have funds to purchase and lend Wi-Fi extenders and mobile hotspots to schools with weaker internet connections and/or to families.

- [wi-fi extenders](#)¹
- [mobile hotspots](#)²

Plan for Problem Solving Technology Difficulties

It is not uncommon for educators and caregivers to experience technology issues while conducting or participating in virtual FBA/BIP activities. To be proactive, teams should anticipate potential technology glitches and prepare a plan for how to resolve them. Potential technology issues may include the following:

- problems logging in to the virtual platform
- platform features not working or freezing
- error messages
- audio or video not working

Addressing Challenges

Troubleshooting plans for technology difficulties may include the following:

- Identify a key person at the school or district that has experience with technology and can support the team (i.e., educators or caregivers).
- Identify the best way to communicate with team members if technological difficulties occur (i.e., numbers for texting or voice calls).
- Develop a task analysis or a guide (i.e., Word or PowerPoint document) that describes the steps to set-up and use the technology, as well as tips for troubleshooting. Include photos that show examples of what users will see when they are using a specific application, platform, or device. This could include how to mute and unmute audio, how to turn on and off the video camera, how to use and read the chat box, etc. (see [Task Analysis Steps](#)³ for a sample task analysis guide).
- Many technical problems can be resolved by exiting the platform and re-entering using the invitation link.



Videoconferencing Platform

It will be necessary to utilize a video conferencing platform that has the ability for two-way audio and video for conducting virtual FBA activities including meetings, in-vivo coaching supports, and observations.

Examples of common platforms include: [Zoom](#),⁴ [Microsoft Teams](#),⁵ [GoToMeeting](#),⁶ and [Cisco WebEx](#).⁷

The platforms can be accessed through a web browser, or applications can be downloaded to devices for immediate access and joining/scheduling meetings.

- To access all features of videoconferencing platforms, subscriptions/licenses are needed. However, many (e.g., Zoom, GoToMeeting) do offer “free versions” that have limited features.
- Ask the school team/family if they are familiar with or comfortable using a specific videoconferencing platform.
- If confidential information will be shared during the FBA/BIP virtual activities, explore whether the video-conferencing platform your district is using is secure and conforms to privacy laws and acts (e.g., Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act [FERPA], Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act [HIPAA]).

Addressing Challenges

- Most districts have subscriptions to a videoconferencing platform. If so, individual educators or a caregiver would not need a subscription to participate. In most cases, an educator with log-in credentials would send out a calendar invitation (via email) or an email invite to other educators and/or families with the information for joining the meeting.
- Quality of the video platform is often contingent upon the Internet signal strength. WiFi extenders and hotspots may be needed to improve quality if weak Internet signals significantly disrupt fluent meetings. (See [reliable Internet connection](#) earlier).
- If a virtual videoconferencing platform cannot be used, Facetime or other visual calling methods could be used as an alternative for both meeting and observations.



Ability to Send and Receive Information Digitally

Although most educators have a school-district e-mail account, some families may not have access to email. Having a method for sending materials, scheduling meetings, and communicating throughout the virtual FBA/BIP process is important. Using email can be the most efficient way to give prompts, schedule meetings, and ensure assigned tasks between meetings are progressing.

- Determine the preferred method of communication.
- Send a test email or message and ask for confirmation that it was received.
- When communicating via email, be cognizant of maintaining privacy by using password protected documents and general terms like “student.”

Addressing Challenges

If a family does not have an email address established, provide options for signing up for email (e.g., Gmail, Yahoo).

Consider other options outside of email for individuals who prefer not to communicate via email.

- Instant messaging programs may be useful for basic information.
- If the caregiver has access to a fax machine, documents can be scanned and sent.
- Sending photos via text can also work for scanning information.
- Some families may prefer US mail for sending and receiving documents. If this method is used, it is important to provide enough time for the materials to arrive.



Device for Virtual Observations

If direct observations of the student will be conducted, a discussion about how that might be accomplished will be necessary. To successfully observe a student virtually, the device must be equipped with a camera and a microphone. For optimum virtual observations, a device that can be moved around the room to follow the student, such as a laptop or a tablet, is preferred. However, if neither are available, a smart phone or other devices with a video component can be used.

If the student is being observed in a situation in which he/she is staying within a designated area, (e.g., at desk), a smart phone can be placed on a lanyard that is worn around an adult's neck. The adult should ensure that the phone is positioned within the lanyard so that the camera is capturing the student. The adult can then sit or stand near the student, allowing the observation to be conducted. The advantage of this approach is that the student may be unaware that he/she is being observed, thus reducing possible reactivity.

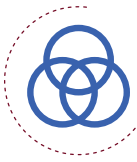
To enhance a more successful observation experience, ask the educator or caregiver about experience using a computer/laptop for observations.

Addressing Challenges

If an educator or caregiver does not have experience using devices for direct observations, provide time and opportunity for them to set up devices and practice using them prior to conducting the “official” observations.

If the student being observed moves frequently within the setting, it may be challenging to observe with a laptop, tablet, or phone. Districts may want to consider investing in devices that can move automatically as the person being observed moves (e.g., [Swivl](#)[®]) and that could be lent to the educator/caregiver.

If direct virtual observations cannot be conducted, the educator/family can record a behavioral event, and upload the video to a secure web server.



Adaptations of FBA/BIP Activities to Enhance Success of the Virtual FBA/BIP Process

Although virtual FBA/BIP implementation basically mirrors face-to-face activities, there are some adaptations that may need to be addressed to increase its effectiveness. The selected virtual adaptations include:

- teaming
- building rapport
- organizing meetings and steps of the FBA/BIP process
- data collection
- providing coaching support

Teaming

- Send an initial email to the team introducing everyone, confirming that the team includes all relevant team members (at secondary, consider inclusion of the student), and describing each person's role/responsibilities.
- Offer to set up video conferencing equipment or provide TA support and opportunities to rehearse/practice for anyone uncertain about using technology.
- It may be helpful to establish a recurrent virtual meeting room with the same link and password to be used by all.

Additional Considerations

Identify preferences for coming to consensus on decisions (e.g., discussion, voting, polling, rank ordering via virtual platform features).



Building Rapport

Establishing rapport virtually can be more challenging than doing so in person. The educator facilitating the FBA/BIP process will want to consider the following:

- Start all meetings with a positive comment.
- Prior to starting the activities related to the FBA/BIP process, have some ice-breaker activity first that gets people to know each other better. Some examples are:
 - Mood Barometer: Asking the team how they feel. This can be done via a poll instead of verbally.
 - Draw Your Mood: Share a whiteboard and ask everyone to draw their mood on it. [Directions for setting up Whiteboards on Zoom](#).⁹
 - Virtual coffee time: Scheduling a time in which people can have coffee or the beverage of their choice and engaging in social conversation can give team members time to get to know each other better and feel more comfortable with each other. The website [Team Building](#)¹⁰ provides virtual coffee time ideas.
 - Open meeting by asking “in one word, how would you describe the past (week/day/month/year).
 - [Other ideas for small meetings](#).¹¹
- Asking all participants to turn their device cameras on during virtual team meetings allows all to see everyone's faces. Coaches or facilitators of the FBA/BIP process should make sure that their facial expressions and nonverbal gestures are positive and matched to the seriousness or frivolity of the situation. This includes using nonverbal signals and facial expressions to show active listening, express empathy, indicate agreement, and validate others' feelings.

Additional Considerations

- Open virtual meeting room at least 10 minutes before start of scheduled meeting time to be ready to greet everyone.
- Ask open ended questions and/or provide options to educators/families when making decisions or gathering necessary information as opposed to using primarily closed questions (yes/no).



Organizing Meetings and Steps of the FBA/BIP process

It is important to ensure that virtual FBA/BIP meetings and other activities are well-organized. The ideal situation is for the meeting to be run fluently and efficiently. Below are suggestions for helping meetings flow.

- Prior to conducting any meeting steps, it is helpful to send an initial email with an agenda for the upcoming meeting and any forms/tools that will be used (e.g., copy of FBA interview, draft hypothesis, etc.).
- Asking team members to do “homework” prior to the meeting/step can save time. For example, prior to a meeting that identifies target behaviors, provide a form to all team members via email or via a link to an online document (e.g., [Google Docs](#)¹²), and ask each team member to list between one to three behaviors they would like to see decreased.
- During the meeting, make sure that screen sharing is enabled for all participants. This allows everyone to see the information that is being discussed and/or entered on forms or share specific documents.

Additional Considerations

An [example of an FBA/BIP agenda](#)¹³ is available from a website from the University of South Florida.



Data Collection

Data collection can be challenging in any situation. Virtual FBA/BIPs can provide features that make this increasingly feasible. Using online platforms such as Google Documents to develop tools for online data entry are ideal. For example, a Google Excel document can be set up for data entry and for creating graphs. This allows multiple team members to enter data with the documents automatically saving. During FBA/BIP meetings in which data are reviewed, the document can be immediately accessed by going to the Google document link.

Similarly, implementation fidelity measures can be developed via Google documents and a shared link can be provided to team members needing to self-assess fidelity or observe the fidelity of implementation of another person.

Observing the student and/or the educator/caregiver implementing the plan would consider all the features related to [student observations](#) in the technology section.

Additional Considerations

Here is an [example of a Google Excel Document](#).¹⁴ This document is a direct behavior rating (i.e., Individualized Behavior Rating Scale) in which the person rates the performance of the student's behavior during the time-period established for observing. Rather than do frequency counts, time durations, or other methods, the rating that best matches how the behavior is performed is circled by the person entering the data.

Here is an [example of a document for measuring implementation fidelity](#).¹⁵



Providing Coaching Support

Educators and families will need coaching support to assist them in implementing the intervention plan with fidelity and to refine and problem-solve any issues that occur after plan implementation. Virtual coaching includes all the considerations mentioned in the first section describing technology considerations, [specifically related to observations](#).

When planning on conducting virtual coaching sessions, it is important to discuss with the educator and/or caregiver how best to do coaching. Some considerations include:

- Role plays and rehearsals can be accomplished virtually. The educator/caregiver who will be implementing the plan can attend a virtual meeting with the “coach” and role play by first having the coach go through the steps of the plan then switching roles with the implementor.
- Identifying the implementor's preferences on how coaching should be provided once the plan is implemented is important. For example, does the caregiver or educator want the coach to observe quietly and debrief afterwards or provide immediate prompts to cue intervention steps?

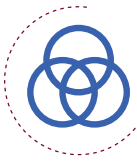
Additional Considerations

If a student has reactivity to hearing audio through a device, the educator/caregiver can use headphones.



Concluding Thoughts

Virtual FBA/BIPs allows educators to provide necessary individualized behavioral supports in environments in which on-site delivery is difficult to achieve. This guide provides adaptations of on-site FBA/BIP activities for virtual implementation and identifies key technology features to be considered for successful implementation of the FBA/BIP process in virtual formats.



Embedded Hyperlinks

1. <https://www.tomsguide.com/us/best-wifi-extenders,review-2225.html>
2. <https://www.tomsguide.com/best-picks/best-mobile-hotspots>
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