

Functional Intervention Planning: The Routines-Based Interview

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The Power of the Routines-Based Interview

What are Routines?

Routines are not necessarily things that happen routinely. They are simply times of the day. It is impossible for families to have no routines. All families, for example, wake up, eat, hang out at home, and go places.

All teachers also have routines, or times of the day in their classrooms. Some teachers are more structured than others, but all have some type of daily activities that are predictable and can be described. Classroom routines are the activities and events usually reflected on the classroom schedule.

One of the most powerful components of the Individualizing Inclusion model for conducting early intervention in natural environments with children of preschool age is our process for intervention planning called routines-based assessment. Our model for working with children with disabilities in inclusive early childhood settings consists of two routines-based interviews - one with the family and one with the teacher. Professionals and parents who have watched or participated in one of these routines-based interviews (RBIs) are amazed at the amount of information that emerges about:

- The child's developmental status
- The family's day-to-day life
- The feelings of the family member or teacher being interviewed

The process consists of the following six steps:

1. **Prepare families to report on routines.**

Whereas professionals come to intervention planning with reports and much experience, families do not have a good way to prepare for the meeting. In RBIs, families are prepared to identify their typical-day routines and to talk about (a) what everyone does, (b) what the child does, and (c) how happy they are with the routine.

2. **Families report on their routines.**

Unlike traditional meetings, where professionals sometimes give evaluation reports, the RBI starts with families discussing any concerns that they may have. The interviewer (or his or her partner if present) writes these down and then prompts the family to report on their routines, beginning at the start of the family's day (e.g., "How does your day start?").

At each routine, the interviewer asks about six questions without the family fully aware of this structure:

What does everyone do at this time?

What does the child do?

How does the child participate (engagement)?

What does the child do by him or herself (independence)?

How does the child communicate and get along with others (social relationships)?

How satisfied is the caregiver with the routine?

To move from one routine to the next, the interviewer simply says, "Then what happens?" or "What's next?" This avoids making assumptions about how the family conducts its daily life.

During the family's report of routines, the interviewer or his or her partner takes notes, marking areas of concern and strength. The interviewer moves the conversation along, if necessary skipping to routines likely to yield important information, such as meals, bath, and bedtime.

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3. *The teacher reports on classroom routines.*

For each classroom routine from arrival to departure, the interviewer asks the teacher to report on the same aspects of functioning that the family reported on, keeping three key pieces of information in mind: (a) what the child does during each classroom routine, (b) what the other children do during each routine, and (c) what is the teacher's perception of the goodness of fit between the routine and the child's functioning. It is also helpful for the interviewer to be prepared to follow up or to initiate discussion about the child's engagement, independence, and social relationships per classroom routine. If the interviewer is the classroom teacher, he or she simply talks about the classroom routines with the family.

The family listens and asks questions if they like during the classroom report.

4. *Interviewer reviews concern and strength areas.*

The interviewer goes through the marked items from both the home and classroom reports to refresh the family's memory.

5. *Family selects outcomes.*

The interviewer asks, "When you think about all these areas of concern and strengths, what would you like the team to concentrate on? What do you want to go on the plan?" The interviewer should be prepared to remind the family of concern areas if they are not mentioned (e.g., "You said that she doesn't accept chunky food at breakfast. Is this something you want to deal with?"). The interviewer will have to be especially encouraging of family-level needs (e.g., dealing with medical appointments, spending time alone). Many families put their own needs after the child's. From a family systems perspective,

these distinctions are somewhat academic.

The list of outcomes generated by the fifth step should be as close to the way the family worded them as possible. This is not the time to worry about making the wording fit the IFSP or IEP forms.

This method typically yields 6 to 10 outcomes, some of which may directly target the needs of the family.

6. *Family puts outcomes into priority order.*

The interviewer shows the family their list of priorities and asks them to put them into their order of importance. From this point forward, the outcomes will always be listed in priority order.

This concludes the routines-based interview.

NOTE on STEP 3

There may be certain situations in which interviewing a teacher will not be possible, such as initial placements into a preschool program. However, for those occasions in which a child spends time outside the home in a child care setting or when the child has participated in a preschool program for a time long enough for a teacher to know him or her (i.e., 3 months or longer), the routines-based interview can be very beneficial. The primary reason for getting input from the child's teacher is so the family has functional information from which to make decisions. Another reason is to reinforce for preschool teachers that their input is valued. More often than not, teachers are not meaningfully included in the discussion of goals for the IFSP or IEP. Input from the child's teacher is required under IDEA and it is vitally important when designing interventions. The routines-based interview provides a meaningful and easily implemented way for them to be involved.

Teacher involvement

There may also be occasions in which the teacher cannot be present during the routines-based interview with the family, and accommodations must be made. A second option, although less desirable, is for the interviewer to interview the teacher at another time, preferably

before the routines-based interview with the family, so that the information gleaned from the teacher can be shared with the family.

Preparing Teachers to discuss classroom routines

Our model provides a process for teachers to determine how engaged a child is during the routines of her or his classroom. It involves observing the targeted child for 10 minute intervals during various classroom routines and rating the child's level of engagement in terms of time and complexity. This type of information is valuable for deciding which routines the child seems to handle fairly well and which ones are more problematic.

Tips

How do I explain the RBI to families?

The RBI replaces a discussion of passes and failures on tests as the basis for deciding on intervention priorities, a welcoming change for most of the families with whom we have worked. Families who are used to other methods may be surprised at first. The interviewer should begin the interview with a version of the following introduction:

"To come up with a plan for helping you and your child, I'd like to ask you about your day-to-day life. By talking about those things, you will then be in a good position to pick the things that are most meaningful to your family, including your child. By focusing on the day-to-day things, we can make our suggestions fit in with what your child and your family are already doing."

Who conducts the RBI?

The RBI with the family can be conducted by the child's teacher, the director of the preschool program, a specialist, a social worker, or any member of the child's team who is involved with assessment and intervention planning. The same individuals (minus the classroom teacher) can also interview the teacher about classroom routines.

How many of us are needed?

It is a good idea to have two professionals at the RBI, one to concentrate on asking questions and the other to take notes, or to do whatever else may be needed so that the interview runs smoothly. In general, we do not recommend overwhelming the family with many professionals at the RBI.



The key to successful RBIs is

Keep the interviews conversational!

Concluding Comments on the Power of the Routines-Based Interviews

After the routines-based interview has been completed with both the family and the teacher, the next step is to share the information with other members of the child's team. At this point, objectives are worded for the child to work on, using those priorities that the family identified. Strategies with the team members are then explored for designing interventions. **The hallmark feature of the routines-based approach is that the step from assessment to intervention is logical and direct, because the format of the assessment leads directly to objectives that are functional, meaningful, and consistent across environments.** Once the list of objectives has been compiled, the team, including the parents can discuss what services are needed.

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