

# Using a behavioural treatment package to address escape-maintained problem behaviours from instructional demands in a child with autism spectrum disorder



**PROGRESSIVESTEPS**  
training and consultation

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## Background and Purpose

A large body of research has been dedicated to developing interventions to reduce escape-maintained problem behaviours and replace them with more acceptable, functionally equivalent responses (Bonner et al., 2022). To extend this research, a changing criterion design was used to evaluate the effects of a behavioural treatment package on escape-maintained off-task behaviours in response to instructional demands for a five-year-old child with autism spectrum disorder. The behavioural treatment package consisted of a behaviour contract, functional communication training, and differential reinforcement of other behaviours. Results demonstrated a decrease in off-task behaviours, increase in functionally equivalent communication responses, and increase in on-task behaviour. The participant and his family found the intervention package to be socially acceptable and easy to use.

## References

Bonner, A. C., Weinszok, S. C., Fernandez, N., Frank-Crawford, M. A., & DeLeon, I. G. (2022). Effects of reinforcer type on the durability of treatment for escape-maintained behavior. *Behavioral Intervention*, 37(3), 594-610. <https://doi.org/10.1002/bin.1876>

## Method

### Participant and Setting:

The participant was a five-year-old boy diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder. The learner was receiving 1:1 behaviour analytic services for 3 hours per week in his home.

### Baseline:

Baseline data for the participant's off-task behaviours were collected over the course of two sessions. The behaviour therapist presented the learner with instructional demands throughout the sessions and data were collected on the frequency and the duration of the learner's off-task behaviours.

### Intervention Procedure:

- Prior to the start of each session, the behaviour therapist and the learner reviewed examples for the expected and the non-expected behaviours and their consequences as part of the behavioural contract.
- Following the behavioural contract review, the learner was presented with a visual session schedule and a set number of "skip ahead" cards that could be used by the learner to functionally escape/skip aversive tasks.
- Once the learner "skipped" a task, that program was not presented again for the remainder of the session.
- The number of "skip ahead" cards was gradually decreased throughout the sessions and the learner's tolerance towards aversive/less preferred tasks was gradually increased.
- To further decrease the learner's escape-maintained off-task behaviours, differential reinforcement was provided on a variable interval schedule of 5, 12 and eventually 15 minutes, and tokens were contingent on the learner's socially appropriate "other" (other than off-task) behaviours.
- If the learner received all his tokens throughout the session, he was allowed to choose a surprise item from his treasure chest.
- If the learner engaged in off-task behaviours at a high rate throughout the session and did not receive all his tokens, he would not earn a surprise toy from his treasure chest and the token board would reset for the next session.

## Results and Discussion

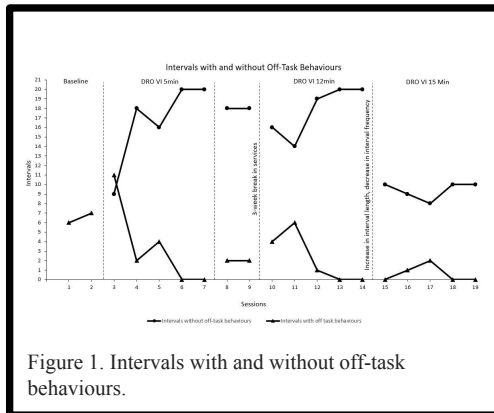


Figure 1. Intervals with and without off-task behaviours.

The results in Figure 1 indicate a decrease in the learner's escape-maintained off-task behaviours in response to instructional demands during sessions. The decrease in off-task behaviours enabled the learner to more fully participate in skill acquisition tasks during therapy sessions. The participant and his family found the intervention package to be socially acceptable and easy to use.

Future research should examine the generalizability of this intervention package across implementers and environments.