Misuse of Social Behavior in Down Syndrome: Caregiver Conducted Functional Analysis

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Abstract

Young children with Down syndrome often engage in charming non-contextual social behaviors. The developmental literature suggests that non-contextual social behaviors may function to escape from difficult activities to preferred social interactions. Caregivers may reinforce the behavior, perceiving it as evidence of the child’s social strength, when in fact, the pattern of behavior may also contribute to missed learning opportunities and a developmental gap between children with Down syndrome and their typically developing peers. We investigated the pattern by subjecting it for the first time to functional analyses. We identified non-contextual social behavior, confirmed function(s) of escape to attention, and compared the extent to which children engaged non-contextual social behavior, other problem behaviors, and contextual behavior. Even with very young children, assessments that lead to intervention decisions may be more informative when they include questions about social behavior and analyses to identify functions.

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