

Question:

How can practitioners effectively implement antecedent interventions in their daily practice? Could you provide some practical examples?

Answer:

Antecedent Interventions in Action

Antecedent interventions involve adjusting the environment to prevent challenging behaviors before they occur. Examples include structured routines, visual schedules, clear expectations, and thoughtful seating arrangements.

This past summer, I supervised a behavior technician (BT) at camp, where sessions were going very well—the client was engaged, responsive, and motivated during DTT. The BT had effective pairing with the client, leading to strong engagement and cooperation in all ABA goal activities during the session. However, when sessions transitioned to the home environment with the same bt, the client displayed frequent maladaptive behaviors, including verbal aggression, elopement, and noncompliance.

During my supervision visit to the home, I modeled several antecedent interventions that transformed the session. Instead of working on the floor in the client's bedroom, we set up a small table and chairs to create a clear "work space." I clarified the reinforcement system by having the BT and client choose a smoothie flavor with the parent and prepare it in advance—making the contingency immediate and meaningful. We also created a simple visual schedule with built-in choices so the client could see when work, breaks, and preferred activities would occur.

These small environmental adjustments significantly improved engagement and reduced problem behavior—demonstrating the power of proactive antecedent strategies

Here is another common example at home

When your client's parent or para tells him it's time to turn off the tablet and get ready for bed, he often yells "No!" and throws the tablet on the couch. This leads to arguments/tantrum behaviors and delays in starting his bedtime routine/transitioning to the next activity.

Function of Behavior:

The behavior is likely escape-maintained (avoiding bedtime routine/next task) and partially tangibly maintained (wanting continued tablet access).

Antecedent Interventions for the Home Setting

Visual or Verbal Countdown

Provide a 5-minute and 1-minute warning before tablet time ends.

"Five more minutes, then it's time to plug in the tablet."

→ Gives predictability and reduces the "surprise" trigger.

First/Then Statement

Clearly communicate what's coming next:

"First plug in the tablet, then we'll read your favorite bedtime story."

→ Adds motivation for compliance and clarifies the sequence.

Choice Within Routine

Offer small, controlled choices:

“Do you want to brush your teeth or put on pajamas first?”

→ Increases cooperation by giving some control.

Transition Signal

Use a consistent sound or cue (like a specific song or timer tone) that always signals “tablet time ending.”

→ Builds a predictable routine cue across days.

Pre-Correction

Before starting tablet time, remind your client of the expectation and reward:

“When tablet time ends, you’ll plug it in calmly, and then you can pick our story for bedtime.”

→ Sets expectations before the trigger.

Why It Works

By adjusting antecedents—how directions, timing, and cues are delivered—parents and paras prevent the problem behavior before it starts. The key is predictability, consistency, and small choices that make transitions smoother.