

## Externalizing behavior among children with neurodevelopmental disabilities:

### Addressing unmet needs and setting up the environment for success

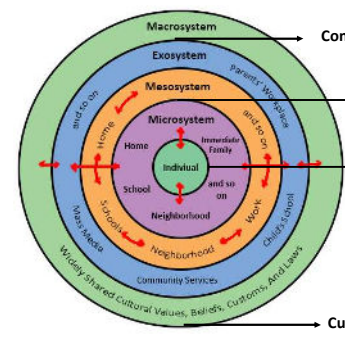
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**Summer Bottini, PhD BCBA-D**  
 Psychologist  
 Complex Behavior Support Program  
 Marcus Autism Center  
 Assistant Professor  
 Emory University School of Medicine  
[summer.bottini@choa.org](mailto:summer.bottini@choa.org)  
 She | Her | Hers

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## Externalizing Behavior Does Not Occur in a Vacuum

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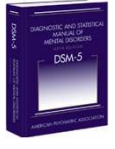

- Contexts may differ in stimuli & expectations
- Others in the environment respond to an individual's behavior
- Individual skills, preferences, and learning history impact behavioral presentation
- Cultural Norms shape how we view behavior & react to behavior

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(Bronfenbrenner, 1979)

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## Cultural Values: My Perspective

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<p><b>Medical Model</b></p>  <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Disease- &amp; pathology-oriented</li> <li>• Focus on individual deficits</li> <li>• Treatment attempts to <u>change the person</u></li> </ul>	<p>vs.</p>	<p><b>Neurodiversity Framework</b></p>  <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Difference- and disability-oriented</li> <li>• Focus on quality of life</li> <li>• Treatment addresses <u>individual fit + societal barriers</u></li> </ul>
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(Leadbitter et al., 2021)

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## Externalizing Behavior

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- Talking about behavior like:
  - Aggression
  - Property destruction
  - Refusal to follow instructions
  - Tantrums

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### Externalizing Behavior

- But what about calling it **problem behavior** or **challenging behavior**?
- Some recent criticisms -

Meaning varies

Neglects perspective

Impact is unclear

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(Bottema-Beutel et al., 2021; Bottema-Beutel et al., 2024; Dwyer et al., 2022)

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### Breaking Down Impact

Minimal to No Concern

Mild Concern

Moderate Concern

Significant Concern

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### What Is Clinically Relevant?

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### What Is Clinically Relevant?

**Safety**

- Injury to self
- Injury to others
- Risk for abuse & neglect

**Restrictive Environments**

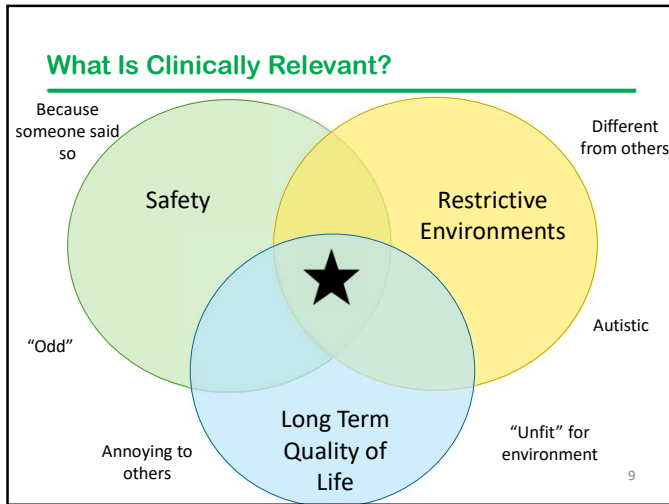
- Community access
- Limited school
- Intrusive procedures
- Hospitalization

**Quality of Life**

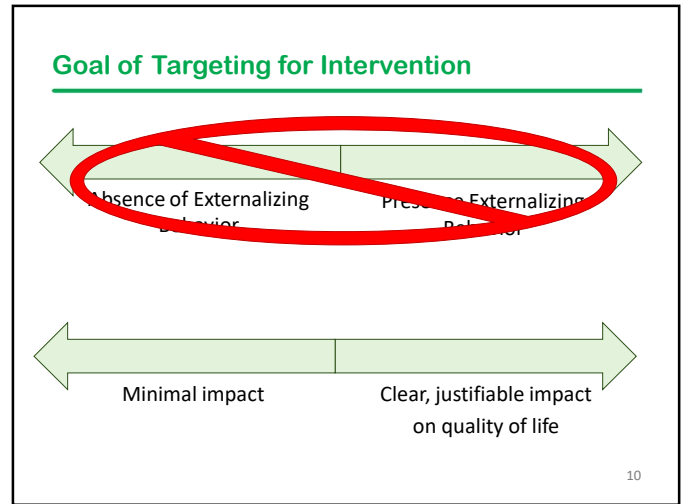
- Independence
- Autonomy
- Meaningful relationships
- Mental health

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### Externalizing Behavior

- Increased prevalence among those with:
  - Lower cognitive ability
  - Lower expressive communication
  - Lower adaptive skills
  - Higher autistic traits

52-68% autistic youth engage in aggression

Why?

(McTiernan et al., 2011; Operto et al., 2021; Williams et al., 2018)

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### A Behavior Analytic Approach

- Externalizing behavior is **orderly**. It happens for a reason.
  - Data driven
- Focus on **environmental variables** that we can alter
  - Thoughts & emotions still important, but largely outside purview of many behavior analytic approaches
- We can often view externalizing behavior as a **form of communication**.

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### Common Wants (Behavior Function)

	<b>Escape / Avoidance</b> Behavior has a history of resulting in removal of an aversive context (e.g., HW, chores, aversive interactions)		<b>Attention</b> Behavior has a history of resulting in desired interactions (can be seemingly positive or negative interactions)
	<b>Tangible / Activities</b> Behavior has a history of resulting in access to item(s) or activities of interest		<b>Automatic / Sensory</b> Behavior has a history of producing preferred consequences (e.g., reduction in headache; stimulation)

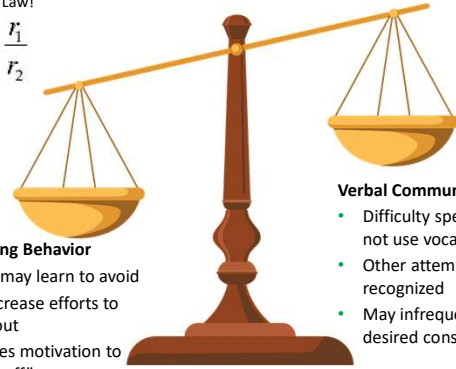
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### But Why Use Externalizing Behavior?

Matching Law!

$$\frac{B_1}{B_2} = \frac{r_1}{r_2}$$



#### Externalizing Behavior

- Others may learn to avoid
- May increase efforts to figure out
- Increases motivation to "turn it off"

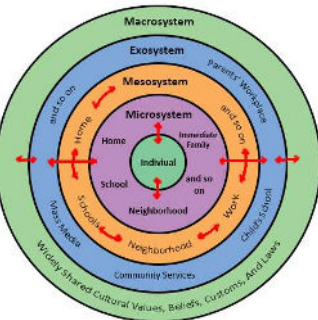
#### Verbal Communication

- Difficulty speaking or does not use vocal speech
- Other attempts may not be recognized
- May infrequently result in desired consequence

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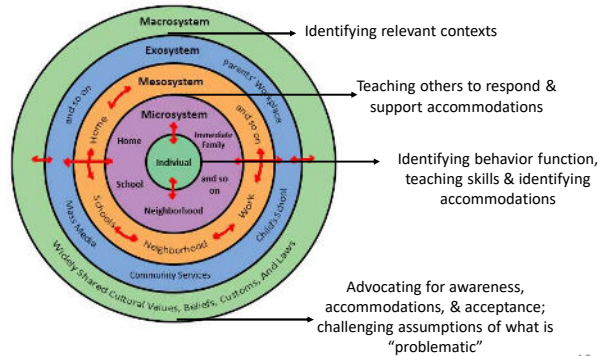
### Addressing Behavior



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### Addressing Behavior




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### Example: Tangibly Maintained Behavior

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Addressing needs from the individual to the environment




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### Targeting the Individual

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#### Decreasing Externalizing Behavior




- Differential reinforcement: favor other responding!

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### Targeting the Individual


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#### Decreasing Externalizing Behavior



- Differential reinforcement: favor other responding!

#### Identifying Accommodations




- Co-occurring diagnoses?
- Communication modality?
- Child preferences?

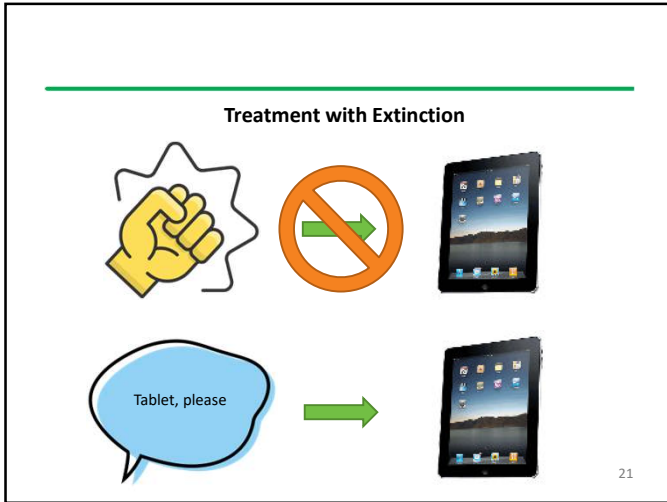
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### Learning History

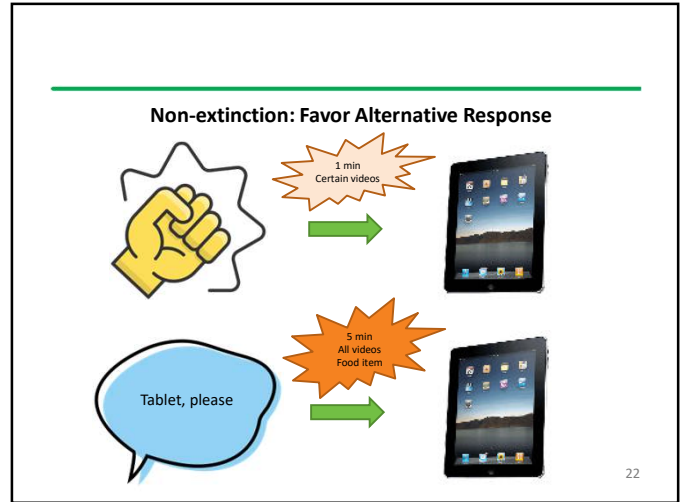
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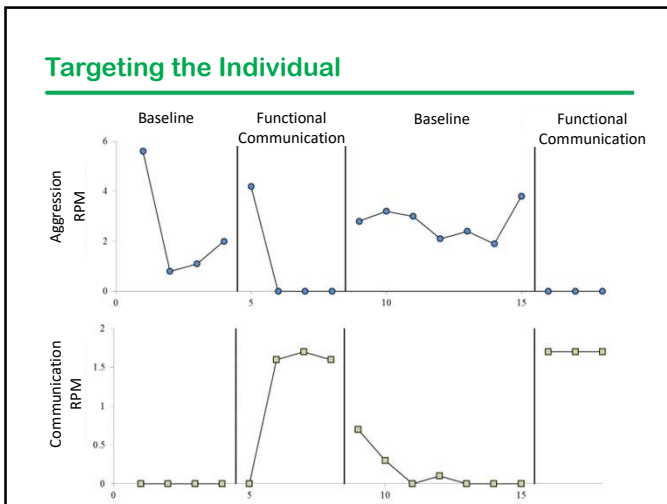
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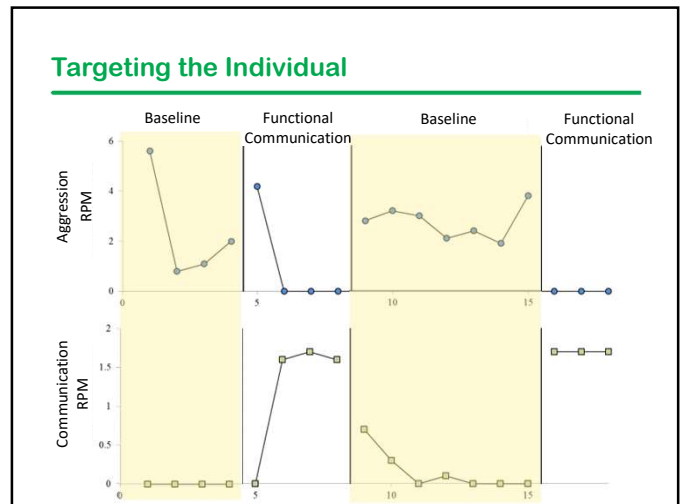
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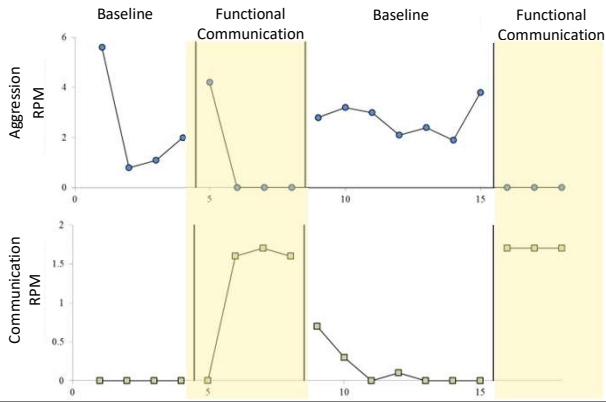


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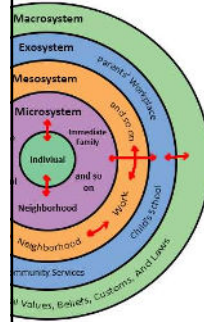
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### Targeting the Individual



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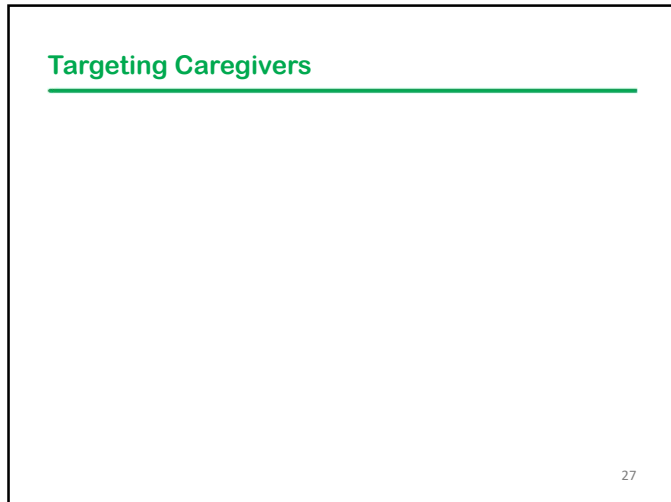
### Where are we at?



- Externalizing behavior low!
- New communication request effective!
- ? Caregiver feasibility & effectiveness

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### Targeting Caregivers



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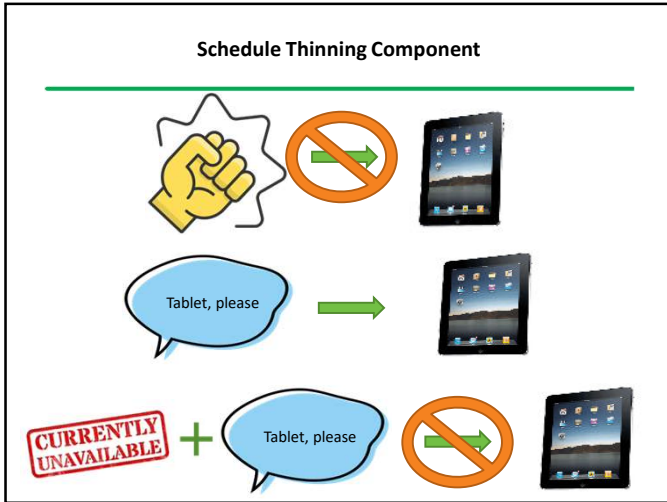
### Targeting Caregivers

- Most (if not all) caregivers cannot sustainably honor every single communication attempt
- It is natural for wants & needs to be unavailable sometimes

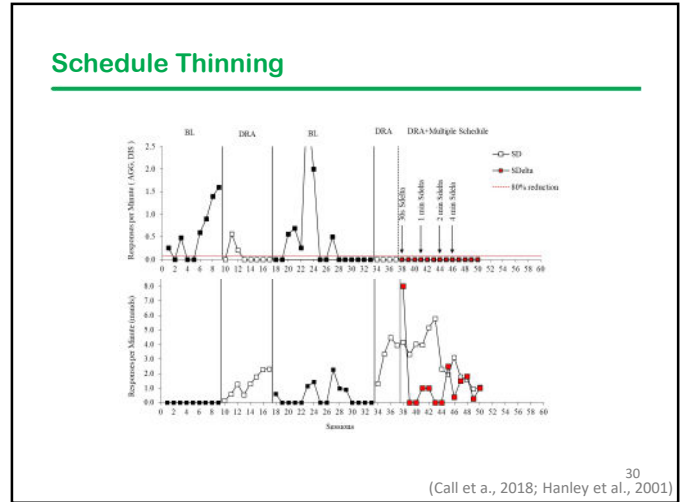


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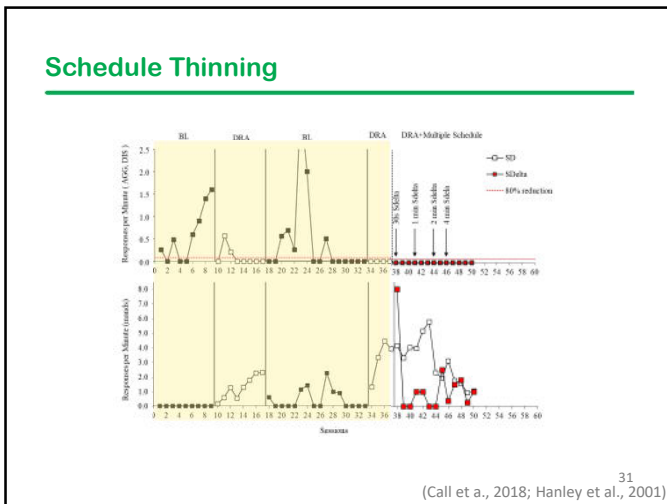
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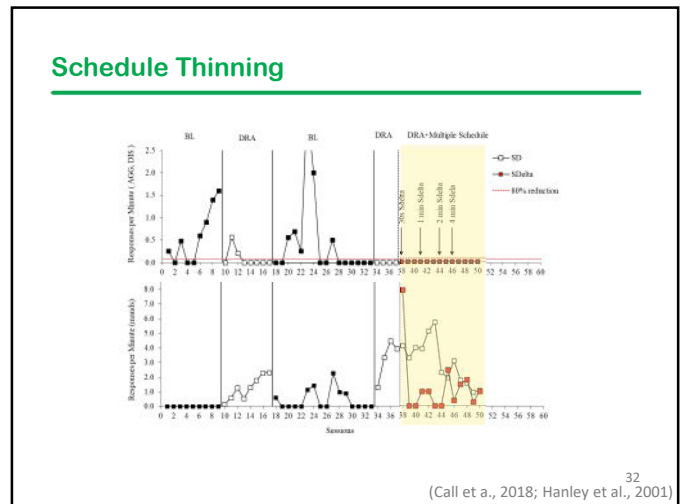
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### Targeting Caregivers

- Behavioral intervention requires **ongoing implementation**
  - These may be more analogous to lifestyle changes

- May include **new ways of...**
  - Understanding their child
  - Communicating with their child
  - Setting up the environment
  - Responding to their child's behavior



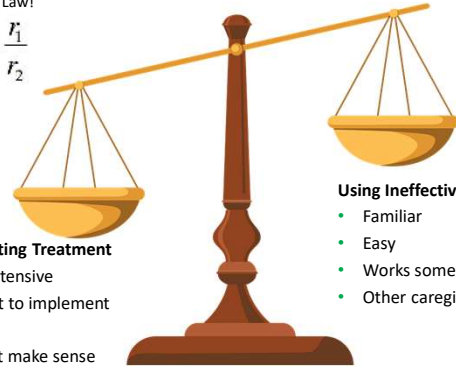
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### Targeting Caregivers

Matching Law!

$$\frac{B_1}{B_2} = \frac{r_1}{r_2}$$



#### Implementing Treatment

- Time intensive
- Difficult to implement
- Tiring
- Doesn't make sense

#### Using Ineffective Strategies

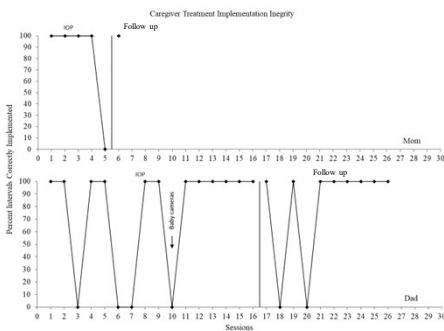
- Familiar
- Easy
- Works sometimes
- Other caregivers do it

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### Targeting Caregivers

- Explicitly targeting caregiver implementation

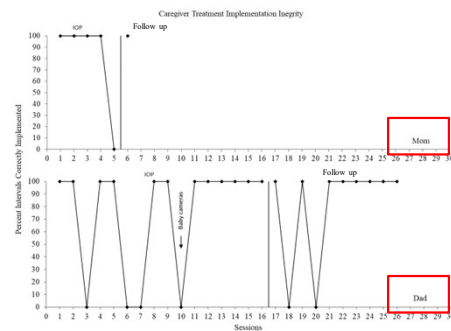


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### Targeting Caregivers

- Explicitly targeting caregiver implementation

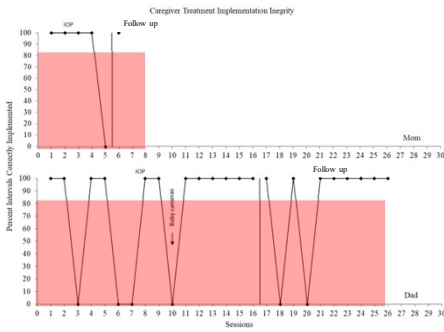


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## Targeting Caregivers

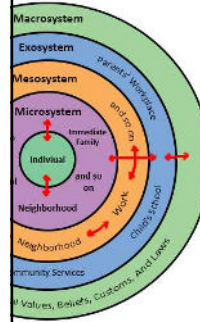
- Explicitly targeting caregiver implementation



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## Where are we at?



- Externalizing behavior low!
- New communication request effective!
- Caregiver collaboration
- Caregiver quality implementation
- Robustness across contexts?

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## Targeting Contexts

## Targeting Contexts

- Strategies must be **effective across relevant settings**
  - Generalization!









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### Targeting Contexts

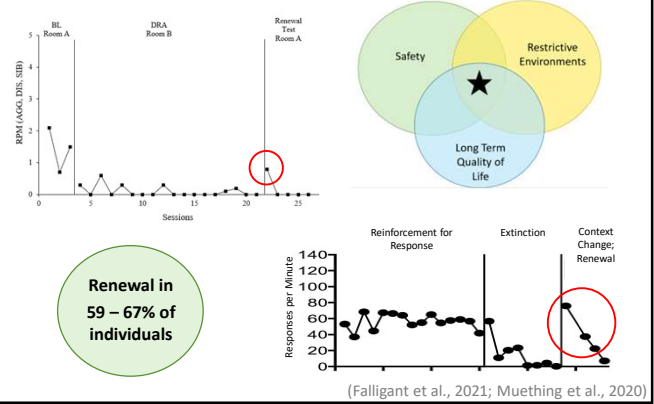
- Changes in contexts can result in behavioral **relapse**

Condition	Externalizing Behavior (Aggression)	Alternative Response (Communication)
Baseline (Room A) 	Reinforcement 	Extinction 
Treatment (Room B) 	Extinction 	Reinforcement 

(Haney et al., 2021; Kelley et al., 2018; Saini et al., 2018)

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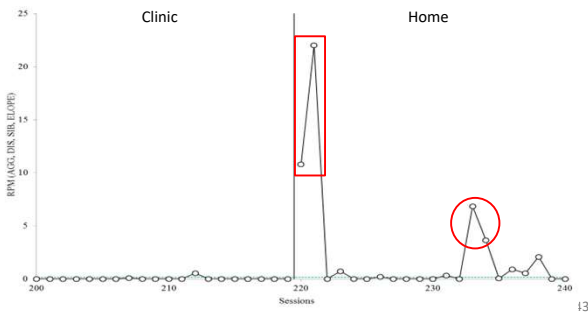
### Targeting Contexts



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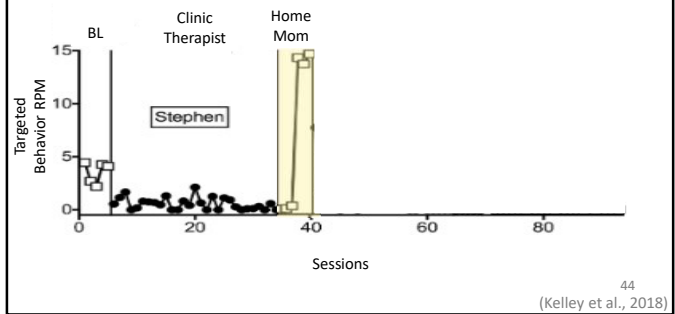
### Targeting Contexts

- What are those meaningful contexts?

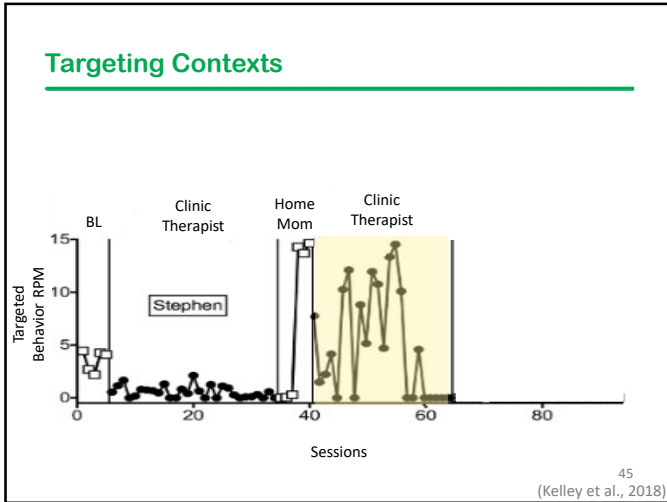


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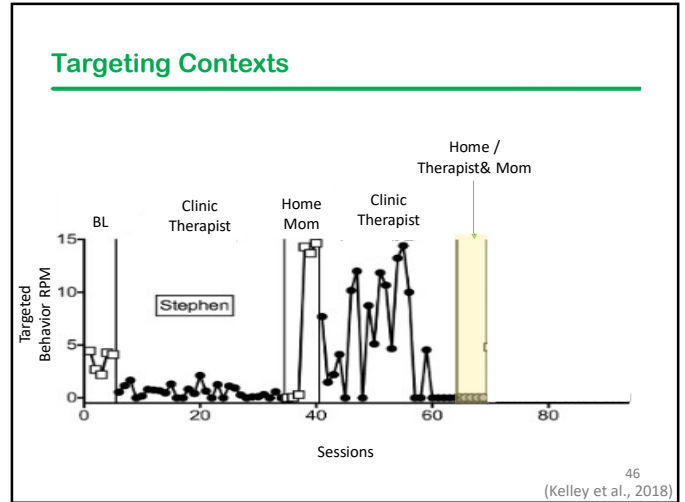
### Targeting Contexts



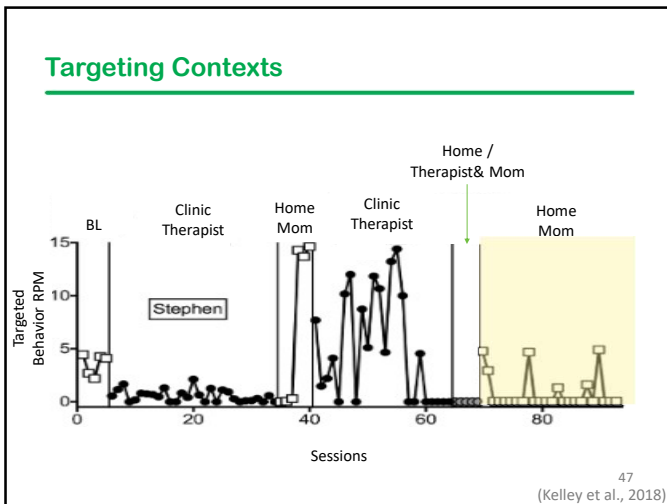
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### Targeting Contexts

- Targeting contexts & planning for possible relapse

The diagram illustrates a process flow. It begins with a yellow diamond-shaped sign that reads "FOCUS on SAFETY". A green arrow points from this sign to a photograph of a young girl with her arms raised in a field. A second green arrow points from the photograph to a photograph of a road with a white arrow painted on it, pointing towards a sign that says "SUCCESS".

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### Where are we at?

- Externalizing behavior low!
- New communication request effective!
- Caregiver collaboration
- Caregiver quality implementation
- Contextual fit & effectiveness
- ? Community Support?

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### Targeting Communities

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### Targeting Communities

- Ongoing barriers in the community (to name a few)
  - Limited familiarity with externalizing behavior
  - Interactions with first responders
  - Lack of accommodations/supports across services
  - Social isolation
  - Caregiver stress

**Need for ongoing education, acceptance, & advocacy**

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### Targeting Communities

**Critical Policy Studies**

**Social movements, knowledge and public policy: the case of autism activism in Canada and the US**

Michael Orsini & Miriam Smith

To cite this article: Michael Orsini & Miriam Smith (2015) Social movements, knowledge and public policy: the case of autism activism in Canada and the US, *Critical Policy Studies*, 9(1), DOI: 10.1080/15460171.2015.1002149

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/15460171.2015.1002149>

**evidence for a training model for first responder knowledge to work with youth with Autism**

**frontiers in Psychology**

**for transition-aged youth**

**Academic, Activist, or Advocate? Angry, Entangled, and Emerging: A Critical Reflection on Autism Knowledge Production**

Monique Bonthuis

**A Strengths-Based Approach to Autism: Neurodiversity and Partnering With the Autism Community**

Amy L. Donaldson  
Department of Speech and Hearing Sciences, Portland State University  
Portland, OR

Karen Zengsha  
Executive Director and Co-Founder, Autism Empowerment  
Vancouver, WA

Analy McMillin  
Department of Speech and Hearing Sciences, Portland State University  
Portland, OR

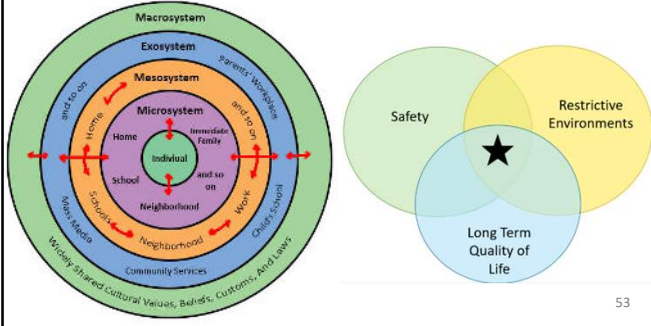
**Experiences of Autistic People: Community Experiences**

Imdad Akram<sup>1</sup>, Nicole Murphy<sup>1</sup>, Fiona Sharkie<sup>1</sup>

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### Wrap Up

Socially valid outcomes are not as simple as only targeting externalizing behavior of a single individual



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### Questions?



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