

SUMMARY

Motivation Assessment Scale

by V. Mark Durrand and Daniel B. Crimmins

The Motivation Assessment Scale (MAS) is a quick, user-friendly indirect assessment tool that “assesses the functions or motivations of behaviour problems”. In other words, it helps us better understand why someone does what they do.

According to authors of the scale, there are four main motivators of behaviour – social attention, tangibles, escape, and sensory input. The MAS is designed to help figure out which motivator (or motivators) is reinforcing the behaviour. Once you know what is keeping the behaviour going, you can start implementing strategies to reduce the behaviour by changing the way you and others respond to it or by teaching the child more appropriate ways of getting their needs met.

The MAS consists of 16 questions which describe situations in which the behaviour might occur. All you have to do is circle how often (from never to always) the behaviour occurs in different situations. When you have answered all 16 questions, you total the scores using a simple scoring sheet.

The results on the scoring sheet suggest what the function (or functions) of the behaviour are – sensory, tangible, attention or escape. The simplest way to use the scoring sheet is to look at the function with the highest score – this is the most likely function of the behaviour. There might be another function that also has a high score – this might be a secondary func-

tion of the behaviour. This information is very important to have before you start to address problem behaviours.

Here is an example of how to use the MAS to figure out the function of a behaviour. In this example, Morgan, a minimally verbal 4 year old, yells when another child tries to play with him. Usually, when this happens, the teacher comes over to the children and, after telling Morgan that the other children are allowed to play too and not to yell at them, supervises the children so that they learn to play together. At other times Morgan is removed from the activity and his teacher tries to engage him in another activity.

The problem is that Morgan’s yelling when other children try joining him gets worse. His teachers are trying to figure out why he engages in this behaviour.

Some of them think that it is his way of telling the other child to go away, while others think that he has a hard time sharing.

The teachers defined the target behaviour as “yelling in a loud voice”. Here is the completed MAS and the scoring sheet for this behaviour.

Motivation Assessment Scale

1986 V. Mark Durand, Ph.D.

Name Morgan

Rater Jessica Smith

Date September 10, 2005.

Behavior Description

Morgan yells very loudly when another child tries to play with him.

Setting Description

child care classroom during free play time

Instructions: The Motivation Assessment Scale is a questionnaire designed to identify those situations in which an individual is likely to behavior in certain ways. From this information, more informed decisions can be made concerning the selection of appropriate reinforcers and treatments. To complete the MAS, select one behavior that is of particular interest. It is important that you identify the behavior very specifically. "Aggressive", for example, is not as good a description as "hits his sister". Once you have specified the behavior to be rated, read each question carefully and circle the one number that best describes your observations of this behavior.

.....
0=Never, 1=Almost Never, 2=Seldom, 3=Half the Time, 4=Usually,

5=Almost Always, 6=Always

| Questions | Answers |
|--|---------------|
| 1. Would the behavior occur continuously, over and over, if this person were left alone for long periods of time? (For example, several hours) | 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 |
| 2. Does the behavior occur following a request to perform a difficult task? | 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 |
| 3. Does the behavior seem to occur in response to you talking to other persons in the room? | 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 |
| 4. Does the behavior ever occur to get a toy, food, or activity that this person has been told that he or she can't have? | 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 |
| 5. Would the behavior occur repeatedly, in the same way, for very long periods of time, if no one were around? (For example, rocking back and forth for over an hour.) | 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 |
| 6. Does the behavior occur when any request is made of this person? | 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 |
| 7. Does the behavior occur whenever you stop attending to this person? | 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 |
| 8. Does the behavior occur when you take away a favorite toy, food, or activity? | 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 |
| 9. Does it appear to you that this person enjoys performing the behavior? (It feels, tastes, looks, smells, and/or sounds pleasing.) | 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 |
| 10. Does this person seem to do the behavior to upset or annoy you when you are trying to get him or her to do what you ask? | 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 |
| 11. Does this person seem to do the behavior to upset or annoy you when you are not paying attention to him or her? (For example, if you are sitting in a separate room, interacting with another person.) | 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 |
| 12. Does the behavior stop occurring shortly after you give this person the toy, food, or activity he or she has requested? | 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 |
| 13. When the behavior is occurring, does this person seem calm and unaware of anything else going on around him or her? | 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 |
| 14. Does the behavior stop occurring shortly after (one to five minutes) you stop working or making demands of this person? | 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 |
| 15. Does this person seem to do the behavior to get you to spend some time with him or her? | 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 |
| 16. Does the behavior seem to occur when this person has been told that he or she can't do something he or she had wanted to do? | 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 |

| | Sensory | Escape | Attention | Tangible |
|---|---------|--------|-----------|----------|
| | 1. 0 | 2. 3 | 3. 4 | 4. 3 |
| | 5. 1 | 6. 4 | 7. 5 | 8. 3 |
| | 9. 0 | 10. 4 | 11. 6 | 12. 2 |
| | 13. 1 | 14. 2 | 15. 5 | 16. 4 |
| Total Score = | 3 | 13 | 20 | 11 |
| Mean Score = (divide the total score by 4) | 0.5 | 3.25 | 5.0 | 2.75 |
| Relative Ranking (high score to low score) | 4 | 2 | 1 | 3 |

If there is a tie for the highest score or if the means of the top two categories are within **.25 to .50** points (and you have clearly specified the behaviour and setting), then both are considered as influences that may be causing the problem behaviour to continue.

In this example, **Attention** had the highest score (20) suggesting that Morgan's yelling was probably attention motivated. When he yelled, his teacher would come over to him, talk to him, play with him and the other child, or engage him in another activity. This was a motivating or rewarding situation for Morgan and yelling ensured that his teacher would interact with him. Now that his teachers know that Morgan was yelling to get their attention, they can start teaching Morgan more appropriate ways of getting his needs met.

You may have noticed that **Escape/Avoidance** had the second highest score (13) – this suggests that it may be a secondary function of the behaviour. Morgan may be yelling to escape situations that are too challenging for him. Again, his teachers can use this information to teach Morgan more appropriate ways of avoiding difficult situations.

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| | Sensory | Escape | Attention | Tangible |
|--|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|
| | 1. _____ | 2. _____ | 3. _____ | 4. _____ |
| | 5. _____ | 6. _____ | 7. _____ | 8. _____ |
| | 9. _____ | 10. _____ | 11. _____ | 12. _____ |
| | 13. _____ | 14. _____ | 15. _____ | 16. _____ |
| Total Score = | _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| Mean Score = <i>(divide the total score by 4)</i> | _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| Relative Ranking <i>(high score to low score)</i> | _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ |

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