Behavior Reduction Procedure for Tantrums During Toileting Procedures

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Client Overview

•4-year-old client, "Client", receives ABA therapy with a focus on skill acquisition, toilet training and behavior reduction

•Target Behavior: Client engages in frequent and long tantrums when dressing in underwear during toilet training.

  • Tantrum: Crying for 10+ seconds without pain, may include dropping and property misuse.

Data Collection: Frequencies and durations of tantrums recorded pre- and post-intervention.

Research Basis

•Siegel and Peterson (1980) demonstrated deep breathing as an effective strategy for reducing disruptive behaviors.

  • Results indicated that participants in treatment who were taught deep breathing had a larger reduction in disruptive behaviors than the control condition

•Adaptation for Client: Adding a rainbow-shaped visual aid for guiding deep breathing exercises.

  • A visual aid was included to help Client focus and have a guide for how long her deep breaths should be.

Procedure

•Preliminary Training: Prior to bathroom visits, Client was prompted to practice "rainbow breathing" while she was calm. Client was verbally prompted to trace her finger along the colors of the rainbow and breathe deeply. The therapist would provide a deep breathing model for Client to follow.

Procedure (Continued)

•Preliminary Training:

•Client was permitted to grab and use the therapist's finger to trace the colors on the visual while doing the exercise if she preferred.

•Client would receive verbal praise for engaging in deep breathing exercise and asked if she would like to do it again.

• If Client says "more rainbow" or "again" the exercise would be repeated.

•Application During Bathroom Procedures:

• Contingency Explanation: Precursor behaviors (ex: whining, throwing objects) for 10 seconds or more would result in the therapist explaining contingency (ex: "First: put on underwear, Then: play).

•Deep Breathing Exercise: Continuation or escalation of precursor behaviors or tantrum would result in the presentation of the visual aid and deep breathing exercises.

•Therapist held visual aid facing Client. Therapist modeled deep breathing for Client. If Client refused to touch the visual, therapist offered to let Client trace the rainbow by holding the therapist's finger.

• Client's participation in the exercise and any direction-following was met with verbal praise (ex: Client looking at the rainbow, touching visual/therapist's hand, any deep breathing with or w/o tracing the visual).Completing the exercise was met with praise and asking Client if she wanted to repeat the exercise or if she was "all done". After exercise, therapist said "Good job deep breathing, it's time to put on underwear".

• Frequency of Tantrums:
  • Pre-treatment: Average of 2 tantrums/session.
  • Post-treatment: Average of 2 tantrums/session.
• Duration of Tantrums:
  • Pre-treatment: Average 433 seconds/session.
  • Post-treatment: Reduced to an average of 159 seconds/session.

Clinical Implications

•Significant reduction in tantrum duration.

•No change in tantrum frequency.

•Recommendations:

  • Continue implementing the behavior reduction protocol to further decrease tantrum duration.

  • Explore additional strategies to address tantrum frequency.

Figure 1: Frequency of tantrums (Pre- and Post- Treatment)

Figure 2: Duration of tantrums (Pre- and Post- Treatment)
Average Pre-Treatment = 632 secs (10.53 mins)
Average Duration Post-Treatment = 296 secs (4.93 mins)

References
Siegel, L. J., & Peterson, L. (1980). Stress reduction in young dental patients through coping skills and sensory information. *Journal of Consulting and Clin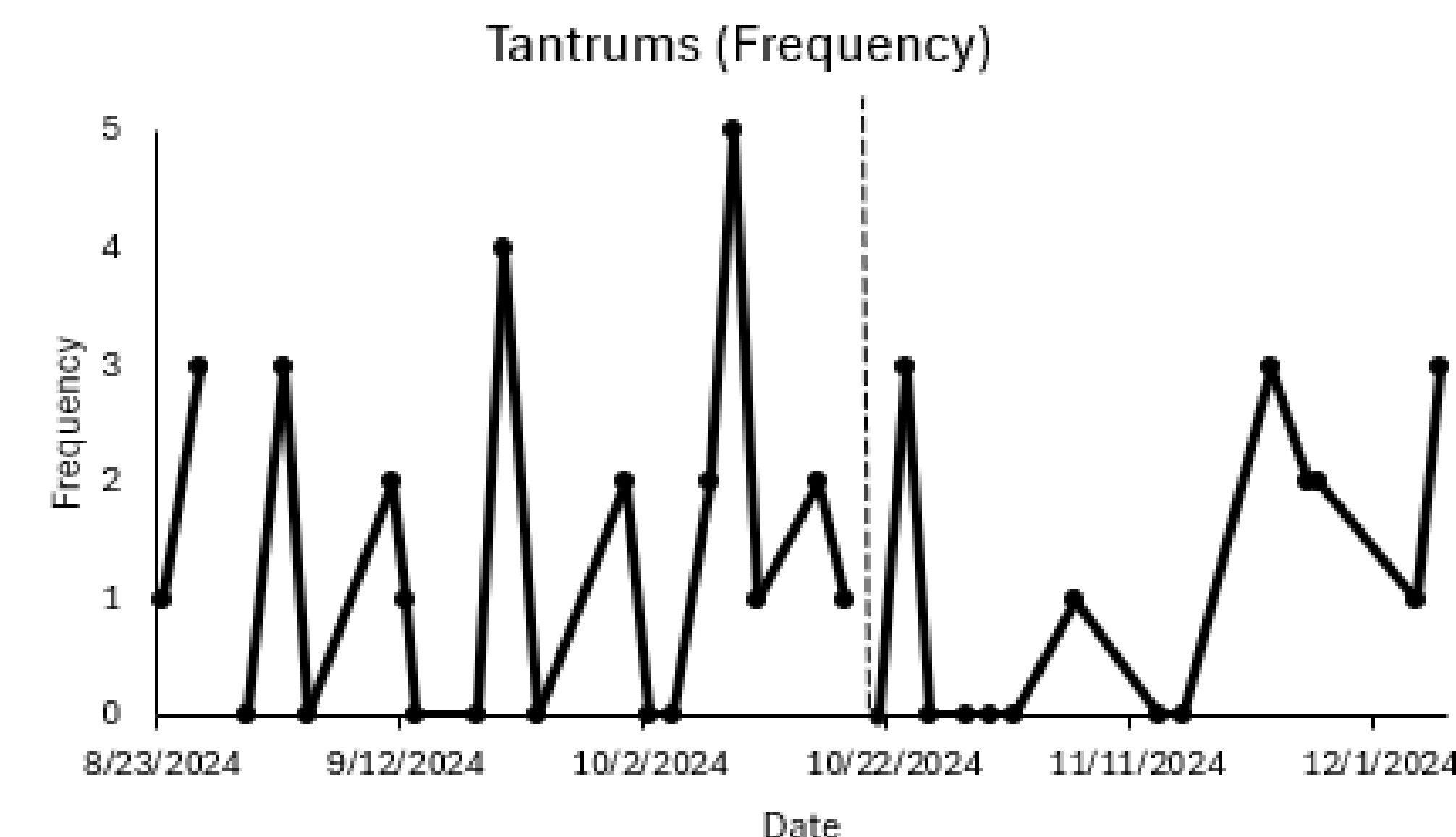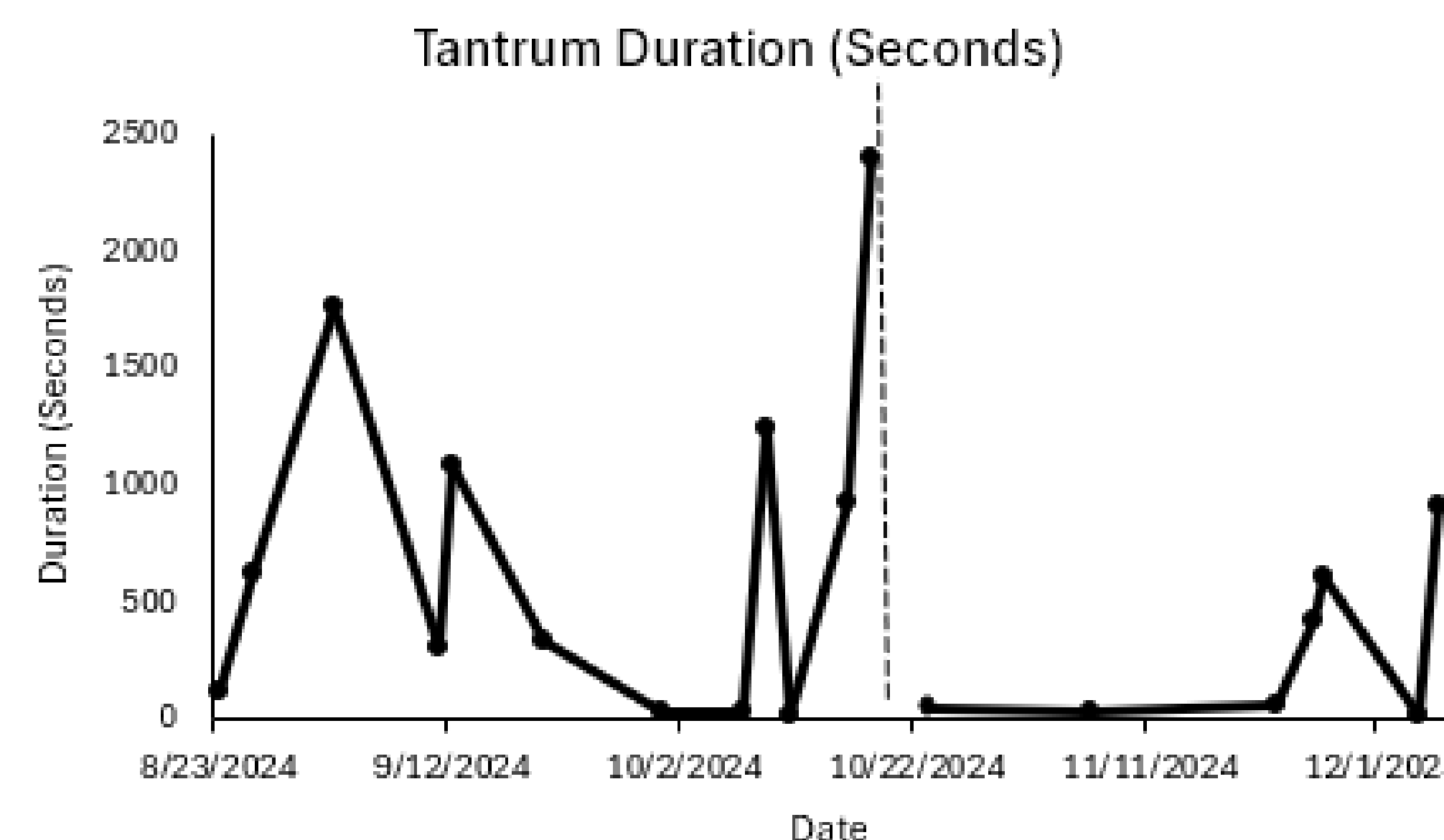ical Psychology, 48*(6), 785–787. https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-006X.48.6.785