

Hello Mr. Ory, I am a behaviorist, and I have an individual with a challenging behavior that I have not been able to extinguish. She constantly hounds with questions, of which she already knows the answers to. Might you have any suggestions for me?

Repetitive questions can serve many different purposes.

If she has poor working memory, she may be repeating because she can't remember.

If she is highly anxious, she may be repeating because she requires reassurance.

If she has little or no other social repertoire, this may be her means of maintaining social contact with those around her.

In each of these cases, the behavior would be functional, and not likely to respond to "extinction" as the need must be met or the behavior would escalate.

To deal with problems in working memory, I always suggest writing down the questions that are repeated, and put them into a booklet and index the sections. Then you can direct the person to read the answer as many times as they like. If they don't read, you can create separate audio or video tapes and direct them to replay the tapes as many times as they like.

To deal with anxiety the same approach is often useful as the person can gain reassurance through repetition.

To determine if it is an issue of lack of social repertoire, the question is, does she do this repetitive question asking when she is fully engaged in some other activity?

If she has no other social repertoire, then the requirement would be to determine how many times you would answer each repeated question and then divert the person and engage her in some structured social interaction.

Of course there is also the possibility that she just likes to hear herself talk about loud or that she is "stuck" and perseverating the question in her mind, but doesn't really expect or need an answer. In either of these situations, if diversion doesn't help, then this may simply be the person's "background noise" and the method she uses to provide continuity to herself.

Hope you find this useful.

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