How to check your child's graph at the team meeting.

Esta lección en español

What it is. Your child's therapy team counts a behavior or a skill every session and puts the counts on a **line graph**. A **graph check** is five minutes at the meeting where you ask to see that graph and test it with three questions and one bit of simple math.

Why it matters. The graph is the one place you can check the work with your own eyes. Reports can sound good while the line is flat. You don't need a degree to see that; you need to know where to look. As I learned in my studies at CSUN with Dr. Kazemi, behavior analysts look at the graph before they argue about it. You can too.

HOW TO DO IT YOURSELF

How to check the graph yourself, in five steps.

1. **Ask to see it.** Before the meeting, write: "Please bring the graph for each goal, with the dates." A summary sentence is not a graph.
2. **Read the labels.** What is counted (the left side), and when (the bottom)? Find the line that marks when the plan started or changed. Dots before it are "before"; dots after it are "now."
3. **Where is the line sitting?** That is the **level**. Is the "now" group sitting in a better place than the "before" group?
4. **Which way is it going?** That is the **trend**. Compare the middle of the first half of the "now" dots with the middle of the second half. Up, down, or flat?

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5. **How bumpy is it?** That is **stability**. Dr. Kazemi taught a rule: find the middle value (the median), go 12.5% of it above and below, and count how many dots land inside that band. If 80% or more are inside, the line is stable enough to judge. The tool below does the math.

Bring three questions: “Where is the line now compared with before?” “Is it going the way we wanted, and if it’s flat, what are we changing?” “Is it steady enough to decide, or do we need more sessions?”

WORKED EXAMPLE

Sam’s asking goal.

Made-up example. The child, the goal and the numbers are invented to show the method.

Sam’s report says he is “making steady progress” asking for help. His dad asks for the graph. Ten sessions, percent of chances where Sam asked: 20, 22, 21, 19, 20, 23, 21, 20, 22, 21.

Question	What the dad found
Level	The middle value is 21%. That is where Sam sits.
Stability	12.5% of 21 is about 2.6, so the band runs from 18.4 to 23.6. All 10 dots are inside: stable.
Trend	Middle of the first five dots: 20. Middle of the last five: 21. Nearly flat.

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What he asked	“The line is steady at about 21% and flat. What are we changing so it goes up?”

What made it work: “steady” was true, but steady and flat is not progress. Three numbers turned a nice sentence into a fair question, and the team changed how they prompted.

MISTAKES TO AVOID

Ways a graph check goes wrong.

- Judging from one dot. A great day or a bad day is not a trend. Look at the group.
- Calling a bumpy line a win. If the dots jump all over, something else is moving them. Ask what.
- Not finding the “plan changed” line. Without it you can’t tell before from now.
- Treating it as an attack. You are asking a fair question about your own child. A good team welcomes it.
- Accepting “we don’t have a graph.” Ask when you will see one, in writing.

TRY IT

One question, then the answer.

A made-up case: the dots for a hitting goal read 2, 9, 1, 8, 0, 10, 3, 7. The team says it’s “going down overall.” Is it stable enough to judge?

▼ Show the answer, and why

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No. The middle value is 5, so the band runs from about 4.4 to 5.6. None of the 8 dots are inside it. Why: when a line is this bumpy, something besides the plan is driving the hitting, and no one can say yet whether it’s going down. Ask: “What is different on the high days?”

Something to keep

Check a graph, then print the sheet.

GRAPH CHECK · BRING TO THE TEAM MEETING

Goal

Dots counted	
Level (middle value)	Type at least 4 numbers

My three questions: Where is the line now compared with before? Is it going the way we wanted, and if flat, what are we changing? Is it steady enough to decide?

WHERE DRAGEN HELPS

When the graph doesn’t add up.

If the line has been flat or bumpy for a month and the plan hasn’t changed, ask why in writing. Use the provider check to see what good supervision looks like, and read more about graphs.

Free on this page, and yours to keep: the lesson and the printable sheet. No email, no login.

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SOURCE

Where this comes from.

Dr. Ellie Kazemi, CSUN, “Visual Inspection & Functional Relationships” (level, trend, variability, the stability envelope and the 80% rule). Cooper, Heron and Heward, *Applied Behavior Analysis* (3rd ed., 2020), chapter 6, on reading graphed data.

Examples on this page are made up. They contain no client, student or family information. This lesson teaches a method; it does not replace your BCBA.

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