Scaffolding Behavior for Student Success:

Moving Beyond Seclusion and Restraint

WISCONSIN
DEPARTMENT OF

PUBLIC
INSTRUCTION

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> **Shelley Billig**
> **Vice-President**
> **RMC Research**
>
> **Jonathan Cohen**
> **President**
> **National School Climate Center**
>
> **Terry Pickeral**
> **President**
> **Cascade Educational Consultants**

Creating a Supportive Learning Environment

How many teachers have never had concerns about student behavior in the classroom? It's doubtful most people can identify a single one. Core to these concerns is the fact that we can't make a student learn, behave, or do anything else we want them to do. We can only set the conditions for their success. We do this by teaching, encouraging, modeling, and reinforcing. But the foundation to all of this should be structuring the learning environment with the right set of conditions that makes it possible for all students to succeed in our classrooms.

Research shows that there are a number of important practices which increase student achievement: providing a warm social-emotional school and classroom climate, fostering effort and engagement for all students, viewing the teacher role as being a change agent, and demonstrating to all students that achievement is possible and expected. "Interestingly, in a study of perception of influences on learning, parents, administrators, students, and teachers were asked to identify the strongest factor in influencing achievement. All but the teachers answered that student-teacher relationships were most important. Teachers said home background, child's attitude, working conditions of the school, and children's innate abilities."[1]

If we want to have classrooms in which all students succeed, we must begin by establishing a classroom climate in which all students are respected, valued, safe, engaged, and supported. This begins with having consistent expectations for students and adults, in how we treat each other, how we are treated by others, and how we function as interdependent individuals within a classroom community. Too often, we treat students as individuals, yet fail to understand their place as individuals within a mutually dependent community. A classroom cannot be successful as a whole unless each of the individuals within that community is successful.

Research demonstrates a link between having a sense of connection to the school and fewer emotional and behavioral problems.

The key to creating this type of classroom climate is to establish agreements, expectations, and norms which require interdependency. Rather than telling students to "Do their own work," or "Worry about yourself, not what your neighbor is doing," we should be encouraging them to help each other out, lift each other up for the betterment of the whole, and share talents, skills, and resources. This is described by Johnson and Johnson as "positive interdependence."[2] In *Productive Group Work*, the authors note, "When students perceive that every member is indispensable to achieving their mutual goals and that they are both dependent on and obligated to their peers,

[1] Billig, S. (2012). *Effective Instructional and Engagement Practices for Service-Learning Practitioners*. Presentation developed for the National Coalition for Academic Service-Learning. Denver: RMC Research Corporation.
[2] Johnson, D.W., and Johnson, R.T. (1984). *Circles of Learning*. Washington, DC: ASCD

conditions are ripe for collaborative learning."[3] Think of the magic that can be created in a classroom where the teacher isn't the only one reinforcing appropriate behavior. When a particularly disruptive student has a good day, wouldn't it be wonderful to have 25 of her or his peers celebrate the success rather than the solitary voice of the teacher? While this may seem unrealistic, there is a good deal of evidence that when students function as a community of learners instead of isolated individuals, students work together to create a learning environment that nurtures success in each individual in order to achieve success for the whole.

Research demonstrates a link between having a sense of connection to the school and fewer emotional and behavioral problems. According to the National School Climate Center, there is extensive research that school climate has a profound impact on a wide range of emotional and mental health outcomes (Kuperminic, Leadbeater, Emmons, & Blatt, 1997; Payton et al., 2008; Shochet, Dadds, Ham, & Montague, 2006; Way, Reddy, & Rhodes, 2007).[4] While this concept is often understood on a broader level, we sometimes fail to understand that this is particularly true for students with an emotional behavioral disability (EBD). These are the students that often isolate themselves by their behavior, by exhibiting aggression or other inappropriate responses, being disruptive, or withdrawing from social interaction entirely. Yet it is imperative, particularly for these students, that we diligently work to ensure they feel a sense of belonging in our classrooms. Think about it. If you don't feel you belong, what difference do you feel your behavior makes to the group? What difference does what others think about your behavior make to you?

There are three critical dimensions to changing this picture for students with an emotional behavioral disability. While the recommended practices below are far from a comprehensive list, they offer a starting point in creating a supportive learning environment that sets the conditions for success.

Setting Expectations
- Several studies have shown that we base expectations on attractiveness, prior conduct of the child, cumulative information about the child, and social class. Weinstein (2002) has shown that students know that they are treated differently and that teachers have higher expectations of some than others. While some may find this hard to believe, the research keeps affirming this, particularly when the teachers have different backgrounds than the students or when the teachers

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[3] Frey, N., Fisher, D., and Everlove, S. (2009). *Productive Group Work.* Washington, D.C.: ASCD.
[4] *School Climate Research Summary - January 2010*. Retrieved April 12, 2012, from http://schoolclimate.org/climate/documents/SCBrief_v1n1_Jan2010.pdf.

are unfamiliar with the types of resource challenges faced by the students and how the challenges are played out in the home and community.[5]

- Ensure that expectations are clear, observable, and consistent. Students need to know what behaviors you expect as well as what those behaviors look like.
- Model the behaviors you want to see, acknowledge behaviors that meet your expectations, and give students opportunities to observe, practice, and generalize those behaviors.
- Acknowledge when you have acted in ways that do not meet your own expectations and consider how to use these moments as "teachable moments."
- Don't expect students to look like mirror images of each other. Some students may take more time to learn the rules, need opportunities to role play them, or may have greater difficulty generalizing behaviors to new settings and situations.
- Engage students in setting expectations with you. This not only increases their ownership in following them, it increases their understanding of what behaviors you're looking for and why.
- Once you've established expectations, you need to maintain them. Reminders, both visual and verbal, are helpful, as are classroom routines that are structured to increase the likelihood that students comply (such as having paper and pencils readily available to students to ensure they are prepared for class).
- Teaching, modeling, reinforcing, and providing opportunities to practice and generalize behaviors is critical in helping students understand and be able to meet your expectations for their behavior.

Establishing Routines

- Establishing consistent classroom routines makes your classroom predictable. Students with emotional behavioral disabilities often have a difficult time understanding how to meet expectations related to behavior. Predictable routines provide students with a structure that makes it easier to respond with the expected behavior. For example, starting class with a trivia question every day provides students with a reliable cue that lets them know when class is going to begin so they can respond with the expected behavior, such as getting out their book, sitting in their seat, quieting down, etc.
- Classroom routines also help to create a sense of shared values, common experience, and sense of belonging to a common community. When everyone is

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[5] Billig, S. (2012). *Effective Instructional and Engagement Practices for Service-Learning Practitioners*. Presentation developed for the National Coalition for Academic Service-Learning. Denver: RMC Research Corporation.

part of the same team, all members feel a sense of contributing to the whole, empowered to help the group succeed, and a necessary part of that success.

- The brain relies on routines to increase the efficiency of learning. "Too often, however, the only clean beginnings and endings to our teaching are the bells at the beginning and the end of the period. When you feed the brain's cravings for clean beginnings and clean endings, it allows the brain to relax because structure and routine are there."[6] When the threat and stress in the learning environment is reduced, students are better able to learn and maintain appropriate behavior.

- Classroom routines should support the type of learning environment you're trying to create. If you want students to be collaborative as part of a community of learners, establish classroom routines that support this type of environment. Arrange desks in groups, structure time for students to process and share information collaboratively, and design learning tasks which require students to rely on each other in order to be successful.

- Encourage students to view each other as resources for learning. Rather than labeling the sharing of information as cheating, model for students how to assist others in their learning rather than just giving answers.

- Classroom routines need to be explicitly taught. They need to be modeled, reinforced frequently while students are learning them, and maintained consistently.

- Use celebrations as an important classroom routine to recognize the success of individuals in contributing to the success of the whole. Be explicit in helping all students understand their interdependence, using affirmations, applause, high five's, and other forms of recognition to celebrate success as a community.

Increasing Engagement

- Students who are not academically engaged are more likely to "develop negative emotions about learning, have a low level of academic achievement, and consequently drop out of school (Fredericks, Blumenfeld, and Paris 2004; Umbach and Wawrzynski 2005). The need for increasing academic engagement for children with EBD stems from the fact that data from the United States have shown that about 50% of students with EBD drop out of school (Kauffman 2008), and 72.9% of high-school students with EBD have been suspended or expelled.[7]

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[6] DePorter, B., Reardon, M., Singer-Noirie, S. (1999). *Quantum Teaching: Orchestrating Student Success*. Needham Heights, MA: Allyn & Bacon.

[7] Al-Hendawi, M. *Academic engagement of students with emotional and behavioral disorders: existing research, issues, and future directions*. Retrieved April 13, 2012 from http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/13632752.2012.672861#preview.

- Research shows engagement is most highly related to goal setting and self-regulation.[8] If we want students with emotional behavioral disabilities to exhibit better self-control, we need to create more engaging classrooms.
- Consistent robust findings across a wide range of studies in different educational settings pinpoint mediators of success. These mediating factors are in the social and personal domains and include engagement, empowerment, motivation, self-esteem, and self-efficacy. It is these elements that put students in a position to achieve academically. Pedagogies such as service-learning have been shown to consistently produce these mediating factors, which lead to a set of seven pillars of effective teaching practices that have to be in place for optimum learning to occur: boundary expansion, personalization, empowerment, collaboration, constructivism, active participation, and authenticity.[9]
- Shared ownership in the learning process increases student engagement and reduces discipline issues. A study by Corrigan and Chapman (2008) established a connection between gains in teacher effectiveness and sharing responsibilities with students.
- Research shows that students invest themselves in learning when educational experiences have personal meaning. When we engage youth in effective ways, we positively impact social-emotional learning and reduce the need for disciplinary measures.
- Engaging youth in shaping and moving through the learning process creates better outcomes for students. If we want to change students' behavior, we need to engage them in creating conditions for success. Engage your students in identifying the behaviors that will make their learning successful. Develop a plan with, not for, them. Students need to be partners in creating and sustaining long-term behavior change.
- Seek to change the role of the teacher to one of facilitator. Rather than creating behavior intervention plans and designing the learning process in isolation, engage your students as collaborators to set goals, develop a plan, assess progress, and use reflection to seek continuous improvement.

As you read the best practices for addressing behavior challenges below, remember that there is nothing we can do to make students behave in ways that are acceptable to us. Our best chances for success are when we create the shared vision for acceptable behavior with

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[8] Billig, S. (2012). *Effective instructional and engagement practices for service-learning practitioners*. Presentation developed for the National Coalition for Academic Service-Learning. Denver: RMC Research Corporation.

[9] Furco, A. (2007, January). *The role of service-learning in enhancing student achievement.* Presentation given at the National Center for Learning and Citizenship Board Meeting, Santa Barbara, CA.

students, then provide them with the instruction, practice, and opportunities to generalize these behaviors across settings.

Using Functional Behavioral Assessment to Analyze Behavior Patterns

While we know that providing students with a learning environment that creates the conditions for success will do a great deal to address problem behaviors, further interventions will likely be needed for students with an emotional behavioral disability. These interventions are far more likely to result in successful behavior change if they are based on positive behavior interventions and supports, and are guided by functional behavioral assessment. Carr et al. reported that in over two-thirds of published studies, interventions using positive behavior support resulted in reducing problem behavior by 80% or more.[10] If we want to achieve lasting behavior change, it is important to move beyond a punishment model. Punishment serves the purpose of addressing problem behavior in an immediate way, but does little to teach replacement behaviors and rarely results in long-term behavior change.

As we work to determine which positive behavior interventions will be most likely to be successful with a particular student, we need to first understand the function, or purpose, the behavior has for the student. All behavior serves a purpose. Behavior continues because it is reinforced in some way. The outcome may appear to be undesirable to the observer (such as a verbal reprimand for talking out in class), but the

> *In over two-thirds of published studies, interventions using positive behavior support resulted in reducing problem behavior by 80% or more.*

student exhibiting the behavior may find the result reinforcing. For example, a student who is disruptive in class might be talking out because her peers laugh at her comments, she is using it as a way to get teacher attention, or it allows her to avoid doing work she finds difficult. These are all examples of functions of behavior. There are four basic functions of behavior:

- Behaviors to get something (such as attention, power or control, acceptance, or revenge);
- Behaviors to get away from something (such as task avoidance or escaping from a stressful situation);
- Behaviors that communicate something (such as crying or yelling to express anger or frustration); and

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[10] Carr, E.G., Horner, R.H., Turnbull A., Marquis, J., Magito-McLaughlin, D., McAtee, M., Smith, C.E., Anderson-Ryan, K.A., Ruef, M.B., & Doolabh, A. (1999). *Positive behavior support as an approach for dealing with problem behavior in people with developmental disabilities: A research synthesis.* Washington, DC: American Association on Mental Retardation.

- Behaviors that are reinforcing (such as behaviors that make a student feel better by helping them self-regulate or provide sensory stimulation).[11]

Before we can begin to design strategies to address problem behavior, we must first understand what function the behavior serves for the student, the conditions under which it occurs, and the events or conditions that occur which make it more likely to happen again. Behavior always occurs in a context. Each time a student exhibits a particular behavior, there are antecedents (that which precedes the behavior), the behavior itself, and consequences (the results of the behavior). Analyzing behavior using this model is called applied behavior analysis and is based on A-B-C, where:

- "A" stands for "antecedent". These are the factors which precede the problem behavior. Antecedents may include external factors (such as directions, tasks, teacher behavior, peer behavior, or noise level) or internal factors (such as stress or energy level, moods, or mental state). Setting events are also considered antecedents, as they are factors considered to be in the near distant past that increase the likelihood that the behavior will occur. These are called "distal antecedents", as they occur some time prior to the behavior. While they increase the likelihood a behavior may occur, they aren't immediate triggers. Setting events can include such things as a fight with parents, siblings, or a peer, changes in family routine, or medication changes).

- "B" stands for "behavior". The behavioral response needs to be identified in clear, observable, and measurable terms. Everyone who reads the defined behavior must be able to know what it looks like as well as what it doesn't look like in order to be able to reliably identify occurrences of the behavior.

- "C" stands for "consequence". A consequence is anything that follows the behavior which influences whether the behavior is either more or less likely to occur again in the future. Consequences can be positive or negative, as well as intentional or unintentional.

Once we have a clear understanding of what the problem looks like, we are ready to being collecting data that will allow us to analyze where, when, and why it is most likely to occur. This process is called a functional behavioral assessment and includes using a variety of tools and strategies to analyze the trigger events, reinforcers, and strategies that are likely to result in long-term behavior change. An effective FBA results in an in-depth of understanding of the behavior. This process helps us better understand the specific parameters to the behavior pattern, the factors related to its occurrence, and helps to shape a reasonable hypothesis about the most effective strategies for creating change. It moves us beyond merely knowing that a

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[11] Peters, L. *Getting Started with Functions of Behavior*. Retrieved April 19, 2012, from http://www.pbis.vcu.edu/2009/11/getting-started-with-functions-of-behavior.html.

behavior occurs in particular contexts to understanding why it occurs so that we can better go about replacing it with a more appropriate behavior.

Research has demonstrated important positive outcomes from the use of functional behavioral assessments across a variety of settings:[12]

- Reduction of problem behaviors and increasing desired behaviors in the general education setting has resulted from using functional behavioral assessment in the general education setting. (Lane, Weisenbach, Little, Phillips, & Wehby, 2007; Lane, Rogers, Parks, Weisenbach, Mau, Merwin, & Bergman, 2007)

- Interventions based on functional behavioral assessment conducted with English Language Learners in general education classrooms resulted in an increase in academic engagement from 69% to 94% and reduction in task-avoidance behaviors. (Preciado, Horner, & Baker, 2009)

- Functional behavioral assessment has been effective when used as part of Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS). (Lane et al., 2007)

- Research into function-based intervention has demonstrated its effectiveness with students with severe disabilities, multiple disabilities, ADHD, and learning disabilities, and those with or at risk for emotional or behavioral disorders (EBD). (Burke, Hagan-Burke, & Sugai, 2003; Dunlap, Kern-Dunlap, Clarke, & Robbins, 1991; Ervin, DuPaul, Kern, & Friman, 1998; Hagan-Burke, Burke, & Sugai, 2007)

There is wide variation in how a functional behavioral assessment is conducted, depending upon factors such as whether the student has identified special education needs, if the FBA is required by IDEA, or whether the FBA is required by Act 125 because the IEP team has determined seclusion and/or restraint will be necessary for the student. For more information on legal requirements related to functional behavioral assessment, please visit http://www.dpi.wi.gov/sped/sbfba.html. One of the critical decisions to make in determining how to proceed with a FBA is the purpose and expected outcome that will result from the process. Just as there is a continuum of intensity and type of interventions that can be used to address mild to severe behaviors, the FBA process can be tailored to gather the level of data needed to inform the behavior intervention plan.

Generally, a functional behavioral assessment will be conducted as a team, with each member helping to collect data from a variety of sources in order to put together a complete picture of a student's behavior patterns. Over the course of the data collection process, team members will:

1. Clearly define the target behavior in observable, measurable terms.

2. Gather data using multiple sources (both direct and indirect) to better understand the function of the behavior as well as the antecedents and consequences that serve to

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[12] *Perspectives and Resources*. Retrieved April 19, 2012, from http://iris.peabody.vanderbilt.edu/fba/fba_04.html .

strengthen or weaken the behavior. Be sure to collect data which addressed the critical dimensions of behavior:

    a. Topography (what the behavior looks like in clear and measurable terms)
    b. Frequency (how often the behavior occurs)
    c. Duration (how long the behavior lasts)
    d. Latency (the amount of time that elapses between the cue and response)
    e. Magnitude (the intensity or force of the behavior)
    f. Locus (the location where the behavior occurs)

3. Determine whether the problem behavior is due to a skill deficit, performance deficit, or a combination of the two.

4. Triangulate the data using at least three sources in the analysis to ensure that a complete and accurate picture emerges which leads to a clear understanding of the behavior pattern.

5. Form a hypothesis about the function and the variables that influence the behavior. Answers to the following questions provide a starting point in formulating this hypothesis:

    a. What does the problem behavior look like?
    b. When does it happen? Does it happen similarly in every setting?
    c. What happens before the problem behavior? Is the behavior exhibited every time these antecedents occur? If not, what variables either strengthen or weaken the behavior?
    d. What happens after the problem behavior?
    e. How often does it happen?
    f. How long does the behavior last?
    g. What part does any disability play?

6. Develop and implement a behavior intervention plan that is based on the data obtained in the functional behavioral assessment and is likely to create lasting behavior change.

A thorough functional behavioral assessment includes collecting data across multiple settings under varied conditions. It is important to take into account not only factors within the student, but how external factors may be contributing to the behavior pattern. These variables can include teacher and peer relationships, classroom routines, cultural factors, teacher and family expectations, and even the physical environment. For this reason, it is critical to work closely as a team, and to carefully plan out the various assessment tools and strategies that will be used in the process. Online resources with sample processes and instructions for conducting a functional behavioral assessment can be found at:

- http://www.dpi.wi.gov/sped/sbfba.html
- http://www.ped.state.nm.us/RtI/behavior/4.fba.11.28.pdf
- http://cecp.air.org/fba/default.asp
- http://iris.peabody.vanderbilt.edu/fba/chalcycle.htm
- http://cie.asu.edu/volume1/number5/fbacie98.pdf
- http://www.pbis.org/common/pbisresources/publications/PracticalFBA_TrainingManual.pdf

Principles of Behavior Change

Just as we need to be intentional in creating the conditions for success in our classroom by fostering a safe, supportive, respectful, and engaged classroom community, we also need to be intentional in applying principles of behavior change to address problem behaviors as they arise. Functional behavior assessment provides the foundation for understanding the critical dimensions of an individual students' behavior. As we use data from the FBA to guide the development of a behavioral intervention plan, it is important to understand the central tenets of behavior change.

Ten Things You Can Do Today To Address Behavior Concerns in Your Classroom

1. Changing behavior is not only about changing the behavior of the student. The behavior of adults and other students may also be necessary in order to create an environment where success is possible.

2. Respond objectively, consistently, and positively. Set clear expectations, model the behavior you want to see, and consistently reinforce students for performing the expected behaviors.

3. As often as possible, provide students with positive attention for responding with appropriate behavior. Teach students what you want them TO do, rather than only telling them what not to do or providing a negative consequence for inappropriate behavior. Teach, practice, and provide feedback frequently as the students learns the new behavior.

4. It is critical to not only reduce problem behaviors, but to teach and reinforce appropriate behaviors which provide the same function for the student.

5. Don't wait for inappropriate behavior to escalate before providing interventions and supports. Provide positive supports and specify expected behaviors calmly to redirect behavior.

6. Target interventions to prompt or reinforce behavior as closely as possible to when the student engages in the behavior (called the student's "point of performance"). [13]

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[13] DuPaul, G.J., & Stoner, G. (2002). *Interventions for attention problems*. In M. Shinn, H.M. Walker, & G. Stoner (Eds.) *Interventions for academic and behavioral problems II: Preventive and remedial approaches* (pp. 913-938). Bethesda, MD: National Association of School Psychologists.

7. Set expectations for behavior change so the student will be successful initially at least 50% of the time **without** changing his/her current behavior pattern. For example, if the student complies with requests on average three times per day 50% of the time, set the expectation for reinforcement at three times per day. Work to increase the frequency of compliance rather than focusing on the number of times he/she refuses to comply.

8. Use data to guide the process. Decisions about interventions should be based on evidence about what is/isn't working.

9. Remember that behavior will often get worse before it gets better. When implementing a new intervention, don't give up if the student doesn't seem to be responding immediately. Students will often "test" the system to find the boundaries.

10. Keep going. It can take four to eight times longer to unlearn an inappropriate behavior in addition to the time it takes to learn an appropriate one to replace it with.

> *The more proactive we can be in addressing student behaviors, the more successful we will be in helping students learn and maintain appropriate behaviors.*

Prevention is one of the most important interventions we can employ in addressing student behaviors. Focusing on the antecedents as described in the section on functional behavioral assessment allows us the opportunity to shape the behavior before it occurs. The more proactive we can be in addressing student behaviors, the more successful we will be in helping students learn and maintain appropriate behaviors. Unfortunately, teachers often fall into the trap of being reactive to a behavior after it has occurred, relying on consequences to discourage inappropriate behaviors and/or reinforce appropriate responses. In addition, once a behavioral response has occurred, teacher behavior can serve to either escalate or de-escalate the response pattern.

In order to be prepared to effectively de-escalate a student's behavior, we need to understand the antecedents as discussed in the previous section. In the table below, common antecedents which precede intense behavioral responses in students and teacher responses which tend to escalate the behaviors are identified.[14]

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[14] Novick, R. *Helping Students Keep Cool: De-escalating Intense Behavior*. Retrieved April 23, 2012, from http://www.yuschoolpartnership.org/webinars/webinar-archive/video/14/Helping-Students-Keep-Cool-De-escalating-Intense-Behavior.

Common Antecedents to Intense Student Behavior	Teacher Behaviors that Escalate Intense Behavior	
• Fear • Failure • Loss of personal power • Attention seeking • Displaced anger • Physiological issues • Need to maintain self-esteem	• Yelling • "I'm the boss" • Insisting on last word • Humiliation • Sarcasm • Character attack • Physical force • Nagging	• Drawing unrelated others into conflict • Double standard • Preaching • Backing into corner • Pleading • Bringing up unrelated events • Generalizing

By contrast, teacher behaviors which will likely be more effective in de-escalating or preventing these intense behaviors from occurring are listed in the bottom of the table.

Teacher Behaviors that De-escalate or Prevent Intense Behavior
• Stand at an angle to the student, which is less threatening than directly facing them, and don't cross your arms, point your finger, or invade his or her personal space. Use a non-confrontational stance when approaching a student who is agitated. • Do not cause the student to feel cornered. Use words, body language, and prompts that reduce tension, communicate support, and provide calm redirection. • Use active listening to show that you are listening to the student and respect his or her feelings. • Don't argue, make threats, or set limits you cannot enforce. • Let the student know you are sincere in trying to resolve the situation. • Ignore challenges and focus only on the student's behavior. Do not make statements or judgments about the student as a person, such as "You are a disruptive student." • Use a calm, non-emotional tone of voice. The more upset the student becomes, the calmer you need to become. • Teach students how to self-monitor tension levels and use self-management strategies for alleviating tension. • Power struggles increase the intensity of the student's behavior. Be careful not to set up a win-lose situation. • Punishment does **not** de-escalate behavior! It is not aligned with the functions of behavior, does not serve to calm the student, and does not teach replacement behaviors.

Understanding the Acting-Out Cycle can help us effectively intervene to both prevent intense behavior responses from occurring and assist with minimizing or de-escalating them when they do occur.[15]
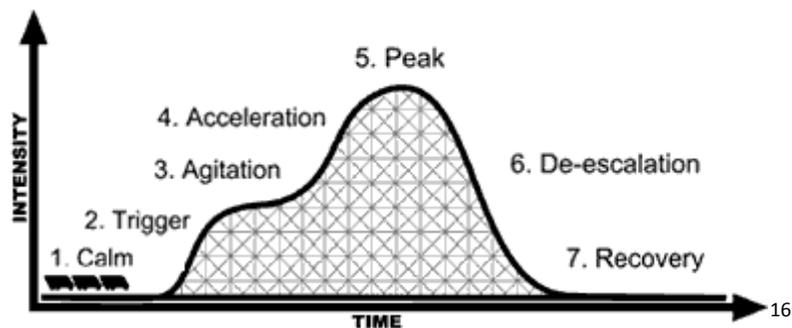
The following is an excerpt posted online at *The Positive Classroom*, which provides an excellent overview of each phase in the Acting-Out Cycle and the effect of various teacher interventions, together with concrete examples of each phase. This excerpt is provided intact in order to provide the full context for the remarks.

> From this diagram, you can see that children start out at a *Calm Phase*. Typically something happens in the child's environment that acts as a trigger that begins the acting out cycle. This trigger could be something at school like being told it's clean up time, transitioning to a math lesson, coming back from lunch, another child coming too close, etc. Other triggers can come from outside of school: being hungry, tired, having a chaotic morning at home, an argument on the bus, and so on.
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> So the first strategy a teacher can use is to help the child avoid or manage his triggers. For example, if you know that Kevin tends to get angry and hit children when the class is coming in from recess, you can use some prevention strategies such as asking Kevin to come in for a special job ahead of the rest of the class. Or you can walk next to Kevin, engaging him in conversation as you enter the classroom. If you know that Jenny begins to have tantrums at the beginning of clean-up time, you can give her early notice that center time is ending, or get her to stop ahead of the other children and then give her a job to do - like watering the plants - that is away from all the movement during clean up time.
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> Next in the acting out cycle is the *Agitation Phase*. At this point, children's emotions and behaviors begin to gain energy. If you are attuned to this phase, you may notice nail

[15] Walker, H., Colvin, G., & Ramsey, E. (1995). *Antisocial behavior in school: Strategies and best practices*. Pacific Grove, CA: Brooks/Cole.

[16] Lane, K. *Overview of the Acting-Out Cycle*. Retrieved April 23, 2012, from http://www.thepositiveclassroom.org/search?q=acting+out+cycle.

biting, hair twirling, tapping, wiggling, inability to sit still, a lack of focus, or daydreaming. Some children will clench their fists, or their jaw, making a grimace or showing frustration on their face. It is at this point when intervention by the teacher is most effective and most necessary. Your goal in the agitation phase is to restore calm, otherwise the child will move into the acceleration phase and can become out of control. It's especially important NOT to yell at the child or add to their growing tension with lecturing or reprimands.

Calming a child in the agitation phase can be as simple as moving your body close by, giving some focused attention on the child, or redirecting the child toward a different activity. The most important thing to keep in mind is reducing the energy and restoring calm. If at this phase, for example, the teacher reprimanded Michael for tearing up the paper, or yelled at Tyler to sit still, it could easily have pushed the child into the acceleration phase rather than restoring calm. This is the critical time to be careful and thoughtful with your approach, especially with children who are prone to acting out.

It is in the *Acceleration Phase* when some teachers first notice a problem, because the child increases his efforts to engage the teacher - often through arguing, refusing to do what was asked, and perhaps beginning to push or kick other children or things. Once again, our goals needs to be to cool things off and calm the child down, even if it means ignoring some of these behaviors for the time being. The worst thing a teacher can do at this point is engage in a power struggle. This adds tension and intensity to the child's emotional state and will push the child right into the peak phase. Imagine the child's behavior as a run-away train. We can either help put on the brakes, or add fuel to the engine that pushes it into worse behavior.

The hardest part of this strategy is letting go of the idea that all inappropriate behavior must be corrected, punished, or dealt with immediately. When children are this agitated, the most important step is to cool them down so they can think and act more appropriately. The time to teach a child more appropriate behaviors is NOT when he is upset. When the child's anger is directed at us, rather than another child, this can be especially hard to do. With practice, being able to stay calm and redirect children's behavior during the Acceleration Phase will pay off in fewer severely inappropriate behaviors. You will also be more effective in teaching children appropriate behaviors to use instead.

With careful observation and skills, we will never have to experience the *Peak Phase* of the cycle. Our goal should always be prevention. However, many children move rapidly through the cycle and we might be unable to intervene quickly enough.

In the Peak Phase, the child is clearly out of control, perhaps kicking, throwing his body on the floor, screaming, and so on. There is nothing that can be done to prevent the behavior at this point, so the focus needs to be on keeping the child, other children, and property safe. Think ahead of time of a plan for out-of-control behavior so that all the adults in the room know how to respond. This is often the point at which we as teachers get very stressed - even frightened of children's behavior. Practice ahead of time using breathing techniques, positive thoughts ("I can handle this"), or other self-calming behaviors. The child needs YOU to stay calm in order to regain control! Needless to say, lecturing, admonishing, yelling at, or threatening the child at this point will only prolong the behavior. Try calming techniques with the child, and if necessary, move the child to a safe place away from the rest of the children. The peak phase is usually intense but short-lived, *if you don't add negative energy to it.*

As the child enters the *De-escalation Phase*, she will be more calm, and may withdraw or try to make amends. This is the time to get the class refocused on what they need to be doing and will lead us to the next phase: Recovery.

Ultimately, we choose to either escalate or de-escalate the situation by our response.

Think of the *Recovery Phase* as a teachable moment. It's important to review what happened with the child and possibly with the class if there was a major interruption of their activities. Point out what might have triggered the meltdown, and make a plan with the child for how you will help her avoid triggers, or learn new behaviors for calming down, using words to express emotions or other needed social and emotional skills. And of course, follow up on your plan![17]

At each phase, teachers have a variety of choices to make in addressing student behavior. Ultimately, we choose to either escalate or de-escalate the situation by our response. Sometimes we are truly left with no choice but to confront the behavior directly. More often than we might realize, however, we can choose a route that will de-escalate the situation if we are calm and intentional in our response.

Let's take a look at one clear example. A student moved from the Calm Phase to the Agitation Phase when he was directed to return to his seat after being disruptive in line for gym. As the rest of the class left the room, he entered the Acceleration Phase, taking a cord from one of the blinds and wrapping it around his neck as he sat on a window ledge. Recognizing this as a dangerous situation that could cause imminent harm, the teacher began walking toward the

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[17] Rand, M. *Acting Out Cycle*. Retrieved April 23, 2012, from http://www.thepositiveclassroom.org/2011/06/acting-out-cycle.html .

student, with the intent of removing the cord from his neck. The principal, who was also nearby, grabbed a pair of scissors and cut the cord well above the student's head. The two adults then talked through the situation with the student and were able to bring him back under control in a short time.
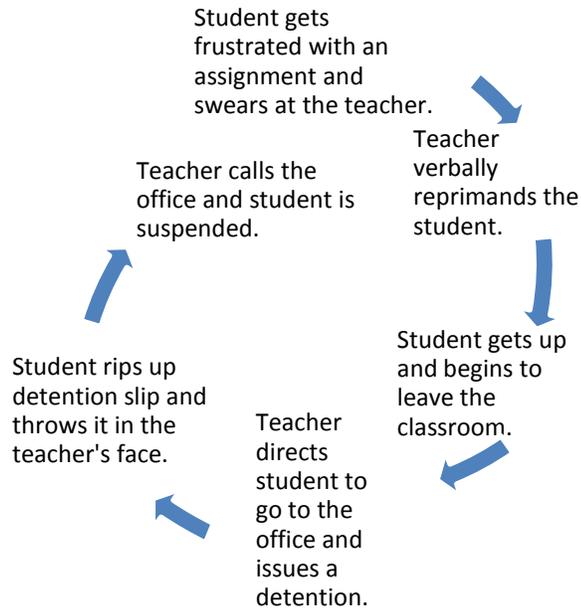
In this situation, had the teacher proceeded with trying to physically remove the cord, it would have likely escalated his aggressive behavior. Instead, the principal's remedy was far more effective, eliminating the danger while providing a safe, respectful space for the student to work through his anger and calm down. While this situation was able to be de-escalated without a crisis occurring, it is possible that the situation could have been diffused at an even earlier point by providing a simple intervention such as proximity control or redirection when he began the disruptive behavior in line. If we are to help student's develop and maintain appropriate behaviors, it is critical that we are vigilant in our attempts to address the root of the behavior through interventions that help to interrupt the Acting-Out Cycle rather than speed it up.

Other helpful resources for understanding de-escalation and strategies for de-escalating or preventing intense student behavior can be found at:
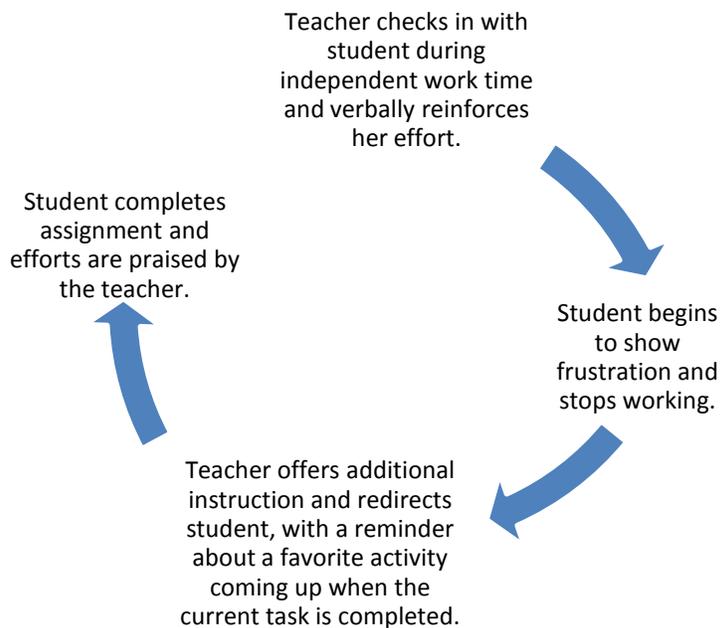
- Successfulschools.org
- Yeshiva University
- The Iris Center

Positive Behavior Intervention and Supports

To effectively address problem behaviors in school, we need to ensure that we utilize a process that teaches appropriate replacement behaviors, model, reinforce, and provide opportunities to practice those behaviors, and help students generalize the newly learned behaviors in varying contexts. It is far too common to see adult responses to behavior concerns grounded in the belief that the student is a problem, and therefore needs punishment in order to turn him or her into a "good student." Punishment, or negative consequences, can quickly cause a downward spiral as in the example below.

Student gets frustrated with an assignment and swears at the teacher.

Teacher verbally reprimands the student.

Teacher calls the office and student is suspended.

Student gets up and begins to leave the classroom.

Student rips up detention slip and throws it in the teacher's face.

Teacher directs student to go to the office and issues a detention.

Positive behavior intervention and supports provide a far more effective process for changing behaviors, stimulating an upward cycle of positive behavior change. The focus is to teach appropriate behavior by providing meaningful incentives and consequences that address the function of the behavior for the student. In the example above, a completely different scenario might unfold if a plan was in place to address the student's frustrations before the behaviors escalate. By attending to student behavior and being proactive in our response, we can better provide the instruction, reinforcement, and support students need to initiate and sustain behavior change.

Teacher checks in with student during independent work time and verbally reinforces her effort.

Student completes assignment and efforts are praised by the teacher.

Student begins to show frustration and stops working.

Teacher offers additional instruction and redirects student, with a reminder about a favorite activity coming up when the current task is completed.

All students, both disabled and non-disabled, can benefit from positive behavior interventions and supports:

- Research conducted over the past 15 years has shown that positive behavior interventions and supports are effective in promoting positive behavior in students and schools. Use of these strategies to maintain appropriate social behavior will make schools safer. Safer schools are more effective learning environments.
- Schools that implement system-wide interventions also report increased time engaged in academic activities and improved academic performance.
- Schools that employ system-wide interventions for problem behavior prevention indicate reductions in office discipline referrals of 20-60%.
- Appropriately implemented positive behavior interventions and supports can lead to dramatic improvements that have long-term effects on the lifestyle, functional communication skills, and problem behavior in individuals with disabilities.
- A review of research on positive behavior interventions and supports effectiveness showed that there was over a 90% reduction in problem behavior in over half of the studies; the problem behavior stopped completely in over 26% of the studies.[18]

The systemic process of implementing positive behavior support on a proactive, school-wide basis is called Positive Behavioral Intervention and Supports (PBIS). PBIS applies evidence-based programs, practices and strategies for all students to increase academic performance, improve safety, decrease problem behavior, and establish a positive school culture through a team-based problem-solving process that considers systems, data, practices, and outcomes. The four elements in PBIS are:
- **Systems** include the policies, procedures, and decision-making processes that consider school-wide, classroom, and individual student systems. Systems support accurate and durable implementation of practices and use data-based decision-making.
- **Data** are used to guide decision-making processes and measure outcomes. Data support the selection and evaluation of practices and systems.
- **Practices** include the strategies and programs that are used to directly enhance student learning outcomes and teacher instructional approaches.
- **Outcomes** are academic and behavioral targets that are endorsed and emphasized by students, families and educators and are measured using the gathered data.[19]

Within the framework for providing positive behavior intervention and supports, there are a number of research-based strategies which have demonstrated particularly strong outcomes on student behavior. Before selecting a particular set of interventions for an individual student, it is important to first conduct a functional behavior assessment to determine the function of the behavior, gain a clear understanding of the conditions under which the behavior is most likely

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[18] Cohn, Andrea. *What is Positive Behavior Support?* Retrieved April 26, 2010, from http://www.nasponline.org/resources/factsheets/pbs_fs.aspx.
[19] Office of Special Education Programs Center on Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports. Retrieved April 27, 2010 from http://www.pbis.org/school/default.aspx.

to occur, and ascertain whether the behavior is a result of a skill deficit, performance deficit, or a combination of the two.

A **skill deficit** is when the student doesn't know how to use the expected behavior. For example, the student may want to interact with peers, but doesn't understand how to get their attention appropriately. This may result in being disruptive in order to get them to laugh, pushing in line to get their attention, or interfering in conversations or interactions with others. If the behavior results from a skill deficit, interventions should focus on teaching, practicing, and generalizing the expected behavior.

A **performance deficit** is evidenced by a student being able to identify the expected behaviors, but not exhibiting those behaviors consistently across settings. For example, the student may be able to describe the use of appropriate language to express frustration with tasks, but act out when presented with a challenging math assignment. If the behavior results from a performance deficit, interventions should provide cues and reinforcement, with frequent opportunities to practice and generalize behaviors across settings.

Whether the behavior is due to a skill deficit, performance deficit, or both, we will have greater success with behavior change efforts if we focus on positive strategies that teach and reinforce replacement behaviors. The student needs to understand the clear parameters for the desired behavior, including what it looks like (and what it doesn't) as well as the social and instructional contexts within which the expectations occur. This process may take four to eight times longer than learning the original behavior pattern, and therefore requires patience, redirection, and reinforcement over a period of time before the behavior will be internalized.

Developing and implementing a behavioral intervention plan (BIP) is an effective tool to guide this process. A BIP is an individualized plan that is created to help any student with identified behavior concerns change a behavior. A BIP may vary in its complexity depending upon factors such as whether the student has identified special education needs, if the BIP is required by IDEA, or whether the BIP is required by Act 125 because the IEP team has determined seclusion and/or restraint will be necessary for the student. For more information on legal requirements related to functional behavioral assessment, please visit http://www.dpi.wi.gov/sped/sbfba.html.

It is important that the BIP be based on the functional behavior assessment and that interventions are designed to directly address the function of the behavior. Some guidelines to bear in mind when developing a behavioral intervention plan include:

- Ensure that the interventions are strength-based and proactive in addressing problem behaviors before they occur or as early in the cycle as possible.
- Identify and modify antecedents that are likely to trigger the behavior, including modifying the environment and/or teacher behavior as needed.
- Focusing on the acquisition of positive behaviors is more likely to result in long term behavior change than reliance on external controls.

- Affirmations or positive statements should be used four times as often as corrections or negative statements.
- Set the student up for success. Initially, set expectations for behavior to ensure that the student will meet the target at least 50% of the time without changing the current behavior pattern.
- Consequences and/or reinforcers must be meaningful to the student and aligned with the function of the behavior. For example, if a student is frequently out of his seat because he needs a high level of physical activity, giving him a sticker for every class period that he stays seated because he likes to collect stickers will be less successful than allowing him to run around the room at the end of each period. The sticker may be reinforcing initially, but doesn't address the function of the behavior. Ultimately, the sticker doesn't alleviate his need for physical movement.
- Engage the student in designing and implementing the BIP as much as possible. The more the student "owns" and feels part of the process, the more likely success will be achieved.
- Develop a BIP that serves to strengthen the relationship between student and teacher. An effective BIP helps to nurture trust, respect, and support.
- Interventions should be implemented consistently across the school day, in all settings. Make sure everyone is on board with the plan, understands the expectations and interventions clearly, and has the necessary support and resources to carry it out effectively.
- Incorporate plans for monitoring and assessing the plan frequently, but guard against changing the plan before giving it a chance to work. It may take four to six weeks to see consistent changes in the behavior pattern.

Determining which particular interventions to use as the behavioral intervention plan is developed should ideally be done as a team, and preferably include the student in the discussion. Unless the interventions are workable for everyone involved, successful implementation is unlikely. As an IEP team, it can be helpful to brainstorm as many possible interventions as you can before determining which seem to be most useful. This brainstorming should always keep in mind the function of the behavior, as well as the context within which the behavior occurs.

Other useful resources on positive behavior supports and designing effective behavioral intervention plans can be found at:
- http://www.ncpublicschools.org/ec/supportprograms/resources/behavioral
- http://www.apbs.org/new_apbs/researchintro.aspx#indint
- http://www.partnerstx.org/PDF/Positive_Behavioral_Interventions.pdf
- http://www.nasponline.org/resources/factsheets/pbs_fs.aspx
- http://cecp.air.org/fba/problembehavior3/elements3.htm